

Carleton Centre for
Community Innovation
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Evaluating the social impact of the Causeway Work Centre's social enterprises

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Causeway Work Centre at a glance:

The Causeway Work Centre is a community economic development organization in Ottawa that provides a range of employment, educational programs and other supports to persons with mental health issues, disabilities, and those who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. Supporting Causeway's mission are three social enterprises which operate under the umbrella of the organization: Kracker's Katering, Good Nature Grounds Keeping and Cycle Salvation. All three organizations employ and train marginalized members of the community for their financial and social well-being.

Purpose of Report:

This evaluation seeks to determine the added social impact of social enterprise employment in employees' lives and will give a detailed view on the effect of social enterprise employment on employee work history, housing, overall income, reliance on social assistance, financial health, self esteem and social life.

Findings from the 2010 survey of Causeway employees highlight the positive influence that employment has on the financial and social life of these individuals. The positive effect of Causeway social enterprise employment manifests itself in four key areas: the diversity of employees, the nature of employment, financial benefit and improvements in personal and social lives for employees.

Benefit: Diversity of Employees

Many different types of individuals work within Causeway Social Enterprises. There is a wide range in age among employees – some workers are as young as 17, and others as old as 65, with an average age of 39 for all employees. There is a variety of educational backgrounds among employees as well, Causeway's work force includes employees who have not finished high school, have completed high school and some that have attended college and university. There is also a significant range in terms of amount of time worked with Causeway among employees. One third of employees have started work in the past 6 months, while the majority have been employed for several years – experienced employees can teach new employees and a positive organizational culture can remain intact. Because there is a wide assortment of employees in terms of age, education and experience, employees are benefitting from exposure to multiple support groups who have experienced and are dealing with the issues that they face.

Benefit: Nature of Employment

The flexible nature of employment and fair wages earned by employees is extremely helpful. Employees are given the opportunity to work a wide range of hours – on average 12 hours per week and receive an hourly wage of \$10.50/hour (above minimum wage). In most cases, employment is a source of supplementary income, while for 25% of employees, work in Causeway's social enterprises is a primary source of income. Most importantly, employees benefit from an understanding work place that accommodates the unique circumstances and needs of the population that it employs.

Benefit: Financial Independence

Employment through causeway has had a dramatic impact on the financial lives of employees. The majority of employees surveyed report an improved financial situation, a regular source of income and increases in disposable income. Employment provides increased opportunity for financial and personal independence.

Benefit: Improved Personal and Social Lives

On a personal and social level, employment has had a dramatic effect. 60% of employees report increased levels of self-esteem and significant proportions report increases in overall self-worth and self-confidence. In addition, the majority of employees report increases in social activity, increased amounts of friendships and significant overall development of employment skills. Isolation and depression have negative impacts on health, but Causeway employment has created improved perceptions of self-worth and increased social activity that are directly tied to happiness and good health. Employment is creating a positive attitude among employees which is translated in to improved overall well-being.

Implications

- 1) A diverse work environment contributes to positive social outcomes for employees.
- 2) The flexible and accommodating nature of employment empowers employees.
- 3) Employment has resulted in improved financial outcomes for employees.
- 4) Employment has resulted in improved friendships, social activity, extra-curricular involvement and improved health for employees and has dramatically improved self-esteem, confidence and self-worth among employees. Friendships, self-worth and confidence are non-monetary, yet extremely important benefits of Causeway's social enterprises
- 5) Employment through Causeway adds stability to employees' lives and can prevent a range of other social problems that often stem from isolation, lack of confidence and doubt of self-worth.

INTRODUCTION

The Causeway Work Centre is a community economic development organization in Ottawa that provides a range of employment, educational programs and other supports to persons with mental health issues, disabilities, and those who are homeless or at risk of becoming so. Supporting Causeway's mission are three social enterprises which operate under the umbrella of the organization: Kracker's Katering, Good Nature Grounds Keeping and Cycle Salvation.

All three organizations employ and train marginalized members of the community for their financial and social well-being. Kracker's Katering is a small catering business that serves quality food to the surrounding community while supporting staff in their employment goals. Good Nature Grounds Keepings is a grounds keeping and property maintenance company. Cycle Salvation is an organization that provides training and employment and training in the field of bike mechanics. The social enterprise refurbishes donated bicycles for resale and has an environmental mission of diverting old bikes from scrap and landfill sites. All of these enterprises provide training, human interaction and a safe social setting which creates a further social and non-monetized stream of benefits.

