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ABSTRACT

In 1998, Canada's Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) conducted case studies of two work-based training and skill development programs for street youth in Vancouver, British Columbia. The BladeRunners program places youth on construction sites while encouraging them to work toward an apprenticeship in the building trades. The Picasso Cafe program provides a place for young people to train and earn college credits in food preparation or food service. Because of its limited resources, the case study was qualitative and focused on lessons learned rather than on long-term tracking of participants' outcomes. Data were collected through focus groups and interviews with participants; observations of intake interviews; observation of meetings and training sessions; observations of participants' on-the-job activities; individual interviews with program staff, employers, and community supports; and reviews of program records and files. The study documented that BladeRunners provides an important second chance for some carefully selected disadvantaged young people, helping many participants start down the path to steady employment and earnings. Despite the promising characteristics that led SRDC to choose Picasso Cafe as a case study site, the cafe underwent several destabilizing changes that made evaluating it difficult. (The case study methodology and data sources are appended. The bibliography lists 43 references.) (MN)

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BladeRunners and Picasso Café: A Case Study Evaluation of Two Work-Based Training Programs for Disadvantaged Youth

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Much of the research on which this study is based was conducted with financial support from Human Resources Development Canada Evaluation and Data Development Branch, the National Literacy Secretariat, the British Columbia Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers, and the ARCO Foundation.

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The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation is a non-profit organization and registered charity with offices in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Sydney, Nova Scotia. SRDC was created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate social programs designed to improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on disadvantaged Canadians. Its mission is to provide policy-makers and practitioners with reliable evidence about what does and does not work from the perspectives of government budgets, program participants, and society as a whole. As an intermediary organization, SRDC attempts to bridge the worlds of academic researchers, government policy-makers, and on-the-ground program operators. Providing a vehicle for the development and management of complex demonstration projects, SRDC seeks to work in close partnership with provinces, the federal government, local programs, and private philanthropies.

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Introduction

Background

Disadvantaged young Canadians often find themselves struggling to make the transition into adulthood. Attempting to join the labour force with fewer marketable skills, less education, or less extensive work experience than more established workers can be an intimidating experience for such young people. This is particularly true for the street youth who are the focus of this study — those whose abusive backgrounds, poverty, substance abuse problems, criminal activity, or lack of education and work experience might reduce the effectiveness of any efforts they make to become established in the labour force.[1]

Much of the media coverage of troubled youth fuels a public perception that street youth are beyond hope. Yet it may be that many possess assets which, when nurtured, can spark re-engagement in productive activities and turn around their lives. It has been suggested that there are some programs that seem to resonate with this troubled group and that, most often, these are comprehensive programs that combine work-based training and skills development with ongoing support and mentoring.[2]

In 1998, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) developed and began a case study of two pioneering programs for street youth in Vancouver. BladeRunners places youth on construction sites while encouraging them to work toward an apprenticeship in the building trades. Picasso Café provides a place for young people to train and to earn college credits in food preparation or food service.

This case study was initially launched under a contract with the Evaluation and Data Development Branch of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). As the research progressed, additional funding was received from what was then the British Columbia Ministry of Employment and Investment (now the Ministry of Community Development, Co-operatives and Volunteers) and from the ARCO Foundation. Subsequently, the Youth Initiatives Directorate of HRDC

[1]There is no single widely accepted definition of "street youth." For the purposes of this research, we are referring to out-of-school, out-of-work young people who, for the most part, are living outside of mainstream society. They typically spend considerable time "on the street," frequently abusing drugs or alcohol, and often engaged in illegal activities.

[2]See, for example, American Youth Policy Forum 1997, especially pp. ix–xi.

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The study programs

BladeRunners and Picasso Café were selected for this study because of their strong reputation and because of the apparent comprehensiveness of their program models. Each seemed to incorporate many of the key elements that are often associated with programs that might make a difference for this troubled group.

BladeRunners

In 1994, while planning was underway for the construction of the General Motors Place sports facility in downtown Vancouver, a prominent social activist lobbied the project's developer to put some of the youth who were living on the surrounding streets to work on the construction site. Thus, BladeRunners was conceived. The idea was taken up by the British Columbia government and public funding was provided, initially for a pilot project, later for an ongoing program.

At first, the program operated only in Vancouver; it was later expanded to additional sites and now operates in seven locations around the province.[3] Program participants are selected from among young adults, aged 19 to 28, who are judged to be severely employment-disadvantaged and who have successfully completed a pre-employment program. With the co-operation and support of the construction unions, participants are placed in paid employment construction sites. For each participant employed, the employer receives a wage subsidy. The goal of the program is for participants to be accepted into an apprenticeship in one of the building trades, which might lead to a permanent career in the construction industry.

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[3]The program sites are in Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Vernon, Kelowna, and Prince George.

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Picasso Café

For almost ten years, street youth have worked alongside restaurant professionals at Picasso Café on Vancouver's west side. Run by the non-profit Option Youth Society, Picasso Café recruits street youth by word-of-mouth, or by referral from community youth agencies. The core of the program is the operation of the restaurant. Through coursework and practical work experience, young people are trained in all aspects of restaurant operation.

Participants in this program can also earn credits towards Vancouver Community College Hospitality Program chef or dining room certificates. After five months of employment at Picasso Café, the participants are placed in a 150-hour practicum (that normally takes about a month to complete) at local restaurants that have agreed to take them on. The goal of this program is for participants to be accepted into an apprenticeship.

The SRDC evaluation

From spring 1998 through the fall of 1999, SRDC conducted field research to learn about the two programs. The research was based on a case study approach. A detailed description of the research methodology is contained in Appendix A.

We believe that this report, which is based on the case study research, occupies a unique position in the literature. SRDC is a non-profit organization created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate social programs. SRDC has traditionally engaged in large-scale quantitative experimental evaluations. We recognize that the case study approach used here cannot measure the net impact of a program on its participants. Therefore, we have not employed the definitions of success used in experiments, and we have not attempted any statistical analysis to compare the success of participants to that of a carefully chosen comparison group.

Nonetheless, we believe that the information presented here can help policy-makers and program practitioners both develop a better understanding the issues involved in evaluating programs for disadvantaged youth and gain insights into some of the factors which might contribute to program success.

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Chapter 1 of this report presents detailed descriptions of the how each of the two study programs operated. Chapter 2 discusses the difficulties associated with determining "success" and summarizes some of the lessons that can be drawn from past evaluations. Chapter 3 presents the results of our analysis of the two study programs, organized according to a number of broad themes. The report concludes with some final reflections based on our experience in conducting this research.

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Chapter 1: Descriptions of the Study Programs

In this chapter, we provide a detailed description of two work-based programs for youth. While the two programs share the same basic approach — using "real" work as a way of engaging young people in productive activities — they have adopted quite different models in implementing this approach. Each program has also changed over the years that they have been operating. The descriptions presented here are based on observations and data collected principally during the second half of 1998.

BladeRunners

BladeRunners is a work-based training program for street-involved youth who have significant barriers to employment. BladeRunners offers a wage subsidy to secure work placements, on construction sites, for youth. The goal is to help them obtain experience in one of the building trades and, where possible, to help "ladder" the participants into an apprenticeship.

Work is at the core of the BladeRunners program. However, the program model attempts to incorporate many of the elements that are often thought to be associated with successful youth programs. As a result, BladeRunners has developed a solid reputation among those involved with such programs in Vancouver.[1] Participants (usually also referred to as "BladeRunners") take part in paid "real-world" employment, which provides both experiential training and a financial reward for their successful participation. In addition, they receive extensive mentoring support from program co-ordinators, who have considerable knowledge of the industry in which participants are working and who are committed to helping these young people be successful in the program. Participating employers receive a temporary wage subsidy for each BladeRunner to whom they provide a work experience opportunity.

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[1]This reputation actually extends much further. In 1999, BladeRunners was given an award by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) of the National Youth Employment Coalition in the United States. Programs that apply for these awards are selected based on comprehensiveness, curricula, clientele, employment, and outcomes. This was the first time a program outside the U.S. received a PEPNet award.

Origins

BladeRunners began as pilot project in 1994. Over the course of a year, work placements were provided to 25 participants at one location — the GM Place construction site in Vancouver.[2] Subsequently, work placements were provided during the construction of the Ford Theatre for the Performing Arts and the Collingwood Village Project. During the initial pilot phase, wage subsidies were not provided to employers. Local community activists were able, with support from the building trades unions, to persuade the developers and contractors to make employment opportunities available to some of the disadvantaged youth in the neighbourhoods where these major construction projects were taking place.

In 1996, in response to what was perceived to be a successful pilot, the British Columbia government began formally supporting the program. Funding was provided from the BC 21 grants program and, at the same time, BladeRunners was expanded to four additional communities: Kamloops, Nanaimo, Vernon, and Victoria. With this expansion, a wage subsidy of $3 per hour was introduced to encourage employers to take part. In 1998, the program was further expanded to Kelowna and Prince George.

The original BladeRunners site in Vancouver continues to operate from the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of the city — an area with a high concentration of street-involved youth and the attendant problems of poverty, homelessness, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse. In Victoria, BladeRunners is located in an industrial area adjacent to downtown Victoria but draws participants from all over the city.[3]

Organization and administration

BladeRunners is one of 12 employment programs of Youth Options BC, an umbrella program of the provincial government that is designed to provide work experience opportunities and to improve access to post-secondary education for young people. The BladeRunners budget for the 1999–2000 fiscal year was set at $1.2 million.

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[2]The building trades unions were brought in as partners from the beginning of the development of the BladeRunners pilot. Their support is evidenced by the fact that participation in BladeRunners became a contractual requirement in the contract negotiated for the GM Place construction project.

[3]Although BladeRunners is now operating at seven sites across the province, only the Vancouver and Victoria sites were actually visited in the course of conducting this case study.

Table 1: The BladeRunners Delivery Network

Location	Organization
Vancouver	**The Urban Community Development Unit of the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers** Previously administered by SkillPlan, the co-ordinators for the Vancouver BladeRunners have been part of the UCDU since the summer of 1999. However, beginning with fiscal year 2000–2001, local delivery has been contracted to the PRIDE (People Responsible for Improving the Downtown Economy) centre, which offers a variety of employment training programs and services to people living in the Downtown Eastside.
Victoria and Kamloops	**The John Howard Society** The John Howard Society is an agency that not only specializes in programs and services for ex-offenders, but also provides outreach programs to the community at large (including job-search assistance, alcohol and drug counselling, and anger management training).
Nanaimo	**Nanaimo Youth Services** For 30 years, Nanaimo Youth Services has been operating programs for young people aged 13 to 28, including employment-related services, lifeskills development, and an "odd-jobs" squad. As well, they have been running a recreational drop-in centre for youth.
Vernon	**Connections Career Centre** Connections Career Centre operates employment programs for youth from a downtown storefront location and provides referrals to other services for young people aged 13 to 29.
Kelowna	**Kereda (Kelowna Economic Recovery and Employment Development Association)** Kereda operates employment and lifeskills programs (including practicum placements with local employers) to help unemployed and disadvantaged people develop skills to re-enter the labour market.
Prince George	**The Native Friendship Centre** The Native Friendship Centre operates programs and services (including educational and skills upgrading, lifeskills training, cultural programs, and alcohol and drug counselling) for the urban First Nations population.

Central administration for the program is provided by the Urban Community Development Unit (UCDU) of the British Columbia Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers. Overall day-to-day direction for the program is provided by a BladeRunners provincial co-ordinator, employed by the UCDU. Local administration of the program is the responsibility of a network of service delivery agencies — one in each of the seven locations where BladeRunners operates. These local agencies operate under contracts with the UCDU.

The central administration provided by the UCDU consists of employing the BladeRunners provincial co-ordinator, arranging for the annual budget allocation for the program, sub-contracting the delivery of the program to a local service delivery agency at each of the seven sites, compiling program statistics, and distributing reports. The key responsibilities of the provincial co-ordinator are to monitor the operation of the program to ensure fidelity to the spirit of the BladeRunners model, to forge and maintain relationships with unions and industry associations, and to facilitate the sharing of information and experiences among the local BladeRunners co-ordinators. The provincial co-ordinator makes quarterly monitoring visits to each BladeRunners site, during which he meets with local co-ordinators, participants, employers, and staff of the local delivery agency. The provincial co-ordinator is also responsible for collecting program information as required by B.C. Treasury Board guidelines, and for negotiating the UCDU contracts with the local program delivery organizations.

The responsibilities of the local service delivery agencies include employing the BladeRunners co-ordinators for the local sites, providing case management support to these co-ordinators in their efforts to help participants deal with personal barriers, paying the wage subsidies to employers of BladeRunners, and collecting program statistics for transmission to the UCDU.

Staffing

The key program staff in BladeRunners are the local co-ordinators. Their main functions are

- recruiting and enrolling participants;
- arranging with employers to provide work placements;

- monitoring participants' work performance to help resolve conflicts on the job;
- arranging referrals to educational upgrading programs;
- arranging referrals to health care or social service professionals to deal with participants' personal problems;
- providing participants with introductions to representatives of unions or other organizations to facilitate entry into apprenticeship or permanent employment; and
- maintaining close personalized contact with participants as a role model and as a mentor.

BladeRunners co-ordinators are hired based on their knowledge of the construction industry and their experience working with youth, particularly troubled youth. For example, the current co-ordinators in the Vancouver and Victoria sites bring a range of experience in working within the construction industry: two have come through the unions to become journeymen in their trades, one has worked as a foreman on a construction site (which hired BladeRunners), and another has worked on unionized construction sites, although not himself a member of a union. Their experience working with youth in general, and with at-risk youth and aboriginal youth, comes from a variety of activities — both volunteer and paid work — augmented, in one case, by academic study. Collectively they have witnessed first-hand the problems of drug and alcohol addiction, and the steps that need to be taken to overcome it.

In jobs where the mentoring relationship can be intense and often affords little opportunity for downtime, there is a high risk of burn-out and high turnover among staff. However, in the case of BladeRunners, the staffing of co-ordinators has been remarkably stable. In five years of operation, only 4 (of 14) BladeRunners co-ordinators have left the program.

The program

A schematic overview of the BladeRunners program is provided on the following page. It should be noted, however, that there is some variation in the program model across the seven sites. For example, in some locations where unionized placements are scarce (Vernon and Kamloops) there is less emphasis on placing BladeRunners on unionized worksites.

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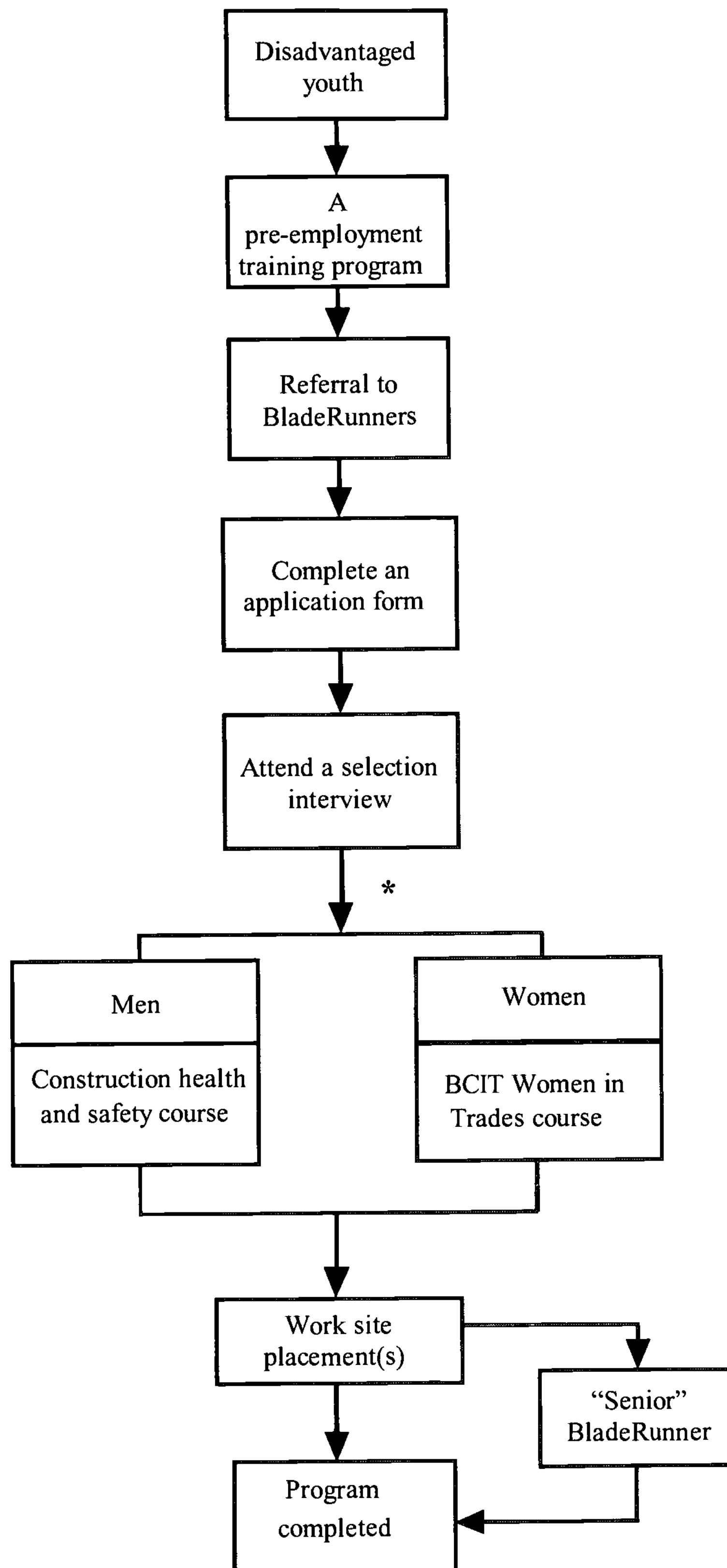
Figure 1: Overview of the BladeRunners Program



*After the selection interview, BladeRunners attend weekly meetings until the time of their work placement.