This evaluation goes beyond a typical financial benefits assessment through the assumption that there are wider benefits beyond income for employees. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the scope of the financial and social benefits that these social enterprises provide to employees. This evaluation will provide an independent measure of the effectiveness of the three social enterprises to provide Causeway and the wider community a detailed snapshot of its impact to provide increased accountability to government, donors and the public in the future.

This evaluation seeks to determine the added social impact of social enterprise employment in employees' lives and will give a detailed view on the effect of social enterprise employment on employee work history, housing, overall income, reliance on social assistance, financial health, self esteem and social life.

METHODOLOGY

24 interviews with employees of the three Causeway work centre social enterprises were performed for this study.

Each interview was conducted in person through the use of a standardized survey. In many cases, participants felt more comfortable filling out the survey on their own because of the personal nature of the questions involved. Each interview involved qualitative and quantitative questions relating to employee finances, employment and social well-being both past and present.

All interviews were performed between August and October 2010. Employee participation in the study was voluntary and not all employees of the three social enterprises participated. All data gained from employees has been aggregated to demonstrate the overall social impact of the Causeway work centre's social businesses.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Employee Characteristics

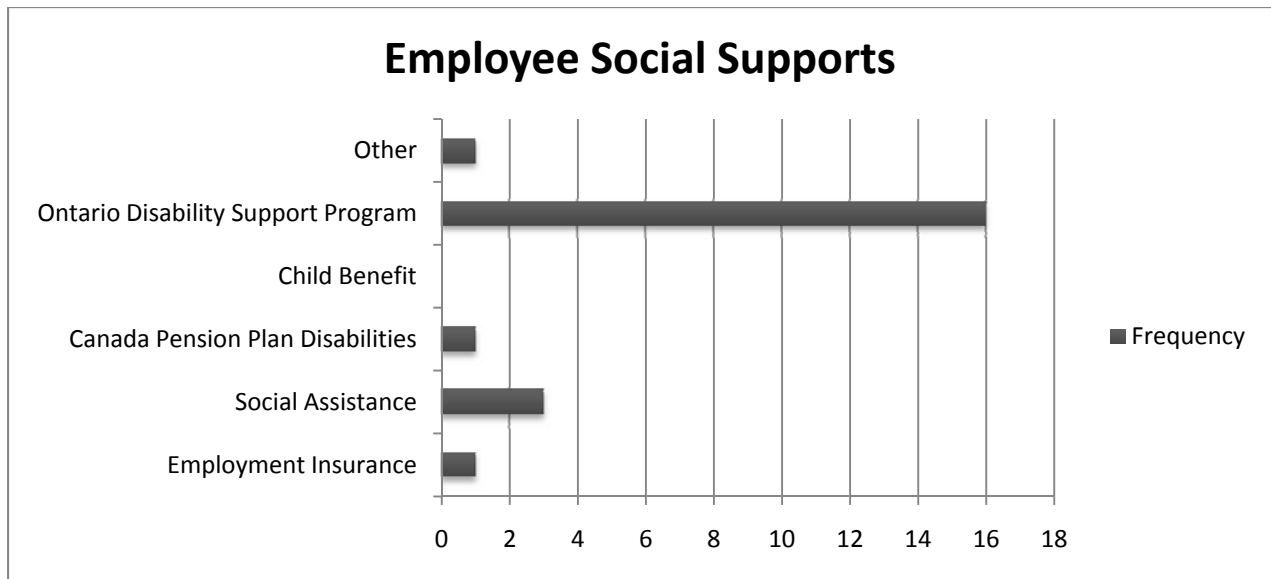
Demographics

There were 4 females and 20 males in the survey, 14% of survey participants were female, most participants were male (86%). The average age of employees is 39, but there is a wide range within this average. The youngest employee is 17, while the oldest employee is 65.