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Also, in locations where the prevailing level of wages is relatively low, the wage paid to BladeRunners can be less than $10 an hour.[4]

Program entry

The basic eligibility criteria for participating in BladeRunners are as follows:

- Be between the ages of 19 and 28;
- Be a permanent resident of British Columbia and eligible to work in Canada;
- Have recently completed an approved training program (not part of BladeRunners) that was no less than eight weeks in duration (with some flexibility to recognize equivalent training or experience);
- Demonstrate a standard of physical health and stamina suitable for construction labour;
- Have a personal history that has created barriers to employment; and
- Demonstrate basic skills in the English language.

Program intake occurs at regularly scheduled intervals during the year. In Vancouver, where there are three local co-ordinators, 12 new BladeRunners are enrolled at each intake and intake occurs three times a year. Victoria, with two co-ordinators, takes in 12 new BladeRunners twice a year.

Potential participants can only enter the BladeRunners program by successfully completing a pre-employment training program.[5] Typically, these courses are about eight weeks in duration and provide instruction in

- self-awareness;
- personal well-being and nutrition;

[4]In this situation, the amount of the subsidy paid to the employer is also reduced. The unsubsidized amount paid by all employers must be at least the provincial minimum wage of $7 an hour.

[5]Nonetheless, on a few occasions, participants have been admitted directly into BladeRunners, without having gone through a pre-employment training program. Programs from which participants have been referred include JOBSTART, Starting Points, the PRIDE Centre, BEST (Basic Education and Skills Training), Tradeworks, Way to Work, and the Spectrum Internship Program.

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- anger management;
- assertiveness;
- dealing with alcohol and drug problems;
- basic literacy and math skills;
- dealing with authority;
- job-search skills; and
- managing personal finances.

The BladeRunners program does not actively recruit participants; prospective candidates are referred to BladeRunners by operators of pre-employment training programs.[6] These program operators are familiar with the BladeRunners program and make a judgement about whether participating in BladeRunners would be an appropriate next step for a pre-employment training graduate. In general, this judgement reflects an assessment of the trainee's "job readiness" and the desire of the trainee to pursue a career in the construction industry.

For those referred to BladeRunners, the first steps are to complete an application form and attend a selection interview. These steps usually occur together. The selection interview board, usually three to five people, can include

- the provincial co-ordinator for BladeRunners;
- one or more local BladeRunners co-ordinators;
- a representative from a service delivery agency;
- a union representative;
- an employer; and
- a "Senior BladeRunner."[7]

[6]The general information on BladeRunners provided by the provincial government states: "Applicants are referred to BladeRunners through their participation in a recognized pre-employment program." See the "BladeRunners" page of the Youth Options B.C. website.
[7]"Senior BladeRunners" are participants who have completed the period of subsidized employment but continue to maintain contact with the program.

Immediately following the interview, successful candidates are told of their acceptance. From that point, they are required to attend weekly group meetings with their local BladeRunners co-ordinator and they are encouraged to call the BladeRunners office at least once a week.

Awaiting placement

Young people entering BladeRunners typically face a delay of two to four weeks before receiving their first job placement.[8] During this period, they take part in two activities.

Weekly group meetings begin the week following enrolment. These meetings are organized by the local BladeRunners co-ordinator, and all new BladeRunners are required to attend. The meetings continue until all (or virtually all) of those enrolled at that intake have been placed on a job site. At the first meeting after intake, co-ordinators clearly outline their expectations of the young people enrolling in the program: BladeRunners are expected to show up for work every day, on time, straight and sober, and ready for hard physical work. They are informed that although they need to take responsibility for their own success, the co-ordinators will be there to assist them, and that many problems can be solved as long as they can be faced honestly. Co-ordinators use this time of transition to prepare participants for some of the difficulties they may have to deal with on a job site.

Also during this waiting period, new BladeRunners take a mandatory five-day construction health and safety course. This is a fairly standard and widely available curriculum, and local BladeRunners co-ordinators arrange to purchase training places for their participants in courses that are available from local training providers. This course is designed to teach students how to avoid injury on the job and to inform them about the personal protection equipment that they should have and the safety equipment that they can expect to find on a worksite. BladeRunners leave this course with certificates in WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System), Fall Protection, and Survival Level 1 First Aid. They also undergo a hearing test and may receive Kitimat safety training, which is specific to working on mine construction.

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[8]The time period between program entry and job placement can vary. Seasonal fluctuations in the level of construction activity result in fewer placement opportunities at certain times during the year. In some instances of longer waiting periods, BladeRunners co-ordinators have helped participants find temporary "non-BladeRunners" jobs.

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BladeRunners co-ordinators organize informal graduation ceremonies for BladeRunners who finish the health and safety training. This is the earliest opportunity to provide recognition of participants' accomplishments as a way of encouraging their continued engagement with the program.

For young women entering BladeRunners, the first phase is somewhat different.[9] In order to help prepare them for the additional challenges of establishing their place in a male-dominated industry, female BladeRunners are enrolled in a 20-week Women in Trades discovery program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) before they are placed on work sites. Intake into this course only occurs twice a year — in January and September — so female entrants to BladeRunners may face a delay in beginning their training.

The BCIT Women in Trades course includes the health and safety training that is provided separately to male BladeRunners. On successful completion of the 20-week course, these young women qualify as Level 1 apprentices. Some of the graduates continue on at BCIT to take entry-level training in specific trades prior to taking their first work placements as BladeRunners.

On the job

The core element of the BladeRunners model is "real-world" work experience. This is achieved by placing participants as paid workers on participating construction sites.[10] Employers are recruited by the local BladeRunners co-ordinators; as a hiring incentive, employers receive a wage subsidy of $3 an hour per participant.

During their placements, BladeRunners work as regular members of the construction crew. They are paid by the employer and receive at least $10 an hour.[11] Each BladeRunner carries the $3 an hour subsidy for up to 1,190 hours (approximately 34 weeks of full-time employment). Given the temporary project-based nature of construction employment, it is not unusual for BladeRunners to go through a number of work placements and more than one employer during the period that they qualify for

[9] Of the 126 BladeRunners who received work placements in Fiscal Year 1998–99, 16 were women.

[10] Although the model is based on employment in commercial construction, some consideration has been given to arranging placements in other industries, including forestry, mining, highway construction, and shipbuilding.

[11] Employers can choose to pay higher wages or provide raises based on subsequent performance. However, BladeRunners cannot be paid more than the established rate for apprentices on the construction site.

subsidization. There is an overall limit of 18 months on how long each individual can be a BladeRunner (i.e. each participant has 18 months to exhaust the 1,190 hours of subsidized employment).

Once the subsidy has been used up, a BladeRunner can continue in the program as a "Senior BladeRunner." Senior BladeRunners maintain contact with the BladeRunners co-ordinator, continue to be eligible to receive support from the co-ordinator (for example, mentoring, referrals to health or social services supports, job leads), and may sit on selection interviews for new BladeRunners and serve as peer mentors. The contracts that the BladeRunners program has with local service providers allows for a ratio of five Senior BladeRunners for every 12 subsidy-eligible BladeRunners receiving support from a local co-ordinator.

Efforts are made to recruit members from all traditionally disadvantaged groups that one might encounter in the street population — First Nations, visible minorities, women, Income Assistance recipients, and persons with disabilities. Attempting to attract these disadvantaged individuals into the program can be a challenge. This is perhaps because some disadvantaged people (in particular, women) are under-represented in the construction trades and potential BladeRunners may feel that there little opportunity for them in that area. Table 2 illustrates the proportion of BladeRunners who are members of a disadvantaged group.

Table 2: BladeRunners Program Aggregate Statistics for 1998–99

Number that received a work placement[a] in 1998–99	126
Percentage of those placed who were	
Women	12.7
First Nations ancestry	28.6
Members of a visible minority	3.2
Receiving Income Assistance	85.7

[a]Refers to placements in jobs for which the employer received a wage subsidy.

BladeRunners has been particularly successful at recruiting First Nations youth. The hiring of co-ordinators who are themselves of First Nations heritage has facilitated the recruitment of First Nations youth. Because of the large number of First Nations youth enrolled, one might argue that BladeRunners participants are more disadvantaged than the average participant in other comparable youth programs.[12]

[12]Based on our field research and the higher proportion of First Nations youth in BladeRunners, we believe that BladeRunners participants are more disadvantaged than Picasso Café students. This is a tentative conclusion, which is subjective and not substantiated by any statistical evidence.

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First Nations people are often among the most disadvantaged Canadians. The unemployment rate among registered urban First Nations people is over 15 percentage points higher than that of Canadians who are not of First Nations heritage.[13] Moreover, First Nations people, on average, receive 30 percent of their income from government sources, compared with an average of 15 percent among those who are not First Nations people.

Mentoring and support services

BladeRunners co-ordinators develop and maintain a close relationship with the BladeRunners who are assigned to them. The relationship starts during the weekly meetings prior to job placement and continues through the subsidized work placements, and lasts even longer if the participant stays on as a Senior BladeRunner.

Although not professional social workers, the co-ordinators function as the BladeRunners "case managers." They are the first line of support for participants and are thus exposed to a wide range of situations that can occur at any time of the day or night. Some of these situations have led to co-ordinators accompanying program participants to court, escorting them to detox facilities, helping them move to new accommodations, helping them locate meals and clothes, helping to extricate them from potentially dangerous situations, and tracking them down when they have simply "disappeared."

Co-ordinators are not only responsible for locating BladeRunners placements for participants, they frequently help them find other work when program placements are not available. They also provide an informal workplace mediation service, working with both the participant and the employer or supervisor on the job to resolve problems and to ensure that a placement is suitable for both parties. It is not unusual for a co-ordinator to accompany a new BladeRunner to work every day during the first week of a placement. Co-ordinators also intervene quickly when job loss occurs in order to help the BladeRunner deal with this potentially disappointing and frustrating event and to help locate a new placement.

[13]These data come from the "Report on Growth, Human Development and Social Cohesion" page on The Policy Research Initiative website.

The BladeRunners co-ordinators are employees of the local service agencies with which the UCDU has contracted for the delivery of the BladeRunners program. BladeRunners is only one of the programs operated by these agencies, and the BladeRunners co-ordinators are often able to tap into the services and expertise associated with other programs that the agencies are delivering in order to obtain additional help to meet the particular needs of the participants.

Graduation from the program

There is no formal graduation ceremony for those who complete BladeRunners. The goal of the program is to have participants make the transition from being a BladeRunner to being a "regular" construction worker almost invisibly. The end of the period for which a BladeRunner's employment qualifies for a wage subsidy marks the end of the participant's status as a BladeRunner (although, as discussed, a participant can continue to be associated with the program as a Senior BladeRunner).

The ultimate goal of the program is for a BladeRunner to be indentured as an apprentice in a building trade. BladeRunners who show an interest in a particular trade are introduced by the co-ordinator to the appropriate union representative, who can assist in applying for indentureship. The highest measure of success would be for a BladeRunner to pursue a permanent career in the construction industry.

Sources of work placements

Locating work placements is an important responsibility of the BladeRunners co-ordinators. The program has widespread support from construction unions, and union representatives frequently facilitate access by BladeRunners to job opportunities. However, placements are made on both union and non-union construction sites. BladeRunners co-ordinators take advantage of their previous experience in the construction industry to identify placement opportunities. They maintain contacts with representatives of union and contractors' associations both to "talk up" the program and to solicit placements. They also follow the trade magazines to identify upcoming construction projects and often makc "cold calls" to construction employers to try to match BladeRunners up with job openings.

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In the five years that BladeRunners has operated, it is estimated that 200 to 250 different employers have provided work placements. BladeRunners are not a major presence on any one site. Overall, about three quarters of the BladeRunners who are ready for placements are working at any given time; this typically amounts to 60 to 70 BladeRunners. At any one construction site, however, there is likely to be only one BladeRunner working. This reduces the potential for BladeRunners who are working alongside one another to reinforce negative behaviours. It also minimizes the supervisory burden placed on employers. During fiscal year 1998–99, across all seven sites, a total of 126 BladeRunners were placed in jobs for which employers received a wage subsidy.

Picasso Café

Picasso Café is a restaurant operated by the Option Youth Society. It was established to train at-risk youth for jobs in the food services industry. The restaurant is located on the West Side of Vancouver along the commercial Broadway corridor. Picasso Café runs two college-accredited programs: the Dining Room Program and the Kitchen Program. Participants in both vocational programs also take part in Picasso Café's lifeskills training classes and receive employment and personal counselling services.

Origins

The Option Youth Society is a registered non-profit society that was specifically set up to organize and run Picasso Café. The society was started by an Anglican Church street worker as a response to the needs of young people who wanted to escape their lives on the street, but who found it difficult to do so because of a lack of education and skills. Following three years of planning and fundraising, the doors of Picasso Café opened in 1989 with 12 students (six in the Kitchen Program and six in the Dining Room Program).

For a decade, Picasso Café has operated an 80-seat restaurant at the same location; however, the level of activity has varied over time. Service has ranged from weekday lunch only, to weekday lunch and dinner plus Sunday brunch. Students may also be involved in preparing catering orders, creating gift baskets, and preparing and serving meals for off-site functions. The number of students has also varied over time. There has usually been approximately 20 students active at any given time but, on

occasion, there has been as many as 30. Over the course of 1998, a total of 64 students were enrolled.

The operations of Picasso Café have been sustained by funding from a number of sources:

- The fundraising efforts of the Option Youth Society;
- Contracts for the delivery of training services that have been received under a number of federal and provincial government programs;[14] and
- The revenues generated by the restaurant itself.

However, in September 1999, with only interim funding from the government and facing a mounting debt, the Board of the Option Youth Society decided to close the doors of the restaurant. In reaction, individuals, corporations, and the media rallied to support the program. Following negotiations with provincial government officials and a full financial audit by provincial government auditors, funding for Picasso Café was reinstated. Financial support has now been incorporated in the budget of the BC Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. This arrangement eliminates the need to submit an annual grant application, but it means that the Café will be subject to a program review about every two years. The restaurant re-opened in March 2000.

Organization and administration

The volunteer Board of Directors of the Options Youth Society is responsible for making decisions about the general direction of Picasso Café, its training components, staffing, and fundraising. Implementation of the Board's directions is the responsibility of the Executive Dirctor of Picasso Café, a paid senior staff position. Experienced industry professionals are hired to oversee the operation of the restaurant and to teach and supervise the students.

[14]Picasso Café is a registered private post-secondary education facility. Training has been provided under contracts from the federal Work-Based Training Option of the Canadian Jobs Strategy, and the federal Youth Internship Canada program, both administered by Human Resources Development Canada and the Youth Works component of BC Benefits.

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The annual operating budget of Picasso Café is in the order of $900,000. The restaurant generates about $200,000 in revenue, all of which is used to support its operation. The balance is made up by funds from government contracts (often amounting to half the total budget) and private fundraising.[15]

The training provided by Picasso Café is eligible for accreditation by the Vancouver Community College (VCC) and the Pacific Rim Institute of Tourism. Picasso Café is a member of the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association, the British Columbia Food and Restaurant Association, the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT), and Networking Education & Training for Workers in Employment, Rehabilitation and Career Counselling (NETWERCC).

Staffing

There is provision at Picasso Café for two chef instructors, two dining room instructors, a lifeskills counsellor, and an employment counsellor. In the past, there has also been an operations and training manager responsible for the overall co-ordination of the program. However, this position was eliminated during a previous restructuring. During the period of this study, positions were frequently filled on a part-time or temporary basis.