Social Supports

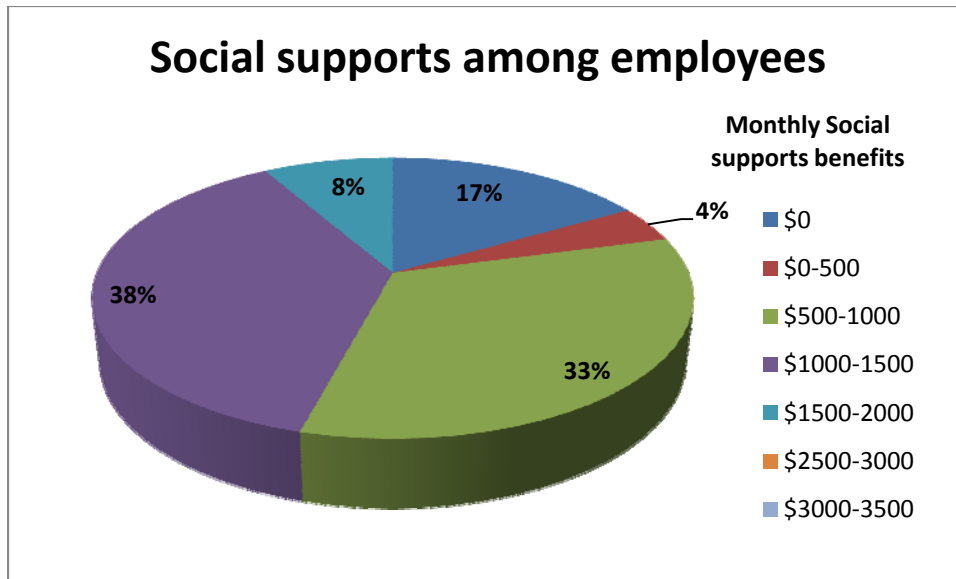
Social supports play an important role for most of the employees of the social enterprises. 23 of 24 survey participants are on some form of social support, with the majority currently receiving benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Figure 1 demonstrates the source and distribution of employee social assistance.

Figure 1 - Employee Social Supports



For 25% of employees, work through Causeway’s social enterprises represents their primary source of income. For 75% of employees, wages are a source of supplementary income. The average amount of social service benefits per employee is \$875 per month. Figure 2 shows that the largest proportion (38%) of employees receive between \$1000 and \$1500 in supports per month, while a much smaller proportion (17%) receive no benefits at all.

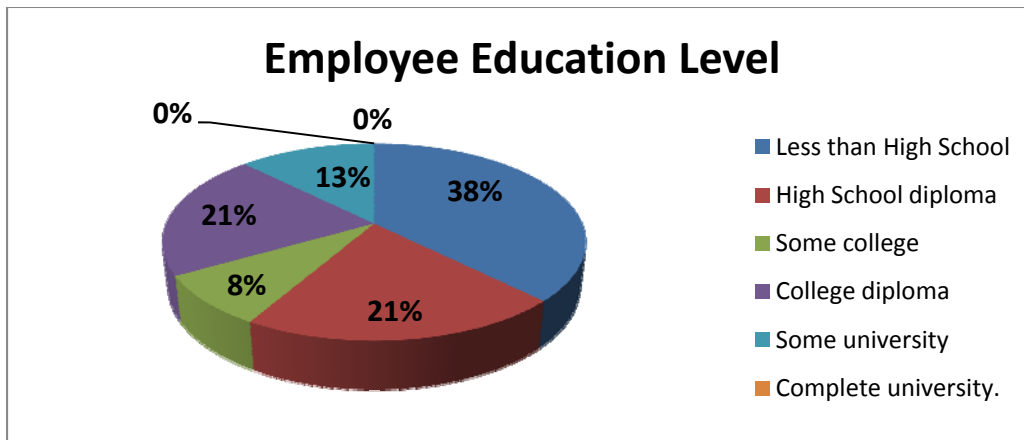
Figure 2 - level of social supports by proportion of employees



Education

The education level of employees is varied. As figure 3 shows, 37% of employees have not completed high school, 21% have a high school diploma, and 42% have attended university or college or received a college diploma.

Figure 3 - Employee education level



Length of employment

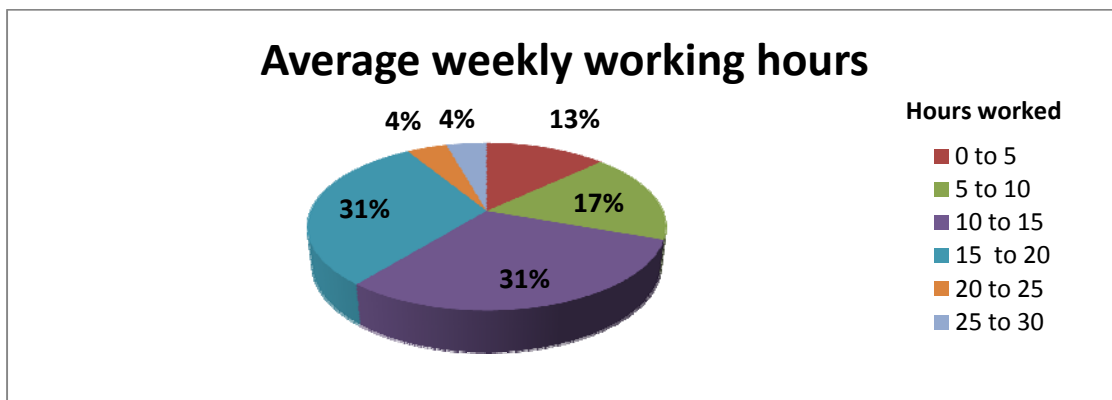
The average length of employment in the social enterprises is 1 year, 9 months with 13% of employees having worked for a causeway social business for over 3 years (some as long as 5 years) and 29% having started work in the past 6 months. The average employment history of employees is 6 years, with 42% of clients having worked less than 3 years in total and 50% of clients having worked over 5 years.