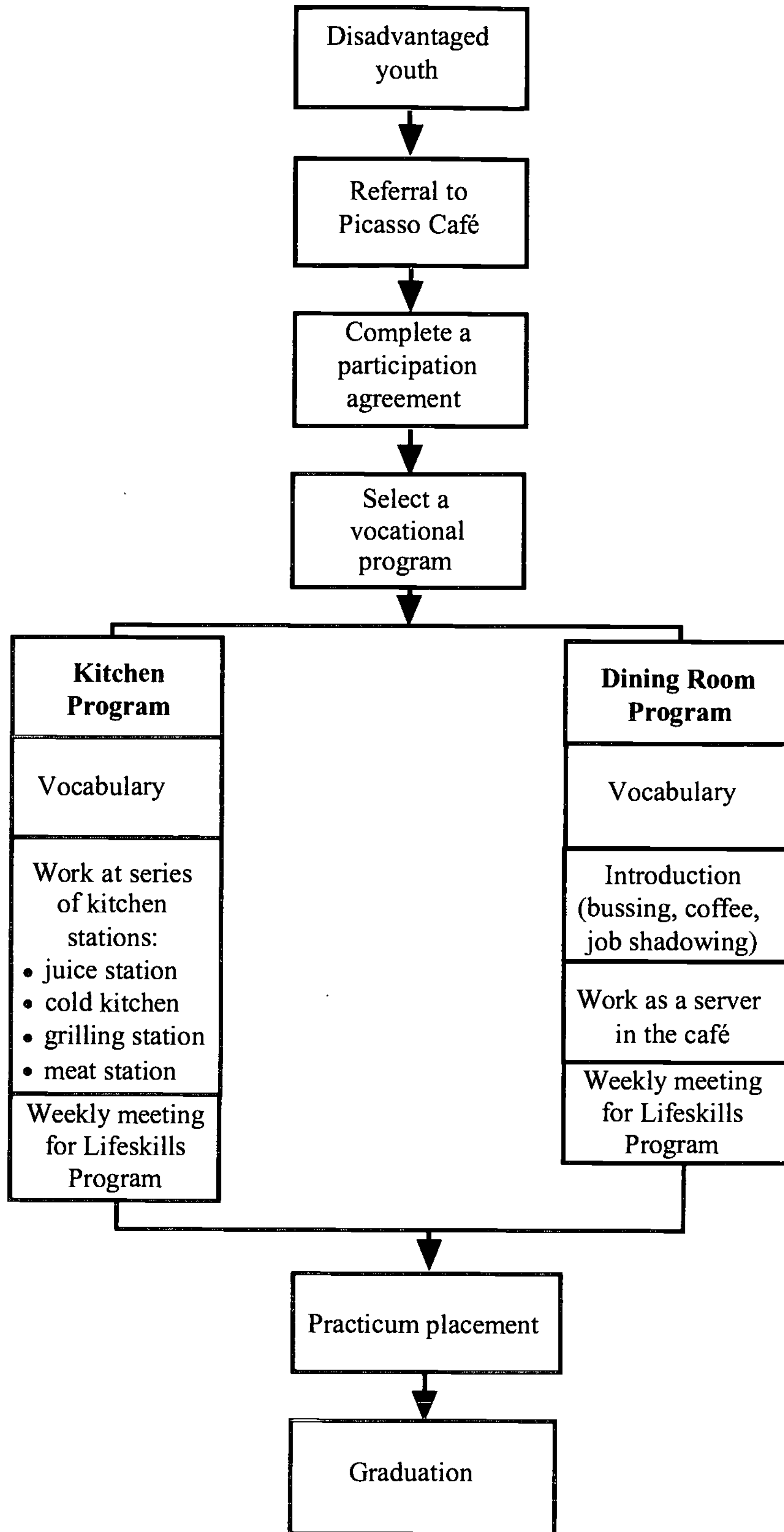
Picasso Café uses a recruitment process that was set up for them by a professional management consultant. Positions are advertised in newspapers and through a network of industry, training, and professional associations. Staff are hired for their industry experience and their commitment to working with young people. If they have no pedagogical training, they are required to enrol in the VCC Instructor Diploma program.

The Program

A schematic overview of the program model used by Picasso Café is provided on the following page.

[15]The actual operating budget and sources of funds have fluctuated from year to year.

Figure 2: Overview of the Picasso Café Program



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Program entry

Picasso Café was originally set up to help youth aged 18 to 24 who had some history of street involvement. These entry requirements are applied flexibly; young people who do not fit these criteria have not necessarily been excluded. The program's mandate is to work with the "hardest-to-serve." Applicants need only

- have been in receipt of Income Assistance benefits for at least four months; and
- have a place to live.[16]

There is no single route of entry into the Picasso Café program. Referrals have been received from training consultants and financial assistance workers who work in the administration of Income Assistance, and from staff who operate a number of pre-employment training programs and youth drop-in centres. Many young people simply "self-refer" and ask to be let into the program. They arrive at Picasso Café from many places — living on the street, in foster care arrangements or, in some cases, still at home — having heard about Picasso Café by word-of-mouth or having seen the flyers that Picasso Café posts in youth drop-in centres.

Intake into the program is continuous; new participants are enrolled as space becomes available. Potential participants can make contact at any time and be enrolled within a week, if there is an opening, or they may be placed on a waiting list if there is not. Waiting lists are not a constant feature of the program but occur from time to time.

Those accepted for participation in the program sign a participation agreement, referred to as "Rights and Responsibilities." Rights include what the students —Picasso Café refers to its participants as "students" — can expect to receive from the program (for example, remuneration, bus fares, uniforms and shoes, and meals). Responsibilities include showing up on time for their shifts, being ready to work, and taking direction from supervisors.

The young people who enrol in the Picasso Café program are receiving Income Assistance benefits. While at Picasso Café, they receive an additional $5 for each day they work at the restaurant. This is done under an agreement with the Income Assistance administrators so that this

[16]Potential students who are homeless when they arrive at Picasso Café are given referrals to resources that can assist them in finding temporary or permanent accommodation. They can return and reapply once accommodations have been arranged.

supplementary payment does not affect their benefit entitlement. Students are assigned hours of work, which can fluctuate significantly depending on the level of activity in the restaurant and the demand for catering services, and on the number of students who are enrolled at any particular time.

Picasso Café aims for its graduates to be employable, but allows students to learn and work at a pace that is comfortable for them. Reflecting this philosophy, the only mandatory requirement is that students show up on time for their shifts. Latecomers have their shifts cancelled, thereby losing out on the payments for that day. Instructors emphasize the need for students to have the "right attitude." Working in the dining room involves direct contact with the public so attitude directly affects students' employability. Working in the kitchen involves performing in a high-pressure environment requiring restraint and concentration. Willingness to work and learn is essential to remaining in the Picasso Café program.

Selecting a vocational program

Students select which of the two vocational programs they wish to pursue. They are free to switch programs later if their preferences change.

The Kitchen Program

The Kitchen Program is designed to be completed in 600 hours. However, because Picasso Café allows students to work at their own pace, it can take anywhere from 450 to 750 hours of training to complete the program. The first thing students learn is the vocabulary used in a kitchen; this gives them a sense of their future working environment. This introductory phase can last from three hours to one week. Once students are comfortable with the vocabulary, they are put into the kitchen to learn basic cooking skills. This is the first of a series of modules that can lead to students earning VCC accreditation.

To receive VCC Level One accreditation, students must successfully complete the following eleven modules:

- Basic Cooking;
- Seafood;
- Meat;
- Poultry;

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- Vegetables;
- Starch;
- Health and Safety;
- Kitchen Management;
- Workers' Compensation Board regulations;
- Fire and Safety; and
- Cold Kitchen (baking and desserts).

Picasso Café also offers students the opportunity to work towards the FoodSafe Level 1 and SuperHost certificates.

The Kitchen training at Picasso Café is organized into kitchen stations. After completing the introduction to vocabulary, students progress through the following four stations:

- The juice station;
- The cold kitchen (which includes desserts and salads);
- The grilling station; and
- The meat station (where they learn to cook meat, poultry, and seafood).

As students progress, they learn the various aspects of working in a kitchen. As they move from one station to the next, they are assigned to train newer students coming on to the station they have just mastered. This reinforces their training and confirms the skills they have learned both to instructors and to the students themselves. Although instructors encourage students to take one test per week towards their VCC diploma or other certificates, it is not mandatory to do so. In fact there is no mandatory skills component in the Kitchen Program because of the range of positions graduates can eventually obtain in the restaurant industry.

The Dining Room Program

The Dining Room Program trains young participants to be waiters and dining room hosts. As in the Kitchen Program, the Dining Room Program starts by having students learn restaurant vocabulary using the Pacific Rim Institute of Tourism (PRIT) textbook. This gives students a sense of the working environment and provides confidence through understanding the contents of menus. Dining Room students are eased into the work environment; waiting on tables does not usually begin until at least a few weeks after intake. During the initial phase, students "bus" tables (clearing and setting tables), act as dining room hosts, make coffee, and job-shadow other servers. Students also learn American Plate Service from the PRIT textbook, which teaches them the order in which food is served.

Dining Room students can pursue self-directed study towards VCC Dining Room and Lounge Service Level 1 certification or the industry-recognized Serving-it-Right, SuperHost, and FoodSafe certificates.

Lifeskills training

Informal lifeskills training in both the Kitchen and Dining Room programs is ongoing, while students are being trained in the more tangible employment skills. Picasso Café employs a part-time lifeskills counsellor to work with students who may want or need extra mentoring or support during times of stress. In addition, students from each of the Kitchen and Dining Room programs are selected to be "mediators." In this role they take on the task of mediating among students or between students and staff when conflicts occur.

The restaurant uses a self-assessment model for students called *The Student Journey*, which was developed by Picasso Café staff. It involves a series of tests on communication, punctuality, professionalism, and serving, and participants can earn over 20 stickers for making progress in different areas. Each student must earn all of the stickers in order to graduate. This fosters responsibility and self respect, while also providing for positive peer pressure and a sense of connectedness. There is a brief group meeting (typically a half hour to an hour) of all Picasso Café students every Monday to discuss any issues that have arisen during the week, and to acknowledge those students who are making notable progress. It is also an opportunity to encourage those students whose efforts to attain their goals have stalled.

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Practicum

Throughout the course of their vocational programs, students may be sent on short placements in local restaurants lasting one or two days. After about 600 hours of training at Picasso Café (usually between four and six months after starting), participants become "senior students." At that point Picasso Café begins paying them the provincial minimum wage of $7 an hour and students are no longer eligible for Income Assistance. They also qualify for the final phase of training — a "practicum" — which is a longer work experience placement (normally scheduled to last 150 hours) with a host restaurant.[17] During the practicum, Picasso Café continues to pay the students the minimum wage.

The purpose of the practicum is two fold. First, it allows students to apply what they have learned outside of Picasso Café's structured training environment. Second, it gives the students exposure to potential employers. The practicums are served in restaurants that have expressed an interest in hiring Picasso Café graduates. Consequently, the practicum serves as a form of internship during which students can demonstrate their abilities to potential employers. The expectation is that students who perform satisfactorily will be hired permanently by the practicum host.

Locating host restaurants for the practicum placements is a key responsibility of the employment counsellor. To begin, the counsellor works with the student to identify the sort of work environment that would be most appropriate. Then, a combination of industry contacts and "cold calls" to potential employers is used to solicit placements. On occasion, discussions at fundraising and other special events have resulted in employers volunteering to take on students. A wide range of local restaurants has taken students from the Picasso Café program. In 1996, placements were made in 35 different restaurants including fine dining establishments, as well as more casual but well-respected restaurants.

[17]Both the Chef Level 1 and the Dining Room Level 1 programs are designed to be completed in 950 hours (including a 150-hour practicum). However, there is flexibility in how quickly a student progresses through the program. The timing of the practicum can also be affected by the availability of hosts to provide the placement.

Graduation

Participants who successfully make it through all the stages of their selected vocational program, and who earn all the Student Journey stickers, graduate from the Picasso Café program. They are awarded a certificate of completion from Picasso Café, and some also achieve VCC accreditation or other certificates.

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Chapter 2: The Challenges of Evaluating Youth Employment Programs

In the downtown areas of every large Canadian city, "street youth" gather in public parks, in shopping areas, in the open spaces that dot the urban landscape. Most are out-of-school and out-of-work, making ends meets with money from family or friends, odd jobs, petty theft, or Income Assistance. In recent years, some have taken to washing the windows of cars stopped in traffic, hoping for a dollar or two in return.

Why is this a problem? From one perspective, the problem is that street youth bother more conventional citizens. Passers-by may find panhandlers offensive and "squeegee kids" intrusive. Street youth appear to have visibly rejected mainstream values — they do not have steady jobs and do not aspire to middle-class lives, complete with families and homes in the suburbs. And, less visibly, some are involved in small-scale criminal activity such as selling drugs, shoplifting, or prostituting themselves.

From another perspective, the problem is that street youth are rejecting lives that they might ultimately find more satisfying and safe. Moreover, their behaviour is often symptomatic of past abuse or neglect, rather than a considered choice. With appropriate guidance (according to this perspective), they can be helped to choose a different and better life course.

Governments and social service agencies have responded to the problem of street youth in a number of ways. One response is to use the force of law to prevent the offensive behaviour. In Ontario, for example, the 1999 *Safe Streets Act* made "squeegee kids" subject to arrest. A more common response is to limit the access of young people to Income Assistance, by requiring work or participation in employment and training programs as a precondition of benefit receipt.

These kinds of responses can "work." Police can sweep the streets clear of street youth, work can be made a condition of Income Assistance receipt and more resources can be devoted to preventing petty crime. That is, one can imagine actions that could eliminate the visible problems posed by street youth. The deeper-seated problems might remain, however, and more serious criminal activity could result.

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An alternative (or perhaps complementary) approach is to create programs to help young people turn their lives around. Every city (and some rural areas) has programs that provide psychological counselling, skills upgrading, and help with substance abuse problems. Such programs are typically not mandatory and enrol only those young people who voluntarily seek them out. We are concerned here with one set of such programs — the set that aims to help youth integrate into the labour force.

In this chapter, we present and discuss two problems that have bedevilled efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of youth employment programs. The first problem is that evaluation findings depend crucially on the measures of success that analysts choose. The best measures of success are not usually available and analysts vary in their choice of second-best measures. As a result, programs that seem successful to some are deemed failures by others. The second problem is that the nature of the programs — small in size and shaped to the unique needs of particular individuals — does not lend itself to careful evaluation. As a result of these two problems, there has arisen what Gary Walker (1997) calls an "evidence gap" in the evaluation of youth employment programs.

What is success?

The goal of youth employment programs is deceptively simple — to create a stable worker where once stood an out-of-school, out-of-work youth. For many street youth, however, that goal is far distant and can be reached only by a long series of small steps, if it can reached at all.[1]

Many street-involved youth face multiple disadvantages — past and ongoing emotional and physical abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, failure in school, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Their early years may have been spent in homes where chronic unemployment, long-term Income Assistance receipt, and criminal activity were common.[2]

Not surprisingly, living for long periods in such environments connects youth to social networks where non-productive skills and norms are

[1]We are concerned in this report with "street youth" rather than with the much larger group of "youth in transition" between school and work. Both groups are out-of-school and out-of-work but street youth are far more likely to have experienced negative experiences in their past lives and to be farther away from traditional school-to-work labour force experiences.

[2]The extent to which street youth come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds is not known. The literature on this topic, as well as our conversations with youth workers and with young people themselves suggest that many street youths come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds but we know of no study that demonstrates this fact convincingly. Some street youth may come from families with no particular disadvantage.

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acquired. According to Sutherland (1956), in his research on criminal behaviour, individuals learn through *tutelage* or community interaction. The information and skills that flow through these networks, such as criminal behaviour and deep and pervasive mistrust, are useful only within the street environment. The acquisition of these "street" skills, at the expense of learning mainstream skills, limits young people's access to employment and other economic activities. Thus, youth can become so "embedded" in these social networks that it is nearly impossible to break their ties to street life (Coleman 1990).

This embeddedness implies that social mobility is difficult, if not impossible, for street youth. Social psychologists who study the life paths of individuals suggest that the chance of "moving up" is poor for street-involved youth (Caspi, Elder, and Herbener 1990; Starr 1986; Elder 1994). For their more advantaged peers, the transition to adulthood is usually a stable trajectory toward meaningful employment and conventional lifestyles. The trajectory for street-involved youth is also stable, but it usually leads *away* from economic and psycho-social success.

Most youth employment programs are attempting to change this trajectory. The tremendous difficulty of making this change creates two problems for program evaluation. Both problems result from the fact that the desired transition from street life to stable employment is unlikely to be realized in the period over which the program is being evaluated.

Two steps forward, one step back

The first problem is that, for street youth, the path from their current situation to their ultimate goal is not a straight line. It is common for them to make progress and then to fall back, to move forward for a while and then to return to previous lifestyles. Indeed, it is widely recognized that for at-risk youth the transition into full-time work, when it occurs, is often achieved through incremental steps.

The evaluative problem posed by this unsteady movement from one lifestyle to another is that the observation that a person has reached a certain stage — for example, completing an employment program — does not necessarily mean the person will give up street life. By the same token, the observation that a person has failed to complete a program does not mean that he or she did not learn valuable lessons that will ultimately lead to success.

According to Dorothy Stoneman, the founder of YouthBuild (a large American youth employment program), program staff believe that "even

those students who failed to abandon street life during YouthBuild and didn't graduate would probably be importantly influenced in the long run by having experienced a completely positive and hopeful mini-community" (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 404).

YOUTHBUILD

The seeds of YouthBuild were planted in 1978 when a group of New York teenagers decided to improve their community. Under the auspices of Dorothy Stoneman — then director of the Youth Action Program — the young people successfully renovated a tenement in East Harlem. Stoneman and the young people then formed an alliance with other non-profit organizations. The alliance evolved over time into YouthBuild USA and expanded nationwide in 1988. In 1999, there were 145 YouthBuild sites in over 43 states.*

Contemporary YouthBuild sites offer a comprehensive range of services for at-risk young people. Participants are predominately African-American and Latino men. Many (47 percent) are parents themselves and almost all (90 percent) come from very low-income families. The core program consists of alternating weeks of in-class instruction and on-site work experience. The in-class program is designed to prepare students for further formal education and training programs. YouthBuild bills itself as an alternative school, integrating life skills with academic skills as well as offering a "family life" environment.

The on-site work experience combines basic skills training, such as work habits and decision-making skills, with formal construction skills. YouthBuild participants work on construction sites under the supervision of qualified instructors who are often unionized journeymen. The construction sites on which YouthBuild participants train are special rehabilitation or construction projects that provide homes for homeless and low-income people. Often these projects are in the participants' neighbourhoods, allowing them to contribute to their own community while developing their own skills.

YouthBuild's reputation as a successful program for at risk youth is supported by its completion rates. In 1997–1998, an average of 60 percent of the students stuck with the program for its full 11 months. The program outcomes for those who complete YouthBuild are also informative. Among those who completed the program, 85 percent enrolled in college or began jobs, with hourly wages averaging US$7.53.

*Much of the material presented here comes from the YouthBuild USA website.

Intermediate measures of success

Given the difficulty of the task they set themselves, it seems unreasonable to judge employment programs for at-risk youth by the number of young people who become stable members of society within a short period of time after program completion. If that is the only measure of success, there is a substantial risk that the true impact of interventions in the lives of young people will be underestimated.

To address this problem, program evaluators have often adopted intermediate measures of success. These include program completion and the attainment of educational credentials (or employment) in the immediate aftermath of the program. In general, these measures map out steps that might lead to the ultimate goal and measure success by the number of steps the person has taken.

The process may involve many steps. For example, one street youth worker described the process an entrenched street youth would need to go through before she would consider referring them to our study programs. It included the following steps:

- Adopt healthier eating and sleeping habits.
- Stay sober and clean from drugs.
- Form an attachment to a street worker/social worker/mentor, while at the same time severing connections with friends who are a negative influence.
- Get established in stable, safe housing.
- Take on "odd jobs," usually starting small with one to two hours at a time with immediate financial gratification, working up to a whole day, and then stringing days of work together.

These steps down the long road to labour market integration are important outcomes for any youth employment program. Important as they are, however, they cannot be a substitute for long-term success.

In sum, we do not seem to have the appropriate tools or concepts to fully describe and measure how employment programs are affecting young people. We do not know if there is a fixed pattern that transitions follow (though we believe there is no one pattern) and we do not know how long the transition will take and cannot, therefore, plan an evaluation that will capture the end result.

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Lessons from past evaluations: Two different methodologies

Partly as a consequence of the difficulties just described, two distinct approaches to evaluating youth programs have emerged. One approach has employed quantitative methods to assess a relatively narrow range of participant outcomes. A second approach has used qualitative methods to study a more comprehensive set of outcomes, including intermediate outcomes for participants and measures of effective program design and delivery.

Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods of program evaluation place great emphasis on the role of the "counterfactual." A true counterfactual tells us what would have happened in the absence of an intervention. Unfortunately, true counterfactuals are impossible to observe because we cannot "rewind" history to see what would have happened had the person never participated in the program. However, by using random assignment methods, or by carefully constructing comparison groups, good approximations to the true counterfactual can be obtained. Such counterfactuals help distinguish between the part of an outcome that is attributable to the intervention and the part that is related to other variables.

The available evaluations based on random assignment experiments or on careful non-experimental comparison group analyses have tended to define success in terms of post-program earnings and employment. Given the above description of the process by which disadvantaged young people attempt to enter the mainstream labour market, we believe that this is an overly restrictive definition of success.

Because they use standard statistical methods, these evaluations typically have an additional criterion for success. The estimated program impact must be significantly different from zero, in the statistical sense. For youth programs, however, even program impacts that are quite small may be of policy relevance. For example, suppose the difference in the post-program employment rate of program participants and the comparison group is three percentage points. Given the difficulty of helping street-involved youth, three percentage points may represent substantial success. If so, few quantitative evaluations have sample sizes that are big enough to have the statistical power to judge a three-percentage-point difference "significant."

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Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods are often better suited to exploring how and why events occur, as opposed to whether or not they occur. In the context of youth employment programs, qualitative evaluators have preferred to analyze a larger range of outcomes than do the quantitative evaluators. The qualitative approach focusses more on the process by which young people try to leave life on the streets and less on their ultimate success in doing so. Moreover, they have studied the effectiveness of program operations, a subject not often included in quantitative evaluations.

Many in this group of evaluators are associated with the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet). PEPNet developed after the U.S. National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) convened a Working Group of youth experts including practitioners, researchers, employers, and policy-makers. The NYEC Working Group agreed upon effectiveness criteria and embarked on a national search for effective youth employment and development programs.

After two years, PEPNet had gained enough credibility and recognition to receive an invitation from the U.S. House and Senate to inform the drafting of the *Workforce Investment Act* (WIA), which replaced the *Job Training and Partnership Act* (JTPA). The WIA legislation incorporates many of the practices recommended by PEPNet. In Canada, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) used PEPNet criteria as a case study model for a recent Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference.

PEPNet annually recognizes programs that exemplify its "criteria for effectiveness." While these criteria acknowledge that participant outcomes are important, they largely concern program design and delivery. Specifically, PEPNet's criteria cover areas such as the program's purpose and activities, organization and management, youth development, and workforce development. PEPNet encourages sustained relationships between adults and youth, as well as age-appropriate program content. It also promotes a connection between work and learning, with employer involvement.

The attention given to the program itself (as opposed to participant outcomes) is a significant departure from the impact evaluations that are undertaken by quantitatively focussed evaluators. The PEPNet approach allows a program to be judged a success even in the absence of extensive information about participant outcomes. Indeed, despite PEPNet's wide reach and credibility, many programs recognized as effective by PEPNet

have been subject only to rudimentary evaluations of participant outcomes.

PEPNET

In existence since 1996, PEPNet is managed by the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) — a network of over 150 different youth employment and development organizations. PEPNet specifically aims to identify and promote "what works" in youth programs. Its work focusses on three main strategies: improving programming and capacity; informing public policy; and increasing support for effective youth programming.

Their "criteria of effective practice" are a central part of PEPNet's message. Youth organizations are encouraged to assess themselves according to the criteria and programs are annually recognized for excellence in meeting these criteria. Established by a NYEC working group, the criteria cover five broad areas:

Purpose and Activities

- The initiative presents a clear and consistent mission.
- There is a logical relationship between the initiative's mission activities and the youth it serves.
- The mission shapes its structure and offerings.

Organization and Management

- Maintain continuity and competence of leadership and staff.
- Incorporate staff development as a management strategy.
- Leverage resources through collaboration and partnership.
- Commit to a continuous improvement strategy.
- Attract diverse funding.

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Youth Development

- Nurture relationships between youth and caring adults.
- Engage family and peers in organized activities.
- Place high expectations on youth and staff.
- Build youths' responsibility and leadership skills.
- Offer individualized age- and stage-appropriate activities.
- Utilize a holistic approach, providing needed supportive services.
- Develop a sense of group membership.
- Foster a sense of identity and self.

Workforce Development

- Nurture career awareness and exploration.
- Embed career guidance and career planning throughout the program.
- Provide work-based learning opportunities.
- Provide experiential learning opportunities.
- Ensure that employers are actively engaged.
- Emphasize the connection between work and learning.
- Measure and assess skills and competencies gained.
- Provide challenging academic preparation.
- Offer post-placement follow-up activities.

Evidence of Success

- Establish intermediate and long-term outcomes and measurable indicators.
- Collect and maintain data.
- Use data for management decision making.
- Use data to assess progress and evaluate effectiveness.
- Share information with stakeholders and community.

The evidence gap

Neither quantitative nor qualitative methods can resolve the problems created by the lengthy and non-linear process that young people go through as they try to change their lives. This is because the problem is not methodological; what is required is the continuous observation of program participants (and a comparison group) over a very long time period.

It is because the problems have not been satisfactorily resolved that policy-makers face the "evidence gap." This gap is made more problematic because the two different groups of evaluators have often come to different conclusions. By and large, the quantitative evaluators have concluded that employment programs for at-risk youth do *not* work (or that the positive impacts are quite modest) while the qualitative evaluators believe that a wide range of particular programs *do* work.

Thus policy-makers can read an extensive literature that is pessimistic about the efficacy of such programs at the same time as they read about numerous programs in Canada and the United States that are devoted to helping young people and staffed by committed and motivated individuals.

Two examples of large-scale quantitative evaluations

In general, the evidence produced by quantitative evaluators has suggested that employment programs for at-risk youth have very limited impact. A number of evaluations have dealt with programs for in-school youth, but here we briefly discuss two evaluations of American programs aimed at out-of-school, out-of-work youth. Both were evaluated, at least in part, as randomized trials.

JTPA

The best known of these evaluations was known as the National *Job Training Partnership Act* (JTPA) Study (Bloom et al. 1997).

First funded in 1982, JTPA was a federal funding umbrella supporting a diverse set of local programs that provided on-the-job training, job-search assistance, and classroom training. JTPA programs were typically quite short, lasting only several months. Aimed at the economically disadvantaged, JTPA served over one million people annually. These people either received Income Assistance or food stamps, or had

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incomes below the poverty level. A mandatory minimum of 40 percent of the appropriations was allocated to programs for youth.[3]

JTPA did not fund a full range of services. For example, all subsidies for public sector employment, available under previous legislation, were eliminated.[4] Moreover, the criteria for providing work experience or on-the-job training were established in such a way that private sector subsidies were all but impossible. Consequently, JTPA programs provided no financial incentives and rarely provided any paid work experience.

The evaluation of the JTPA used random-assignment methods. The methodology was particularly difficult to implement in this case because the intervention being studied was an existing program rather than a specially designed demonstration project. Several problems are associated with the evaluation of an existing program that is not under the close control of the evaluators. For example, there is always the possibility that the process of evaluation will alter the program, limiting the ability to isolate the impacts of the program. Another problem is the reluctance of sites to participate. The evaluators were able to recruit a smaller-than-expected number of sites, which led to a sample size only 50 percent as large as planned.

The major findings of the National JTPA Study with regard to youth were quite clear. During the 30-month post-program follow-up period, participation in JTPA had no impact on earnings or welfare receipt. For female youth, JTPA increased the proportion of female high school dropouts who received high school diplomas (or equivalent) during the follow-up period; there was no impact in this area for male youth.

Policy-makers took these unfavourable results seriously. In 1996, funding for JTPA programs was cut by 79 percent, a cut based on the evidence provided by the National JTPA Study.

[3]The period that the JTPA study covers was prior to the 1992 amendment that created a separate funding stream for youth programs.

[4]One of the major criticisms of the *Comprehensive Employment and Training Act* (CETA) — JTPA's predecessor — was that it provided too much subsidized public service work and not enough private sector exposure. It would appear that the JTPA regulations were a reaction to this criticism.

Job Corps

One of the most intensive and long-lived youth employment programs is the American Job Corps program. This program was established in 1964, as part of the War on Poverty and continues to this day. Here, we summarize two separate evaluations of the Job Corps.

The first covered the period 1977–1981. During that time, the Job Corps provided "economically disadvantaged youths between 16 and 21 years of age with basic education, vocational training, and related services in a residential setting" (Mallar et al. 1982, 1). Most participants — called Corpsmembers — were high school dropouts with histories of criminal activity and welfare dependence. Most came from low-income minority families, and had little job experience.

The key difference between the Job Corps and other youth programs, then and now, is that it is a residential living program. That is, participants leave their homes and live together at a Job Corps site for a period of about six months. The cost of Job Corps per participant was about US$6,000 in 1977 (C$18,370 in current dollars) which is quite expensive by contemporary standards. While in residence, participants receive a panoply of services (Mallar et al. 1982, 15):

> *The components of the Jobs Corps program include remedial education, high school equivalency classes, vocational training, health care and education, counselling and other ancillary services.*

After completing the residential portion of their program, Job Corps participants received subsidies while working in a job placement.

Using quasi-experimental methods, Mallar et al. (1982) found significant positive impacts relative to a comparison group that received only whatever non-Jobs-Corps services were available in their communities. For example, in the 18–24 month period after they left the program, the comparison group spent about 45 percent of their time employed (Mallar et al. 1982, 133); the corresponding percentage for the program group was 7.4 percentage points higher. Overall, those who participated in Job Corps earned about 15 percent more than comparison group members over the four-year follow-up period. In addition, Corpsmembers were more likely to receive a high school diploma (or its equivalent) and less likely to be involved in criminal activity.

These results led to the belief that intensive (and expensive) programs such as Job Corps were effective for disadvantaged young people. In the mid-1990s, the U.S. government funded another evaluation of the Job Corps that used experimental methods. The short-term results of this

evaluation (Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman 2000), while positive, are less compelling.

The impact on earnings in the 10th quarter of the follow-up period was $13 per week per participant (Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman 2000, xliii) which was 11 percent higher than the weekly earnings of control group members in the 10th quarter. Over the entire 30-month follow-up period, however, Corpsmembers' earnings were *lower* than control group members, largely because of the earnings foregone while in the program. As before, Corpsmembers were more likely to receive a high school diploma (or its equivalent) and were significantly less likely to be involved in criminal activity (Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman 2000).

This latest evaluation of the Jobs Corps included an evaluation of a relatively small non-residential Jobs Corps program. No impacts were found for participants in this non-residential program, leading Schochet, Burghardt, and Glazerman (2000, 27) to write:

> *The finding that males and females without children who participate in the nonresidential components derive no net benefit over and above what they can get from the many other education and training opportunities available in the community appears very consistent with the finding on youth from the National JTPA Study.*

A caveat here is that these evaluations measured the impact of Job Corps participation compared with the impact of whatever services the comparison or control group received. That is, they do not compare the impact of the Job Corps compared with no services at all. If more services are available today as compared with twenty years ago, then the *incremental* impact of Job Corps might be smaller even if its direct effects are unchanged.

The overall message here is that large-scale quantitative evaluations of programs for severely disadvantaged out-of-school, out-of-work youth have not uncovered any "magic bullets."[5] Short, relatively inexpensive programs like those funded by JTPA — programs lasting about six months and costing about US$2,800 per participant — seem to have no impact on employment and earnings. Somewhat more intensive programs like JOBSTART — lasting about a year, providing about 60 hours per month of training in a non-residential setting, and costing $5,900 per participant — also had little impact.[6] The more intensive Job

[5]The numbers cited in this paragraph are drawn from Katz et al. 1995.

[6]JOBSTART was essentially a less intensive, less expensive, non-residential version of Job Corps. Evaluated with random assignment techniques, the 13 JOBSTART programs did not, on average, increase employment or reduce welfare dependency. Earnings increased by about eight percent in *(continued)*

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Corps program — lasting about a year for those who completed the program, providing twice as much training as JOBSTART and costing $15,000 per participant— seemed to have larger incremental impacts in an early evaluation, but more recent results revealed smaller impacts.

Three examples of qualitative evaluations

The conclusions drawn from qualitative evaluations give a more positive impression of youth employment programs. This need not be seen as contradicting the quantitative evaluation since, as noted previously, the outcomes examined are quite different.

YouthBuild

A formative evaluation of YouthBuild (Ferguson and Clay 1996) is one of the best-known qualitative evaluations. YouthBuild uses construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing as a backdrop to its job training, education, and counselling program. Participants alternate weekly between GED (General Equivalency Diploma) preparation and on-site training in construction skills.

According to Ferguson and Clay (1996, ii):

> *Formative evaluations aim primarily to discover details of how programs operate and to contribute to the improvement of program design and implementation. Formative evaluations are not primarily concerned with calculating . . . social costs and benefits, nor do they compare participants' outcomes with what would have happened for participants if they had not participated in the program.*

At five YouthBuild sites, the evaluation explored areas such as enrolments and attendance. It also made some external comparisons with the Urban Core Expansion Project, the New York City Volunteer Corps, and with non-residential Job Corps, JOBSTART, and JTPA programs. The evaluators used interviews to explore the local organizational structure and practices. Statistical analysis was also used to predict the determinants of program performance. The report concluded that, "the YouthBuild model is replicable and appears to be most effective when sites are most faithful to the philosophy and substance of the core YouthBuild model" (Ferguson and Clay 1996, vi). Among those features

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the third and fourth years of follow-up. One JOBSTART site — the Center for Employment and Training in San Jose — had a very large impact on its participants and this program has since garnered considerable attention.

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identified as leading to success were fidelity to the YouthBuild model, strong leadership, and adequate and sufficiently flexible funding.

Programs from PEPNet's "Lessons Learned" series

PEPNet's "Lessons Learned" series highlights programs that exemplify the criteria for effectiveness in youth employment programs.

Goodwill Toronto trains at-risk youth to work in the call centre industry with a 16-week program consisting of classroom work and an internship. The first eight weeks are spent in a simulated call centre where students learn industry-specific skills in combination with "soft" skills such as communication, team building, interpersonal skills, as well as time and money management. The second eight weeks are spent in an internship with an employer who is committed to hiring the students following the course. Goodwill uses participant and staff feedback in its assessment of effectiveness, and the main funder (HRDC) regularly conducts in-depth interviews with students to glean information about program operations and effectiveness. PEPNet reports on two outcomes — program completion and wages. In the three years Goodwill has been in operation, it has exceeded its target outcome of graduating at least 70 percent of participants. In their guaranteed positions, those graduates have earned hourly wages that average $10.

Fresh Start in Baltimore provides experiential learning in a maritime environment to high-risk youth aged 16–20. The nine-month program provides applied learning experiences in building and repairing boats and engines. Fresh Start also allows participants to develop carpentry skills, work in a marina, and crew aboard vessels. The last two months of the program support students' transition into internships and jobs. Fresh Start, which has received a number of awards for being a model program, cites only a single outcome as evidence of their success: nearly half (46 percent) of their graduates pursue further education. However, we do not know the program graduation rate, nor the rate at which participants would have pursued further education in the absence of the program.

Goodwill Toronto and Fresh Start are examples of the alternatives to the long-term quantitative evaluations of JTPA, JOBSTART, and the Job Corps. Participants are not followed for long periods after leaving the programs and no comparison or control groups are involved. However, the nature of program participation is studied fairly intensively, the lived experience of participants is explored in personal interviews, and success is measured by relatively short-term outcomes such as program completion and immediate post-program employment.

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Conclusion

The kind of analysis presented in this report more closely parallels the PEPNet "Lessons Learned" series. We explore factors contributing to *program* success, rather than *participant* success. These might include the program's capacity to deliver its services, its reputation among participants, partners, and funders, and the availability of suitable resources, human and financial.

In taking the case study approach, we are recognizing, as did Ferguson and Clay (1996, 400), that:

> . . . *No one model, including ours, is unassailable in its ability to identify appropriate outcome levels against which to hold programs accountable. Hence, despite the growing popularity in policy circles of outcomes-based accountability, any serious regime of accountability for programs like YouthBuild [and like our study programs] will necessarily . . . give attention to issues of process as well as to outcomes.*

In that spirit, the next chapter contains the themes and conclusions that we drew from our observations of BladeRunners and Picasso Café.

Chapter 3: Themes From Research on BladeRunners and Picasso Café

Programs like BladeRunners and Picasso Café try to help those who are willing to make the transition from street life to mainstream employment. The previous chapter indicated that large-scale quantitative evaluations of youth employment programs have focussed on post-program outcomes for participants. In general, these evaluations found either no impact or only relatively modest positive impacts. Smaller-scale qualitative evaluations have focussed on program operations and highlighted practices thought to be effective. In other words, while the quantitative evaluations focussed on *participant success*, the qualitative evaluations focussed on *program success*.[1]

Our evaluation is qualitative and relatively small. Lacking the resources to track large numbers of program participants over a long post-program period, participant success was outside the scope of this evaluation. To be sure, in the course of dozens of interviews and hours of observation, we identified a number of participants who seemed to have moved well down the road toward steady and remunerative employment. Their numbers are small, however, and we have no counterfactual against which to compare their experience. Like other qualitative evaluations, we therefore focus on program success.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first discusses program participation, the second program management and structure, and the third the relationships between the programs and external institutions.

Program participation and content

No one really knows how many street youth live in downtown Vancouver. The reason is partly definitional — what exactly defines "street youth?" — and partly practical — how would one count the number even if a definition were available? Current estimates of the population of street youth in Vancouver seem to lie in the 1,000 to

[1]"Participant success" refers to the ability of the participants to reach the program's intended goal — full-time employment in "good" jobs. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the difficulty of measuring participant success. "Program success" refers to the operational and managerial capacity and effectiveness of the programs.

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2,000 range.[2] These estimates are far greater than the number that participate in programs such as BladeRunners or Picasso Café. For example, in any one year, BladeRunners and Picasso Café serve between 90 to 120 youth. We do not know if there are just too few programs (or too few attractive programs) or if the majority of street youth are simply not ready to make the transition to full-time work.

This section discusses the factors that are important in attracting participants and helping some of them to complete program requirements. In particular, we discuss the following, linking general ideas drawn from the literature to specific observations of BladeRunners and Picasso Café:

- **Turning points**: Only a small percentage of street youth will be interested in enrolling in any voluntary employment program because only a few will have reached the necessary psychological "turning point."

- **Attractiveness to street youth**: To be attractive to those who are ready to attempt the transition to mainstream life, an employment program must offer a transparent link to a good job and be able to deal with the multiple challenges that street youth face. We found that our study programs have both of these features and, perhaps for that reason, have a good reputation among youth and among youth workers.

- **Screening**: Even if a particular young person is ready and willing to enter a program, the program staff may believe that he or she will not be able to meet program requirements. Most youth employment programs, therefore, ask potential participants to go through a screening process. We describe the screening processes of our study programs in some detail and report on participant views of the screening.

- **Mentoring**: Regardless of a program's ability to attract participants, it is the content of the program that is thought to affect participant success. Both of our study programs offer sustained adult contact — known as mentoring — as part of their program content. We explore BladeRunners mentoring (an especially important program feature) in some detail. We also briefly describe the adult contact component of Picasso Café.

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[2]These estimates come from our conversations with street youth workers and BladeRunners co-ordinators.

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Turning points

Both of our study programs are directed to the subset of youth who demonstrate some "readiness" to make the transition from street life to steady employment.

For street youth, the lack of family support and lack of positive school and work experiences can lead to lifelong difficulties (Starr 1986) and to socioeconomic inertia. Nonetheless, some lives can become redirected by "turning points" (Elder 1985). These may be single or multiple events that either provoke sudden epiphanies or more gradual awakenings. For some young people, the turning point might be the death of a friend or a new awareness of familial responsibilities. Many of the BladeRunners and Picasso Café participants spoke of these turning points in their lives. As one put it:

> *I'm just getting sick of seeing the same thing, people doing drugs over and over and I'm getting sick of it. I want to get somewhere in my life. I'm not getting any younger.*

These turning points represent an opportunity to reach troubled youth and introduce them to more positive communities. Labour force participation has often been cited as a context that encourages disentanglement from street life (Hagan and McCarthy 1998). When placed in this new context, youth may be able to develop relationships with individuals and networks that assist in the acquisition of skills — sometimes as simple as trust — that are useful in productive employment.[3]

Attracting participants to a program

Once a young person has reached a turning point, he or she must find something to turn toward.[4] A voluntary program cannot affect the lives of young people if it cannot attract participants. A successful program must, therefore, meet the needs and desires of its intended audience in order to attract them as participants.

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[3]Another view of individual development recognizes the importance of participant "readiness." Motivational psychology asserts that individuals will become focussed on a certain life path only if it seems both desirable and feasible. Feasibility requires that the young person have a strategy to achieve the desired goal and the skills to implement that strategy (see Ferguson and Clay 1996, 245–318).

[4]Not all "turning points" will lead to changes in lifestyle. We assume that the desire to participate in any employment training program is an indication that a turning point has been reached. In reality, some who apply to youth programs will drop out when program requirements are made clear.

Programs that are simply a mirror of programs for adults are unlikely to appeal to street youth (Grubb 1995). Because the target groups for programs like BladeRunners and Picasso Café are street-involved youth, programs must adapt to their particular needs. These youth grapple with the psycho-social challenges of late adolescence, while also facing special disadvantages. They often come from disrupted families and frequently struggle with alcohol and drug abuse (Hagan and McCarthy 1998). While a difficult home life contributes to the likelihood that a young person will become involved in street life, it also contributes to difficulties at school (Hagan and McCarthy 1998). Fewer than one third of our focus group participants had completed high school. Difficulties in school clearly limit the range of available employment opportunities. Almost all the participants we spoke to had been receiving Income Assistance for 4 to 11 months.

Both BladeRunners and Picasso Café appear to be able to appeal to street youth. Youth workers, pre-employment program operators and the young people themselves speak of the good reputation of the two programs.

The key to their appeal seems to lie in the transparent link between successful program completion and relatively stable and well-paid employment. This link is important because street youth have generally rejected the more traditional means of human capital development, such as formal education. Even when considering making life changes, they are not typically prepared for or willing to undergo the sort of preparation that post-secondary education or formal training entails. The rewards of such human capital investments are too remote. Consequently, they are attracted to programs that appear to provide a direct conduit to employment.

Part of this appeal is the ability to gain certificates and recognized credentials. Participants are aware of the value of these credentials in assisting them to gain access to higher-wage labour markets. A BladeRunner describes how his situation improved by earning certificates:

> *I heard that you could get your first aid ticket, too, and I thought there's a lot of construction sites like that, if you have your industrial first aid, because you can watch up to 12 guys. It's good because the job that I had a few months ago, they hired me because I had my first aid ticket. . . . A big difference.*

Youth are attracted to programs when they see that the program will lead to a job. It also appears that the quality of the job — here restaurant and construction work — is also important to young people. Some developmental research indicates that not having access to a rewarding full-time career impedes the successful transition to adulthood (Starr 1986). Our study programs seem to hold out the promise of not just any job, but a good job. As one BladeRunners participant noted:

> *I was working for landscaping for a while and it was like eight bucks an hour. . . . I didn't like it so I just decided I wanted a better job, more money and you need your GED to get into . . . get a real job basically.*

For others, it was not simply a matter of money but also about how motivating the job was:

> *I'd rather be doing something that's interesting and you don't get bored with it, like something that's always going to be different. With plumbing and heating I found that, whatever you were doing it was always different.*

Other research also supports the importance of job quality in making meaningful impacts on these young people's lives. According to Allan and Steffensmeier (1989, 109):

> *Where jobs are insecure, with low pay, few benefits, and minimal opportunities for advancement, work may provide fewer incentives for young people to form lasting commitments to conventional lifestyles, and such conditions may help to create and sustain deviant subcultures at the community level while eroding norms and social controls.*

The low-wage part-time employment opportunities that are typically offered to young people may be acceptable to those who live in comfortable home environments. However, street youth often require greater financial and social independence and are thus not satisfied with these types of jobs.

In summary, BladeRunners and Picasso Café appeal to young people who have decided to try to turn their lives around because the programs offer a transparent link to jobs and to jobs that offer relatively interesting and remunerative work.

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Screening

When individuals have reached a turning point in their lives and have decided to apply to particular programs such as BladeRunners and Picasso Café, another dimension of readiness becomes important. Just because a young person has reached a turning point does not mean that he or she is ready for a full-time job on a construction site.

Programs often select only the individuals they believe can succeed and believe that, in so doing, they are expending resources on those who can most benefit. Our study programs screen potential participants so that only those deemed suitable are allowed entry. Program staff believe screening is important for two reasons: to gauge participants' "readiness" to make the transition from street life to steady employment and to ensure a safe working and learning environment for all participants. Both workplaces — restaurant kitchens and construction sites — are potentially dangerous and require attentiveness and commitment to safety from all employees.

Given its importance, the ability to accurately detect the "readiness" of potential participants is a critical program function. YouthBuild (first discussed in Chapter 2) uses a screening process to ensure that participants have demonstrated the requisite "readiness." The evaluation of the YouthBuild program suggests that well-run programs place an emphasis on their screening process (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 254). As a YouthBuild staff member explained:

> *We were looking for people who were really willing to get humble, and put their stuff on the line, and really put their hearts up there and say what they really wanted to do. If we could do that in an interview and they could get real and start telling us things, then we felt they were reachable, versus a couple that came in — they were so hard that you couldn't break the barrier.*

While both Picasso Café and BladeRunners screen participants, they differ greatly in their approaches.

Students can sometimes begin at Picasso Café within a week of their first contact with the program. In the past, however, waiting lists have occasionally delayed program entry. At the time of our field research, program staff indicated there was an informal interview process; however, some participants did not regard this interview as a barrier and believed that all interested individuals could gain entry. Young people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse or without a place to live, however, are not permitted in the program. Such applicants are directed to other resources and may reapply when they have dealt with these challenges.

The participant intake process at BladeRunners is more rigorous than that of Picasso Café.[5] At the centre of the application process is the interview, which involves appearing before a panel of up to six individuals. Panellists, who might be BladeRunners staff, potential employers, "Senior BladeRunners," or social workers, ask applicants a number of direct questions covering their demographic background, their previous employment history or activities while on welfare, their current lifestyle, and potential employment barriers. They also ask a number of more personal questions having to do with applicants' current drug and alcohol intake and whether they have difficulties in this regard, or any other problems that might affect their work performance.

Almost half of the BladeRunners who commented on the interview described it as an intimidating process. One participant called it a "nightmare" because he was certain he would say something wrong. Some of those who ultimately felt comfortable during the interview admitted it was "scary" at first. Several of this latter group said they found the interview easier as it progressed, usually because the questions were not as difficult as they had expected. Interestingly, one participant commented that he thought "the more you've been through, the better chance you have of getting in," but said he did not make anything up to increase his chances.

In particular, BladeRunners in Victoria appreciated the interview experience because they felt it helped them prepare for job interviews. Because the co-ordinators and others who conducted the intake interviews had actually worked in construction, the interviews seemed more real to the participants than the practice interviews that were a part of many pre-employment training programs.

Whether intimidating or comfortable, the BladeRunners interview process was respected and any problems with it were attributed to the participant, not to the interviewers: "It was rough for me, man. I was too opinionated and . . . it was scary. It was pretty good." Honesty was mentioned by about one third of the BladeRunners in our focus groups, whether they found the interview process intimidating or not. They appreciated the straightforwardness of the interviewers, and felt that in turn it was important for them to be straightforward; they felt this promoted trust. "So depending on how much you want to be here, that's how much they want you to be here. So it's good."

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[5]During times of high demand by employers, however, some BladeRunners participants that have not completed a general pre-employment program, or who do not meet the age requirement, have been granted entry. All are required, however, to complete the construction health and safety training program.

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Perhaps the difference in the two screening processes can be attributed in part to the differences in the programs. Picasso Café may cater to a more advantaged student population and there may be less likelihood that applicants will be unable to meet program requirements.[6]

Students at Picasso Café also spend a great deal more time than BladeRunners in training before they interact with external employers. Since BladeRunners are placed on construction sites early in the program — making the readiness of the participants more important and testing the program's reputation earlier — there is a heavier emphasis on ensuring the reliability of participants before they enter the program.[7] If a student does not work out at Picasso Café, no outside employer is affected and, because there is continuous enrolment, the student's place can be rapidly filled.

Mentoring

The job skills conveyed through program participation are essential to the transition from street life to steady employment. For BladeRunners, the skills are those of a construction worker; for Picasso Café students, they are the skills necessary to work in a restaurant.

The support that programs provide to participants in addition to job-related skills can also be crucial. Groups such as the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) have focussed on adult mentoring — consistent and long-lived interaction between young people and trained adults — as an especially important extra source of support.[8]

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[6]We have no quantitative information on the level of disadvantage faced by Picasso Café and BladeRunners participants. Based on our observations, we believe that Picasso Café students are somewhat less disadvantaged than BladeRunners.

[7]We do not mean to suggest that BladeRunners participants are more reliable than those at Picasso Café.

[8]Evidence from other evaluation studies supports the effectiveness of mentoring, although many of the programs studied served individuals who were considerably younger than the street youth who enrol in BladeRunners and Picasso Café. A random-assignment experiment of the Big Brother's/Big Sister's mentoring program provides evidence that one-on-one long-term mentoring can have a positive impact on young people's lives. The study, which compared youth who received mentoring with youth on the program's waiting list, found that program participants were 46 percent less likely to initiate drug use and 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use during the study period (Sipe 1996). Other positive effects include reduced likelihood of hitting someone, lower levels of truancy, slightly better grades, and improved relationships with friends and parents. Other studies of students show still more positive effects of mentoring. As Freedman notes, Project RAISE improved the grades and attendance of English students, while students with mentors in the Atlanta Adopt-a-Student program were more likely to enrol in post-secondary education (Freedman 1993).

Adult mentoring is important to street youth because many have grown up without the positive familial support that is considered critical to human development. Psychologists have documented that non-familial adult relationships in adolescence can have a positive impact on the lives of troubled young people (Caplan 1964; Rutter 1987; Ainsworth 1989).

Mentoring is not simply the presence of adults who are willing to help young people deal with various issues. Freedman (1993) distinguishes between *primary* and *secondary* mentoring relationships. Primary relationships are quite intense and tend to involve emotional openness and commitment. These types of relationships typically expand beyond the scope of the program. In secondary relationships, the mentor is not central in the life of the participant. These relationships are less intimate and are confined to the program itself.

In conversations with youth, Higgins (1988) found that, for many of them, their relationship with an adult was the deciding factor in their decision to stick with a program. The adult presence helps the young people deal with troublesome issues beyond those involved in their program training. This allows them to engage more fully in the program and makes it more likely that they can capture all of the potential benefits of program participation.

While both BladeRunners and Picasso Café provide adult support, the type of support offered in the programs is quite different. The relationship between BladeRunners co-ordinators and BladeRunners participants is quite similar to Freedman's primary mentoring relationship. By contrast, the adult interactions that occur at Picasso Café are more like Freedman's secondary mentoring relationship.

At BladeRunners, co-ordinators are deeply committed to the young people in the program. Each co-ordinator is assigned a small caseload to manage. Participants typically approach one person for help overcoming any and all problems. Contact is not limited to the program office; much of it is on the job site, at participants' homes, in union halls, in schools, at other community services, or on the street. Neither is contact limited to certain hours of the day or days of the week — staff carry cell phones and are accessible at any time.

Co-ordinators also provide a wide range of assistance. They will often track down BladeRunners who have "disappeared." Other examples of their assistance include helping participants move from one residence to another, accompanying participants to court appearances, discussing their family problems, and arranging sponsorship in the Alcoholics Anonymous program.

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One co-ordinator convinced a reluctant BladeRunner to enrol in a drug rehabilitation program by promising to come to see him every day. As it turned out, however, the program did not allow visitors in the first 72 hours of the program. In order to keep his promise, the co-ordinator thought that he would simply attend a weekly meeting held at the Detox centre, which was scheduled to occur within 24 hours of the start of the BladeRunner's rehab program. After hearing that the meeting was to be cancelled because it lacked a leader, the co-ordinator volunteered to run the meeting himself. He was allowed to do so only if he agreed to run the next three meetings as well, which he did to keep his promise to the BladeRunner.

This intensive relationship with individual BladeRunners makes the co-ordinators highly motivated to assist the young people in whatever way they can. They get to know the participants and in some cases their families, partners, parole officers, social workers, and other significant people in their lives. Co-ordinators are also motivated by the relationship to "go the extra mile" for participants, and when they speak of successes their pride in the individual participants is apparent. A further consequence of this relationship is that they have a high level of job satisfaction and are more committed to the work because they really feel they are having an impact upon the young people's lives.

Part of the remarkable commitment that we observed in the BladeRunners co-ordinators may stem from the specific characteristics of the co-ordinators themselves, rather than the program parameters. Most of the co-ordinators have worked extensively in the construction industry, some as journeymen or foremen. They are expected to have experience dealing with alcohol or drug addictions.

One factor in the decision to hire particular co-ordinators is their ability to act as mentors to the youth who must face these issues. While not formally trained as counsellors, they may have first-hand experience dealing with addicted co-workers, friends, family members or may, in some cases, have had their own past experiences with addiction. Another factor considered when hiring co-ordinators is whether they have volunteer experience in youth programs. For example, one of the Vancouver co-ordinators lives in the program's usual catchment area, the Downtown Eastside, and is well known to the local residents as an advocate promoting youth recreational activities (e.g. basketball and hockey), as well as being involved in housing and single parent issues. Having these characteristics allows the co-ordinators to relate more

closely to the young people who, in turn, view the co-ordinators as credible and trustworthy. One BladeRunner said:

> *You know where they've come from in their lives. So they know exactly how it is to be out there looking for work on your own. . . . Or knowing how to get into something, instead of drugs.*

BladeRunners-style mentoring is not only unique in its intensity but also in its duration. While most programs reduce their support after a job placement has been made, this is when the bulk of the support in the BladeRunners program begins. Participants need close adult contact as they prepare to begin work. Co-ordinators accompany BladeRunners to work several times in the first week. In many cases, this close monitoring enables them to head off potential problems. It also gives employers a sense of security and comfort in knowing the extent of support they can expect from the program.

The close contact that is maintained in the post-placement stage can also reduce the risk that participants will go back to street life when payday comes around. For many participants, the salary they receive while working as a BladeRunner is considerably more than their previous income. The young people can come under tremendous pressure to spend their money on alcohol and drugs. Many participants speak of the "new friends" they gain on payday. BladeRunners co-ordinators can help participants weather these temptations and can also help them recover from slips.

In one example, a BladeRunner who had been working quite steadily for several weeks went missing one payday and did not show up for work for three days. He credited his return to work and ongoing success entirely to the BladeRunners co-ordinators who advocated on his behalf to the employer, tracked him down and dragged him to work. The incident happened in early spring 1999, and the BladeRunner was still a valued full-time employee in January 2000.

Another critical role that the post-placement support plays is in encouraging wage progression. Although not strictly mentoring, co-ordinators encourage employers to promote and give raises to successful BladeRunners. This allays the concern that youth will be exploited through low wages — a frequent criticism of other employment programs.

The Picasso Café model for providing adult contact is not a mentoring relationship in the same sense. One group of staff provides the actual training. But other staff provide a range of services that goes beyond the

immediate training needs of the students — one is responsible for employment counselling and another for life skills. Contact mostly takes place at the restaurant, during hours of operation. Some staff work part time, and thus have less time to spend with individual participants. Staff meet once a week to discuss students, to update each other on students' progress, and to develop strategies for each participant. Since this type of support is less intensive, it allows staff more emotional distance from individual cases.

Advice and direction to participants takes place during the same period during which students are being trained and the restaurant is being run. For this reason, trainers must refer problems that require more time or attention to the life-skills counsellor. As a result of this split in responsibilities, staff are not likely to be directly involved with the full range of issues participants face. While staff took pride in helping to turn around young lives, they did not express a feeling of obligation to their students. Students at Picasso Café had responsibility for their success.

Former staff at Picasso Café also found that the dual nature of their program created ambiguities in their relationship with students. On the one hand they were trying to train participants and simulate a work environment to prepare them for independent employment. On the other hand, they needed to be able to deal with the personal and attitudinal problems that come with working with this population. When the lines between supervisor and counsellor became blurred it created additional tensions for staff.[9]

For example, because of the different focus of each staff member, there are various approaches to dealing with problems. When we interviewed a chef at the restaurant in 1998, he emphasized the need for a firm approach when students did not follow directions. As a trainer, he wanted to ensure that students understood the potential danger of not following directions in a kitchen environment. The life-skills counsellor, who joined us in this conversation, focussed less on the technical aspects of the restaurant industry. For her, it was important to spend time inculcating norms of professional behaviour in participants.

Mentoring relationships require that staff earn the trust of participants. Staff turnover, therefore, can easily defeat the gains that mentoring can bring; for each change in frontline staff, trust must be rebuilt. In the course of our field research, we discovered that staff turnover was much

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[9]BladeRunners co-ordinators do not face this problem because they do not supervise the training of program participants. The acquisition of construction skills goes on at the job site under the direction of the employer.

higher at Picasso Café than at BladeRunners. Over time, the BladeRunners program has had very little staff turnover. Only 4 of the 14 co-ordinators hired since 1995 had left the project as of January 2000. By contrast, considerable staff turnover has occurred at every level of Picasso Café.

Our observations of Picasso Café and BladeRunners suggest that one reason — though hardly the only reason — for the differing degrees of turnover may be differing degrees of staff satisfaction. Staff satisfaction, in turn, seems to be related to the commitment of the staff to the participants.

It is important to recognize the limits of the BladeRunners mentoring relationship. Because the co-ordinators are not trained counsellors, doctors, psychologists, or psychiatrists, they must refer participants to those professionals, as appropriate. As trusted mentors, however, they can perform the crucial function of recognizing the need for such professional help and then linking participants with services that participants had not been aware of or had previously disdained.

Examples of this from our field research included addiction treatment services, educational upgrading, and psychological counselling. These interventions were necessary to help overcome barriers to full-time employment. Problems with drug and alcohol abuse were the most common barriers we observed among program participants. Other participants needed to improve their reading and writing skills in order to improve their employability.

Program management and structure

The lack of effective program management can stand in the way of the success of any organization. In this section, we discuss our findings with regard to the structure and management of BladeRunners and Picasso Café.[10]

The role of central co-ordination in BladeRunners

A key challenge faced by an organization expanding into new geographical locations, as BladeRunners has done in recent years, is to ensure that the central elements of the program model are adopted while

[10]These findings should not be interpreted as the report of a professional management consultant. They are simply views about management and structure developed in the course of observations primarily concerned with program content and participation.

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simultaneously accommodating local conditions. Our research on BladeRunners suggests that the effectiveness of its expansion was facilitated by a flexible, but still centralized, co-ordination structure.

Flexibility and centralization would seem to be competing goals. Simon (1946) calls such apparently competing goals the "Proverbs of Administration." In his seminal work, Simon observed that the doctrines of organizational theory were similar to such proverbs as "Look before you leap" and "He who hesitates is lost." Individually, each proverb provides a simple directive with an inherent logic. Yet, for every proverb there is another equally logical, yet contradictory, proverb. The tension between the control of centralization and the flexibility of decentralization exemplifies these sets of proverbial doctrines. In this case, we must reconcile one principle, unity of control, with another, specialization. Unity of control provides for a single hierarchy of authority, while specialization recommends that decision making be devolved to the position of expertise.

Since Simon developed his ideas, subsequent theorists have recognized that effective organization is far more complex than had been previously suggested. Indeed, an appropriate balance between both centralization and decentralization is a plausible resolution to this organizational dilemma. Peters and Waterman (1982) call this balance "simultaneous loose-tight properties."

This combination of control and autonomy is usually achieved effectively only when all members of the organization share a set of values. When all members of the organization are strongly committed to the organizational goals, the organization can reduce the extent to which it monitors employees and can provide staff with greater autonomy and flexibility. In organizations with common goals and values, there are fewer principal-agent problems. The principal-agent dilemma arises when the best interests of the principals — the employers — do not coincide with those of the agents — the employees. In such circumstances, organizations will increase their monitoring efforts to ensure that employees' actions conform to organizational interests.

Shared values, such as the commitment to street youth that we saw among BladeRunners staff, increase the overlap between the goals of principals and agents. When commitment to organizational goals is evident, employers can provide greater autonomy and flexibility. This means that employees are trusted to execute the central vision with some areas of discretionary control.

The efforts to expand BladeRunners to a multi-site program illustrate how flexibility and control can be effectively combined. In 1997, the provincial government established new BladeRunners programs in Victoria, Nanaimo, Kamloops, and Vernon. Two years later, a new expansion phase took the program to Kelowna and Prince George.

In planning to expand beyond the original Vancouver site, the Urban and Community Development Unit (UCDU) needed to decide how to manage the new sites. The UCDU chose to allow the new BladeRunners programs to be operated by local non-profit agencies to accommodate local variation in target populations, labour market conditions, and staff availability. At the same time, the UCDU took up the task of co-ordinating the activities of the local agencies in order to protect the integrity of the model. Following the selection of each expansion site, local delivery agencies (the local non-profit organizations) were chosen through a competitive bid process. The UCDU worked alongside the agencies to hire staff, build industry and community connections, and ensure that the BladeRunners model was preserved.

This model of central co-ordination has precedents in the United States in the YouthBuild USA Affiliated Networks model.[11] YouthBuild USA centrally co-ordinates 87 sites across the United States. It provides centralized data collection and very broad support. It also enforces the careful adherence to the YouthBuild model. While YouthBuild USA Affiliated Networks appears to be functioning smoothly at present, its history provides some lessons for expanding youth programs. YouthBuild encountered difficulties when its federal government sponsor, the Department of Housing and Urban Development agreed to fund a major expansion in 1988. In the initial years of that major expansion, YouthBuild leadership had less control over site selection and implementation; as a result, the quality of YouthBuild sites was uneven and some of the less successful expansion sites folded.

Our observations suggest that the BladeRunners programs have been able to avoid the early experiences of YouthBuild because the UCDU has maintained a suitable level of co-ordination. Consequently, the BladeRunners programs have been able to reap the benefits of co-ordination, which have included preservation of the integrity of the model and broader institutional networks.

Our fieldwork indicates that the central co-ordination approach has been successful in the preservation of the integrity of the BladeRunners model

[11]Although BladeRunners has similarities to YouthBuild in the use of the central co-ordination model and other aspects, BladeRunners was not deliberately modelled after YouthBuild.

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in each site, while allowing for adaptations to the local environment. The most important program element in BladeRunners is the provision of a caring and respectful mentor to each participant and this was accomplished in each site. The goal of providing work experience in the construction trades is also consistent across sites. Participants receive wages above the provincial minimum, primarily because of the subsidy. Each program also includes referrals to other social services and access to educational upgrading and career development.

The ability for each site to maintain links to other sites through the UCDU provincial co-ordinator provides a broader institutional network. This network facilitates information exchange among co-ordinators. For example, BladeRunners co-ordinators hold a conference once a year to receive program updates, engage in program planning, brainstorm, and share solutions to difficult situations or problems. The information exchange and ability to form collegial relationships — at some sites, there is only one co-ordinator — has the additional benefit of acting as an outlet for stress within and between each site. Co-ordinators spoke of the importance of being able to problem-solve or generally "let off steam" with each other.

The broader institutional network also facilitates connections with external organizations. For example, the unions that have supported the Vancouver BladeRunners program have their own cross-province networks. The satellite programs have benefited from the ability to tap into these networks. These benefits are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Despite the clear benefits of central co-ordination, there is always the potential for tension between the central agency — here the UCDU — and satellite programs. The satellite programs may feel that their individual circumstances are not duly considered, or that the central office is not responding to their needs. Conversely, the central agency may feel that the local programs are not acting in concert with its goals.

Any such tension appears to be minimal for BladeRunners. On the rare occasions when co-ordinators at expansion sites requested an adaptation of the model to suit their local circumstances, they were able to work out an acceptable solution with the UCDU. Two examples from the Vernon BladeRunners program illustrate this process.

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First, in Vernon, the unemployment rate is several percentage points above the B.C. average.[12] As a consequence, there was a concern that the subsidy, which raises the wage by $3 per hour, would result in resentment from unsubsidized co-workers. The Vernon program requested permission to allow the employer's portion of the wage to fall below the minimum wage. In this case the UCDU response provided a compromise. The employer was still required to pay the provincial minimum wage, but if the Vernon program wished the total wage to be lower than $10 per hour, they were given the option of providing a lower wage subsidy.

Second, the original BladeRunners model did not allow for placement of participants in jobs other than construction. The intense competition for jobs in Vernon, coupled with the seasonal fluctuations in construction activity, meant that the opportunities to place BladeRunners on construction sites were relatively rare. In order to respond to these local conditions, the delivery agency in Vernon was allowed to place BladeRunners in temporary unsubsidized jobs to keep them involved in productive activities until a construction placement could be found.

The volunteer board at Picasso Café

The management structure at Picasso Café is very different from that of BladeRunners and has yielded mixed results. Picasso Café is managed by the Option Youth Society, which in turn is governed by a volunteer board of directors. The board members, who have ranged from 9 to 15 in number, represent the hospitality industry, community members, and business people. Picasso Café benefits in several ways from the relationship with its board members. This management structure, however, was not able to protect the Café from closure when provincial government funding was cut.

Organizational theorists recognize, in general, that boards of directors can mediate the organization's relationship with its external environment (Minzberg 1979; Selznick 1948). Board members can perform this function in several ways. First, they can facilitate financial and information flows through relationships with individuals and other

[12]According to the 1996 Census, the unemployment rate in the Vernon Census Agglomeration was 12.1 percent compared with 9.6 percent for all of British Columbia. (Source: Statistics Canada, "Income and Work Statistics for Vernon (Census Agglomeration), British Columbia," *Census 1996, Canadian Statistical Profiles* <http://ceps.statcan.ca/english/profil/Details/details1inc.cfm?PSGC=959&SGC=91800&A=&LANG=E&Province=59&PlaceName=vernon&CSDNAME=Vernon&CMA=918&DataType=1&TypeNameE=Census%20Agglomeration&ID=998> (last viewed on January 24, 2001).)

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organizations (Middleton 1987). This is particularly true of non-profit boards that tend to be composed of a greater proportion of external members (Oster 1995). Because of their various affiliations, Picasso Café's board generates donations as well as important connections with the potential employers of Picasso Café graduates. The program benefits from the expertise of its board members; for example, one board member, who was also a business consultant, developed the recruitment process at Picasso Café.

Despite the many benefits of the board, it also has some drawbacks as a management structure. Volunteer board members have less time and resources to provide consistent management. The very people who have the most to offer as board members — those with relevant skills, experience, and industry connections — also have busy careers of their own and thus limited time to devote to the board. During the field research, we heard from staff who felt that the board was too removed from the day-to-day operations of the Café, yet we also heard the term "micromanagement" applied to the board. Given the state of flux that the Café was in at the time of our research, however, we do not feel able to come to any definitive conclusions about the efficacy of board management in this case.

The closure and subsequent re-opening of Picasso Café illustrates both negative and positive aspects of volunteer board management. In the spring of 1999, the British Columbia government decided to cancel its annual allocation of $240,000. Historically, approximately one third to one half of the funding for Picasso Café had come from restaurant revenues, another quarter from donations, and the remainder from a mixture of federal and provincial funds. The government funding was never permanent and required yearly application.

Following the provincial government's decision to discontinue its financial support, the board decided to close the restaurant. This decision was only in part a direct result of the anticipated funding shortfall. Another cause was the concern of board members about their personal liability for the accumulating debt. Although it was the board's decision to close the restaurant, board members were also instrumental in ensuring the program re-opened in April 2000. The board members' connections to media and influential individuals in the community assisted in generating support for Picasso Café. Following the closure, individuals, corporations, and the media rallied to support the program. Their efforts led to the provision of temporary funding and a commitment by the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security to arrange more stable funding. Without the board's efforts, it is

not clear whether Picasso Café would be operational today; however, one cannot ignore the role that the board played in precipitating the closure.

Leadership

The experience of both BladeRunners and Picasso Café, with their very different management structures, highlights the importance of leadership for organizational success. PEPNet recognizes effective leadership as a critical component, "Stable and continuous leadership is key to organizational success . . . essential is strong engaged and competent leadership that is committed to accomplishing the initiative's mission" (PEPNet 2000, 13). The YouthBuild evaluation has also drawn attention to the role that leadership can play. In this case, evaluators concluded that the programs achieving a higher degree of success had "executive leadership sufficiently qualified and devoted to perform all of the core duties required, including both internal management and fund raising" (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 370).

Picasso Café's leadership was troubled by instability over the course of our study period. In the years leading up to the closure of Picasso Café, there was little continuity in staff at all levels. After the departure of the Executive Director in 1998, the Café was subsequently led by three different acting executive directors in quick succession. One staff member we interviewed described this period as "history repeating itself every two months."

By contrast, leadership in BladeRunners has been far more consistent. The BladeRunners model actually requires leadership by three different groups — co-ordinators, staff of the delivery organizations, and staff at the provincial government level. Although the three groups perform different leadership tasks, we believe that they all share the essential leadership characteristics as set out by PEPNet (see Chapter 2), and there has been a high degree of consistency at all levels. In addition, the provincial co-ordinator makes quarterly visits to all the BladeRunners program sites, thus providing knowledgeable first-hand reports to ensure that the programs are adequately funded, and maintaining the integrity of the BladeRunners model.

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The co-location of BladeRunners and local youth-serving agencies

From most youth programs, resources of all types are particularly scarce and, therefore, extremely valuable. Structural arrangements that maximize available resources better position programs to provide their services. For BladeRunners, a close relationship with local youth-serving agencies allows extensive resource and network sharing that contributes to the program's success.

In each BladeRunners location, all day-to-day responsibilities are contracted out to community-based non-profit organizations. These agencies are called "delivery organizations" and are responsible for the payment of wage subsidies to the participating employers, for the administration and reporting of discretionary expenses and for paying co-ordinators' salaries. The delivery organizations are selected by the ministry based on four criteria: location within the region and knowledge of the area to be serviced; extensive experience with the target client group; experience in employment training and construction-related employment; and demonstrated financial administration experience.

In all sites, the BladeRunners program is now housed within the same premises as the delivery organization.[13] There are obvious benefits to these arrangements, such as sharing of overhead, computer networks, and support staff, as well as access to staff training and development activities. For example, co-ordinators in at least two sites have been able to participate in professional development activities, such as taking courses at the Justice Institute of British Columbia. Being engaged in professional activities, as well as participating in social functions, promotes a sense of shared purpose among co-ordinators and delivery agency staff.

A less visible, but no less important, benefit is the emotional support received by the co-ordinators from colleagues in the delivery agency. Because of the intense mentoring component of BladeRunners and the severity of the problems for which co-ordinators provide assistance, the co-ordinators bear a high level of responsibility. Receiving feedback from their peers — either other BladeRunners co-ordinators or agency staff — is helpful in preventing co-ordinator "burn-out." Delivery organizations often share in the case management of BladeRunners, meeting either formally or informally to review the status of clients.

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[13]The BladeRunners "program" refers to the training and job placement content as well as the mentoring that the co-ordinators provide. This can be distinguished from the delivery organization, which is responsible for administrative tasks.

A variety of other benefits are realized from the relationship with delivery organizations. Using established delivery organizations helps boost BladeRunners' profile in the community and improves their connection to the services network. When co-located with agencies, the BladeRunners program benefits from simply being physically present in a familiar location for youth. Co-locating also facilitates covering work assignments for co-ordinators who are away due to illness or vacation. Adequate vacation coverage is an important element in alleviating co-ordinators' work-related stress and is often raised as a concern by the co-ordinators.

Prior to April 2000, the Vancouver program was the only site not co-located with their delivery organization, SkillPlan. In fact, after the contract with SkillPlan was terminated in the summer of 1999, the Vancouver program underwent a period without a delivery organization, during which time they reported directly to the provincial UCDU co-ordinator.[14]

SkillPlan's training mandate and connections with the construction industry had made it appear to be an advantageous choice as a delivery organization. Yet, negotiations around the BladeRunners' second contract with SkillPlan were problematic. SkillPlan's geographic distance and lack of on-site support to the program contributed to a communication breakdown that ultimately led to the termination of the contract. Ending the SkillPlan contract placed an additional administrative burden on co-ordinators who were temporarily responsible for preparing the monthly reports, submitting their own invoices, and preparing the subsidy information sheets that determine payments to employers.

Unproductive relationships, such as that between SkillPlan and BladeRunners can seriously undermine a program's efforts. Some YouthBuild programs have experienced similar frustrations. In Gary, Indiana, political tension between the local YouthBuild and the funding agency as well as the local construction unions prevented YouthBuild from securing a construction site in the second year of their demonstration project. In Cleveland, the inter-agency conflict led to the program's closure. In this case, the host organization — United Labor Agency (ULA) — was not a good fit with YouthBuild. The ULA was not

[14]SkillPlan is a non-profit society formed in 1991 to improve the basic skills of people working in the unionized construction industry in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. It offers courses, tutoring, and literacy and other training. Some of this training is funded on a fee-for-service basis, while further funding is provided through the collective agreements of construction unions.

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sympathetic to the youth-oriented participatory culture of YouthBuild. Other difficulties arose from conflict surrounding the responsibility for hiring and firing (Ferguson and Clay 1996). The experience in Cleveland underscores the importance of finding a good fit for these collaborative partnerships.

Fortunately, the Vancouver BladeRunners program was able to respond to the difficulties with their first delivery agency. In the wake of the cancellation of the SkillPlan contract, the UCDU held a competitive bid process to hire another delivery agency for the Vancouver project. The PRIDE centre took over this role on April 1, 2000. Since 1993, the PRIDE centre has offered employment counselling and related services in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside. BladeRunners and the PRIDE centre share a history of providing services to street youth; their staff have worked alongside each other and their offices are located in the same building, thus allowing the identified benefits of co-location to be realized.

Relationships with the external community

Since both BladeRunners and Picasso Café are primarily work-based training and employment programs, the relationships they form with employers are critical to their ability to help their graduates find jobs. Their efforts to recruit employers could be assisted by an understanding of why employers participate in similar programs.

Unfortunately, past research on this question has not provided a clear picture.[15] According to Bailey, Hughes, and Barr (1998) there are at least three different motivations for hiring interns or apprentices:

- altruism;
- individual self-interest and;
- collective self-interest.

Employers motivated by altruism will hire young people simply to help them out, even if they would be better off without the young people. Employers who act out of individual self-interest hope to benefit from the employment of low-cost or temporary labour. Such employers may also find that their participation in work-based training constitutes an

[15]Most of this literature deals with programs for more advantaged youth; however, it is reasonable to expect the issues to be similar, although one might also expect higher risks and costs associated with the clientele of our study programs.

effective recruitment device, allowing them to "try out" a large number of potential employees.

Employers motivated by collective self-interest might hire trainees in order to increase the pool of employees with the kind of skills needed by their industry. For example, woodworking firms might train young people to increase the number of skilled woodworkers, even if any one firm is not able to keep newly trained workers. Although such actions are undertaken to benefit an entire industry, each individual firm presumably believes that it will benefit eventually.

Many school-to-work advocates are doubtful that altruism is sufficient motivation to sustain a meaningful program. Yet several empirical studies have indicated that altruism plays an important role in the minds of employers. A survey of employers involved with five different work-based training programs revealed that altruistic reasons dominated some of the respondent firms' motivations. Almost a quarter of all participating employers cited "contributing to the community" as their biggest motivation (Bailey, Hughes, and Barr 1998). In *Home Grown Lessons* (Pauly, Kopp, and Haimson 1995) — a study of 16 school-to-work programs — the staff responsible for recruiting employers were asked which factors most influenced employers. The respondents ranked "helping the students and the local community" as most important.

Economic theory would suggest that, instead of philanthropy, individual self-interest could trigger profit-maximizing firms to participate in work-based training programs. If organizations are acting rationally, they will hire young people as interns when the associated marginal benefits of doing so exceed the marginal costs. Yet, it is not clear whether the benefits ever outweigh the costs. A survey from the Youth Entitlement project discovered that many companies felt that young people's contributions would not justify the extra supervision they would require (Bailey 1995). According to Klein (1995, 3), "the incentive for profit-maximizing firms to sponsor training is nearly indistinguishable from charitable giving when students' productivity fails to offset their cost to the firm."

When the collective benefit of the increased availability of a skilled work force is included in the cost-benefit calculations, participation could appear more desirable. In theory, employers might each incur the individual costs of participating in a youth training program, so that they may all enjoy the collective benefits of a skilled workforce. A poll, undertaken in 1991, of corporations familiar with work-based youth training programs found that 48 percent of those polled believed that

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their participation could lead to the production of a skilled workforce (Osterman 1995).

Yet, it is not certain that collective benefits are sufficient to sustain employer participation. Under the premise of strictly rational behaviour, collective action is likely to fail because of "free rider" problems. When individuals acting in good faith discover that others are reaping benefits without covering their share of the costs, the system might fall apart. Collective action requires monitoring and sanctioning systems. While most collectivities do not have the capacity to create and maintain such systems, unionized construction apprenticeships do (Bailey, Hughes, and Barr 1998). Because of its connection to unions, BladeRunners may be ideally situated to allow employers to take advantage of these collective benefits.

Our interviews with employers suggest that there are net benefits that lead employers to hire participants in our study programs. The employers of Picasso Café graduates we spoke to were supportive of the program and were positive about their experiences. This is evidenced by the fact that many have taken more than one student. In one case, an employer compared a Picasso Café graduate favourably with graduates of Vancouver Community College. As predicted by the literature, some employers felt that, by hiring graduates, they were contributing to the program and more broadly to society. So, while these employers are in part motivated by philanthropy, there also appears to be an expectation that program graduates perform at the same level as their peers who are not from Picasso Café.

For BladeRunners, its reputation appears to motivate employers to hire its trainees. The program is seen as reliable and the co-ordinators' on-site involvement may lower the additional supervision costs, making it more attractive to hire BladeRunners participants. As one employer explained:

> *You know that when you hire a BladeRunner, you're going to get someone who has some training, some screening, and you're going to be well taken care of by the co-ordinator. Any problems, you call him.*

Employers in Vancouver, Victoria, and Kelowna, all of whom had hired from other employment programs, said they were most satisfied with their BladeRunners experience.

While both programs appear to offer benefits to employers, they still rely on their networks to attract and recruit employers. Picasso Café draws upon its staff's connections, and those of its board of directors, to

develop contacts with potential employers. BladeRunners staff, most of whom have been directly involved in the construction industry, make use of their union contacts. Co-ordinators keep in touch with industry contacts by getting on union mailing lists and subscribing to trade journals. New connections are fostered by local politicians and by letters of support from contractors previously involved in BladeRunners.

In some cases, the community connections are forged by the tenacity of particular individuals. One example is the work one BladeRunners co-ordinator did with the Chemainus First Nation (CFN) reserve. When the program was first advertised on the reserve, there was little response. The co-ordinator subsequently met with local youth and band staff in order to reach out to potential participants, who were hesitant to become involved in an off-reserve program. The difficulty in attracting participants from the CFN reserve was compounded by the dearth of employment opportunities there. A community social worker on the reserve explained that the CFN reserve is very traditional; its only industry is a gas station. Consequently, there were few opportunities for job placements.

Fortunately, a local contractor, who was committed to offering employment to First Nations youth, was brought into the process. At the same time, the community identified the need for a new day-care centre and the local contractor hired youth from the reserve to work on the construction of the centre. The BladeRunners co-ordinator hoped that Chemainus youth might be ready to work on a project off-reserve after participating in this on-reserve project.

Another way in which the co-ordinator generated interest from First Nations youth was to draw on community ties and arrange to have then-premier Glen Clark and the chief of the CFN attend the indenturing ceremony of two young First Nations men. Profiles in the CFN newspaper also helped attract applicants to the program. At the time of the last field visits, five CFN youth were working as BladeRunners.

Often the strength of the connections helped in employer retention. An employer in Victoria explained how he was persuaded to continue participating after two negative experiences with BladeRunners. Members of his union encouraged him to try one more BladeRunner. The co-ordinator's persistence and own reputation as a respected tradesperson eventually succeeded in placing another BladeRunner. This participant worked well on the site and was retained during a subsequent period of layoffs.

Placing itself within the tight network of unionized construction professionals has brought many benefits to the BladeRunners program. Even so, the relationship between the program and the unions also has the potential to create problems if the program becomes too dependent on that relationship. These dependencies can tax a program's resources if too much energy must be devoted to maintaining these relationships.

On two occasions, BladeRunners' relationship with the unions was tested and considerable effort was required to maintain good relations. The first incident came when the contract with BladeRunners' original delivery organization, SkillPlan, was not renewed. This organization had strong union ties, including union representation on its board. The second came following the departure of a staff member who had forged and maintained the BladeRunners' relationship with several of the larger unions in Vancouver. If either of these events had created a serious rift between the union network and BladeRunners, there might have been negative repercussions for job placements. To prevent this, co-ordinators from local offices as well as the provincial co-ordinator made frequent contacts with the unions during both of these times of transition to ensure their continued support for the program.

Unions have, on occasion, tried to exert their influence by asking BladeRunners not to place participants on particular non-union sites or with "rat" unions. Because non-union construction sites provide significant opportunities for job placements, BladeRunners cannot afford to ignore them. Indeed, in the interior of the province, placements on non-union sites are the norm. Co-ordinators are well aware of the delicate balance that must be struck between finding adequate placements and maintaining their relationships with unions.

Overall, it does not appear that the relationship between BladeRunners and the unions has had any negative impacts. Nonetheless, the possibility of such impacts remains. For example, the risk exists that BladeRunners could become involuntarily embroiled in a major labour dispute.

Because of the nature of our two study programs, avoiding dependency on external agents (such as employers) is nearly impossible. Another example of such necessary dependency is the relationship between the programs and the provincial government.

Both study programs rely heavily on government funding. Indeed, BladeRunners is entirely funded by the provincial government and is managed by the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers. An early BladeRunners incarnation was independent of the government and was led by a prominent social activist and other

Downtown Eastside community leaders. At that time, it was supported by ad hoc funding from the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour and the Ministry of Employment and Investment. Then, from 1995 to 1997, it was funded by the BC 21 Fund. In the 1997–1998 fiscal year, support came from the Ministry of Youth; the program currently receives funds from Youth Options BC, which is part of the Ministry of Youth.

One difficulty with this relationship is the uncertainty of the arrangement — annual submissions must be made to Treasury Board, with no guarantee that funding will be renewed in whole or in part. Program staff frequently cited this problem as the most significant threat to the continued operation of the program.[16]

At the time we were conducting our research, Picasso Café also needed to petition annually for both its federal and provincial funding.[17] The funding instability at Picasso Café was not limited to government funds. For Picasso Café, government funding composes only a portion of its operating budget. The remaining funding — derived from restaurant receipts and fund raising — is also uncertain. Fluctuations in the business cycle, for example, affect the level of resources secured through non-government sources.

It is not clear how deeply BladeRunners has been affected by unstable funding. Their proposal to expand to other sites in fiscal year 2000–2001 was not approved, even though efforts to identify opportunities with contractors and unions had already commenced. This rejection seemed to have had a negative impact on staff morale. Yet, this is relatively minor in comparison to the profound effect that funding instability has had at Picasso Café.

Funding difficulties have had two major impacts at Picasso Café. First, financial instability limited the ability of administrators to hire staff on a long-term or full-time basis. This may have resulted in feelings of insecurity among staff and generated concerns among them about their future at the Café. As we have mentioned previously, part-time staff and those with short tenures are restricted in their ability to form strong bonds with students. Our research leads us to suggest that this has contributed to staff dissatisfaction and turnover.

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[16]Although our researchers made it clear that our role was as objective evaluators, program staff may have felt that we would act as advocates. Consequently, some responses may have been geared toward lobbying for more resources.

[17]In the fall of 1999, the provincial Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security conditionally offered to reinstate Picasso Café's funding as a line item in its budget, which would secure two years of funding.

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Second, and more fundamentally, Picasso Café's struggle with funding has threatened its ability to deliver services. On several occasions in 1998, operating hours were restricted to reduce costs, which reduced the training hours available to students. The most visible and acute effect of funding instability, however, was the Café's closure in 1999, discussed in the previous section.

The complexity of various accountability relationships makes it difficult to identify the root of funding instability. Do these programs receive unstable funding because they cannot demonstrate their success? Or perhaps, is it that they cannot demonstrate their success because they only receive unstable funding? Our study programs are accountable to government funders who, in turn, are responsible to the public through parliaments and legislatures. Governments are also open to criticism from auditor generals and comptrollers.

Under these arrangements, stable funding is not always feasible, particularly when programs are not able to provide data, including outcome measures, that can justify the government's expenditures. Governments at all levels have re-emphasized and reformed their public accountability frameworks. Much of this has required different reporting standards and performance measures, with a particular emphasis on outcomes-based indicators. Under the federal reform called the *Improved Reporting to Parliament Project*, departments are required to table a Plans and Priorities report followed by a Departmental Performance report. Both of these reports require the identification and communication of targets, service standards, and performance indicators.

Provincially, the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers reports specifically on BladeRunners through its annual Performance Plan. In 2000–2001, the Ministry expects BladeRunners to contribute to the Ministry's goals of developing self-reliant communities, communities with resilient and diversified economies, and a community focus in government. The BladeRunners program will be expected, for each objective area, to provide data for outcome measures.

Youth programs are not always positioned to respond to these changes in government accountability regimes. For example, it is not unusual for many youth programs to have difficulty providing financial data. YouthBuild's evaluators found that "Data on the revenues and expenses

were incomplete and the quality of available data was questionable" (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 379).[18]

We asked both of our study programs for data concerning the number of students who were screened, the number that were accepted into the program, the number that completed the program, and the number that dropped out. At the time of our field research, neither Picasso Café nor BladeRunners had the capacity to track participants though the program and beyond completion in order to calculate measures of program usage such as job placement and job retention. However, in the fall of 1999, both programs began the process of restructuring their statistical reporting in order to be able to generate these reports accurately and rapidly. In both cases, these restructuring plans were a result, at least in part, of government mandates. In the case of Picasso Café, one of Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security's criteria for renewing funding for the Café as a budget line item was that the program prepare accountability reports including the program usage measures. For BladeRunners, the ability to calculate accountability measures was identified as a priority for preparing a Treasury Board proposal for program expansion; accordingly, they restructured their data reporting practices.

Despite the necessity of producing useful data, few incentives to develop evaluative capacity exist. In resource-poor organizations, data collection is unlikely to be a priority. The funding that flows to these organizations tends to be earmarked for specific activities, leaving data collection an under-funded activity. For example, YouthBuild legislation does not allow the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to allocate funds for data collection and analysis (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 406). On the other hand, JTPA-funded programs historically received incentive funding for reaching and exceeding rigid performance standards. Yet there are few other examples of support for evaluation. Indeed, while external evaluators often criticize the data management of youth programs, Dorothy Stoneman (the founder of Youth Build) notes that external evaluations and demonstrations are rarely structured or mandated to leave organizations with any internal evaluative capacity (Ferguson and Clay 1996, 402).

Collecting data for outcome measurement and evaluation can be risky for vulnerable programs. In the context of 1990s fiscal restraint and expenditure reductions at all levels of government, youth programs may

[18]It is important to note that this evaluation was undertaken several years ago and does not necessarily reflect YouthBuild's current data management.

have had good reason to be wary of the evaluation process. As noted in Chapter 2, following the release of the JTPA evaluation, funding was cut by 79 percent. The United States has a tradition of using evaluation to support or oppose programs. U.S. congressional committees often sponsor evaluations to challenge the executive. The impact of evaluation on the Canadian policy process is not as clear. Evaluation in Canada which, some have argued, reached its pinnacle in the 1970s, has focussed more on management tools (Pal 1997). However, more recently, the evaluative capacity in government has been heightened by the politics of fiscal restraint. The federal Program Review, which required all federal government programs to be assessed, was part of this trend.

Notwithstanding the risks, it is still important to maintain good data collection and participate in rigorous evaluations. Although generating data and outcomes does not provide a guarantee that funding can be secured, it does increase the likelihood that it will. The experiences of Picasso Café demonstrate both the risk and reward of evaluation. The 1997 Program Review of Picasso Café concluded that the program had "failed to meet the performance expectations as specified in the current contract," and recommended that the funding not be renewed. In media statements, the Ministry cited unfavourable cost comparisons as a factor contributing to the withdrawal of funding. The report was also critical of the program's data collection procedures.

Participation, albeit involuntary, in the 1997 evaluation was not positive for Picasso Café. After that experience, one might have expected Picasso Café to withdraw altogether from the evaluative process. In the end, however, it was participation in another audit in 1999 that resulted in renewed funding. This time the review concluded that the Board had the capacity to run the program, and that the program was delivering a valuable service in the community. In this example, we observe a direct connection between the evaluation results and government decisions. Given this evidence, there is an imperative for the programs to develop their evaluative capacity if they want to demonstrate their success.

Evaluation is one instrumental manifestation of the kinds of relationships organizations form with their external environment. Forging relationships beyond their boundaries creates the risk of dependency and vulnerability. These external ties also provide links to new resources and maximize the benefits of existing resources. It appears that organizations must assume these risks in order to persevere and grow. For both BladeRunners and Picasso Café, the relationships have, to date, been more beneficial than not.

Final Thoughts

In this study, we tried to understand whether two work-based employment programs — BladeRunners and Picasso Café — were successful in helping troubled youth change their lives. The fundamental problem in assessing youth programs is that success ought to be defined over the long-term, over the life of the individuals involved, but this is often not possible. For our evaluation, and for the vast majority of policy research in this area, the time during which participants are observed is far too short to assess their ultimate progress. This problem applies to both qualitative and quantitative evaluations. Nonetheless, differences in methods and measures between these two techniques contribute to the conflicting evidence in previous literature.

Quantitative and qualitative analysts have employed different measures of success when analyzing youth programs, even though the different choices are not necessarily a function of the methods used. Quantitative analysts have focussed primarily on *participants*, looking at measures such as program completion or post-program employment rates; these analyses indicate that youth programs have relatively small impacts on participant outcomes during the observation period. Qualitative methodologies have focussed more on *programs* and adopted much broader definitions of success (for both participants and programs). The qualitative analysts seem more sensitive to what youth program staff believe is the "two-steps-forward, one-step-back" nature of the path that "street youth" travel as they try to find a place in mainstream society.

It seems appropriate to focus on participants but it may be unrealistic to expect that participant success can be measured during the time frame available to evaluators. Broader measures of success (including the assessment of program strength) may be more realistic but beg the question of whether programs that seem substantively sound and administratively strong actually help participants achieve the desired outcomes.

When we began our study of BladeRunners and Picasso Café, we decided that a qualitative method — a case study— was the most appropriate, given the number of individuals we would observe and the relatively short time period during which we would be studying the programs. The case study method would allow us an opportunity to describe who the participants were and how the programs worked. Careful observations and conversations with participants, program staff, and employers would

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help us form some conclusions about what contributes to or detracts from program operations. With this method, however, we knew we could not come to know the programs' long-term impact on participants.

We believe that BladeRunners provides an important second chance for some carefully selected disadvantaged young people. From BladeRunners participants and staff, we heard that co-ordinators formed one-on-one, trusting, and meaningful relationships with the participants. These relationships were as valuable to the staff as they were to the young people. As suggested by the previous literature, this intensive form of mentoring seemed to be the crucial element of the program. To the very limited extent that we could observe participant outcomes, it seemed that many BladeRunners had started down the path to steady employment and earnings.

While we were observing Picasso Café, it underwent a number of destabilizing changes. Despite the promising characteristics that led us to choose to study it, we found that — at least during the period we studied it — Picasso Café experienced far more staff turn over than BladeRunners and offered far less intensive mentoring. Our ability to study the success of Picasso Café participants was more limited than it was in BladeRunners; little data existed and our access to it was constrained by the administrative turmoil at the Café during our observation period. Since we are not certain how it might operate under "normal" or "ideal" circumstances — Picasso Café is not now what it was when we studied it — these observations about the Café can only be tentative.

Ultimately, we want to know whether a program can have a lasting and positive effect on the lives of young people. This study has allowed us to increase our knowledge about how employment programs for street youth operate. We also learned more about the youth themselves, and what attracts them to particular programs. Nonetheless, we still understand comparatively little about the impact of these programs on youth. Although policy-makers and researchers may be some distance from a definitive answer to the question of what works for street youth, evaluating programs like BladeRunners and Picasso Café is a necessary part of the effort to reach that final answer.

Appendix: Methodology and Data Sources for the Case Study

The case study approach

Based on our knowledge of youth employment programs, the difficulty of defining success, the scale of the potential study programs, and the limited resources available to conduct this study, we selected the case study approach as the most appropriate research technique for this project. The key reason for selecting this approach was the small number of individuals that we thought would be involved in the programs during the study period. We knew that no statistically valid results could be obtained from the quantitative analysis of such a small number of participants. With the case study method, we expected that we would be able to explore the programs' characteristics and gain a better understanding of those characteristics that might be associated with success.

Case studies are one of many techniques employed in social science research, each of which possesses strengths and weaknesses depending on the nature of the research. Robert Yin (1994, 1) asserts that case studies are widely considered to be the preferred strategy when many "how" and "why" questions are being asked. This is particularly true in a setting where the researcher has access to the participants but no control over their behaviour.

The fundamental process at all stages of qualitative research is to seek evidence that challenges theories and conclusions, particularly when these propositions may have been constructed through anecdotal evidence. It is, therefore, critical to pay attention to data that do not confirm one's preconceptions, to consider alternative explanations and understandings, and for team members to work independently to summarize their own field research and then challenge each other and work together in an iterative process of data collection and analysis.

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The emergent technique

While our evaluation of BladeRunners and Picasso Café employs the case study approach, it also falls within a subset of qualitative techniques called the "emergent technique." With this technique, researchers do not seek to either prove or disprove *a priori* theories. Instead, researchers collect as much data as possible, while allowing themes to emerge from the data (Kalafat and Illback 1998). Once these themes have been identified, the data is re-examined and new data is collected to develop a more focussed exploration of the themes. In our case study, we also added secondary data from the literature to help explain or confirm some of the themes that we observed.

Because the emergent technique casts a wide theoretical net, having sufficient data to explore any potential themes is critical. Data collection is facilitated by a sample selection process, which Patton (1990) calls purposeful sampling. This selection process differs greatly from probability sampling, which is used in quantitative analysis to select observations so that they are random and thus representative. In contrast, purposeful sampling selects cases that are expected to be rich in data. Accordingly, BladeRunners and Picasso Café were selected for our case study because they were widely recognized programs with excellent reputations. Additionally, these programs appeared to possess many of the characteristics that the literature has associated with success. Consequently, it was our expectation that, with these two programs, we could uncover sufficient data.

Information collection and analysis

Once the programs for study were selected, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) began to make connections with program staff at both BladeRunners and Picasso Café. In this process we identified all stakeholders, established data requirements, and identified the best means for collecting the information.

A number of information-gathering techniques and sources were utilized in this research, including

- focus groups and interviews with participants and program drop-outs;
- observation of intake interviews;
- observation of meetings and training sessions;

- observation of on-the-job activities of program participants;
- individual interviews with program staff, employers, and community supports; and
- program records and files.

Data analysis was based on memos produced following interviews, focus groups, or other site observations. Once field research was finished, a review of all memos and transcripts was undertaken.

Focus groups

In the summer of 1998, SRDC conducted baseline focus groups with 28 young people who had recently enrolled in Picasso Café or BladeRunners in Vancouver. SRDC interviewed a group of enrolees at the Victoria BladeRunners site. In all cases, the progress of these young people was monitored from the time we first met them until the end of December 1999. The length of the follow-up period, therefore, varied from 16 months in the case of the 1998 summer intakes, to eight months for the Victoria BladeRunners group.

At follow-up, focus groups were replaced by interviews with those who had participated in the initial focus groups. At that point, some were still enrolled in the programs while others had left the programs.

Intake interviews

We were able to observe seven BladeRunners intake interviews. These were interviews that determined whether program applicants were to be admitted into BladeRunners, and are a crucial component of program operations. There is no equivalent interview process for Picasso Café participants.

Observation of meetings and training sessions

At BladeRunners, we observed four of the weekly group meetings held in the period between intake and work placement. We also attended one of the five days of classroom health and safety training with BladeRunners. We were unable to arrange a suitable time to observe weekly meetings at Picasso Café due to the fact that the program was in a state of flux during much of the study period.

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Observation of on-the-job activities of program participants

On the four occasions when we visited Picasso Café, we observed Picasso Café students being trained at the various training "stations." We also visited three construction sites where BladeRunners were working.

In-depth interviews with staff, employers, and other key informants

An important source of information was a set of detailed interviews — with pre-designed interview protocols — of individuals who were involved with or knowledgeable about the study programs. In all, we interviewed over 60 individuals including current and former program staff, current and former participants, employers of program participants, government officials who had dealt with the programs, and staff from other institutions that had dealings with the study programs.

Program records and files

Both study programs compile a limited amount of administrative data on program participants, program funding, and program operations. Most of these data are collected for administrative reasons and are not designed for research purposes. For BladeRunners, we had full access to program files; our access to similar information at Picasso Café was much more limited.[1] We used what information we had to inform our analysis of the programs.

Measures to assess validity

The case study method is sometimes accused of lacking rigour. In pursuit of the most rigorous case study research possible, SRDC employed a number of measures, as proposed by Maxwell (1996), to assess the validity of the data.

Searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases

To avoid the bias that might be created by interviewing only those who were likely to view the programs positively — program staff, participants, and funders — we tried, with varying degrees of success, to interview

[1]SRDC staff did not have direct access to Picasso Café program files. Concerns over the confidentiality of participant files, combined with sensitivity surrounding the restaurant closure, led to only limited, second-hand access to information from program files.

program drop-outs and key informants (staff and participant employers) who might *not* support the program.

Collecting information from a variety of individuals using a variety of methods

As noted above, a wide range of techniques was used to collect information from a wide range of individuals who had knowledge of the programs. These included in-depth interviews, casual conversations, focus groups, site visits, and direct observation. In all cases — other than casual conversations — protocols were created in advance of the data collection.

Detailed descriptive note taking about specific, concrete events

Fastidious note taking, transcription of notes, and immediate summarizing assured that little information was lost along the way. The two field researchers prepared protocols and summarized notes in an iterative process of checking themes with one another, with participants and co-ordinators, and subsequently filling in data gaps.

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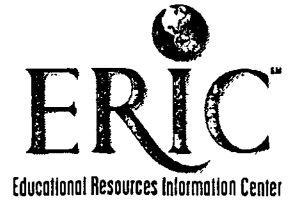

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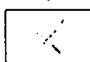 X		
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