Overall, Causeway social enterprises are employing a diverse range of people, those both new to and experienced in the work force, and those with varying levels of education. The fact that many different types of individuals (in terms of age, experience and education) work within these enterprises means that all employees likely benefit from exposure to multiple peer groups and experience positive social effects from their interaction with others.

Nature of Employment

The amount of work for employees is varied - some workers work more, while others work less. As shown in figure 4, the majority of workers work between 5 and 15 hours per week, while a slightly smaller proportion either work longer work weeks (15-30 hours per week) or less than 5 hours per week.

Figure 4 - employee working hours



The average number of hours worked per week by employees is 12.4. The range of working hours available is advantageous for employees because flexible employee accommodation tailors to their special needs.

The average wage for employees is \$10.50/hour with some clients making as much as \$14/hour and a minimum of \$10.25/hour. The resulting average wage per week of Causeway social enterprise employees is \$130.

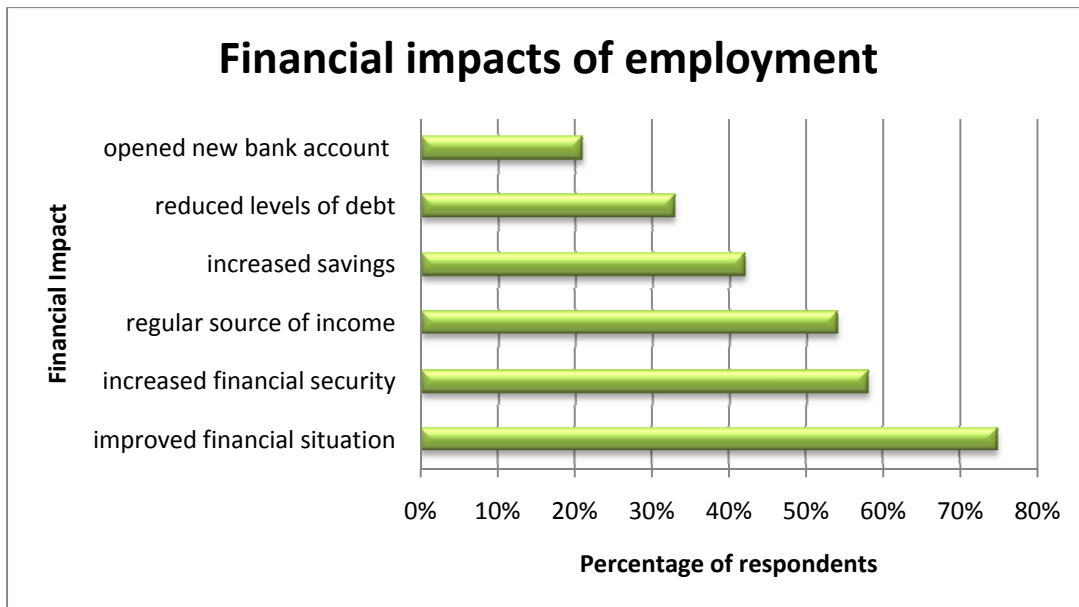
Aside from increased income, increased development of employment skills has been reported by 75% of respondents. Social skills development reported by many clients included improved: communication, organizational skills, people skills, time management, work ethic, motivation, confidence and improved ability to work as part of a team. Other specific and transferable skills cited by employees included: cooking, baking, serving, cleaning, landscaping, bike mechanics, serving and personnel management. Employees are gaining social and practical skills that make them more productive and employable in the future.

Causeway social enterprises tailor to the specific part-time employment needs of its workers, which compliment disabilities payments to help improve the economic status of the marginalized populations employed.

Financial Impacts

Aside from the wages and income received by employees, there are a wider set of financial impacts that have an effect on employee well-being. Such impacts include increased access to the financial system, reduced levels of debt, increased savings, a regular source of income, financial security and an overall improved financial situation. As figure 5 highlights, certain impacts are more acute than others for employees:

Figure 2 - financial impacts on employees



75% of all employees report an overall improved financial situation as a result of their job, among this group there was an average increase in earnings of \$338 per month prior to employment. The overall average increase in earnings for all those employed by Causeway social enterprises was \$239 per month.

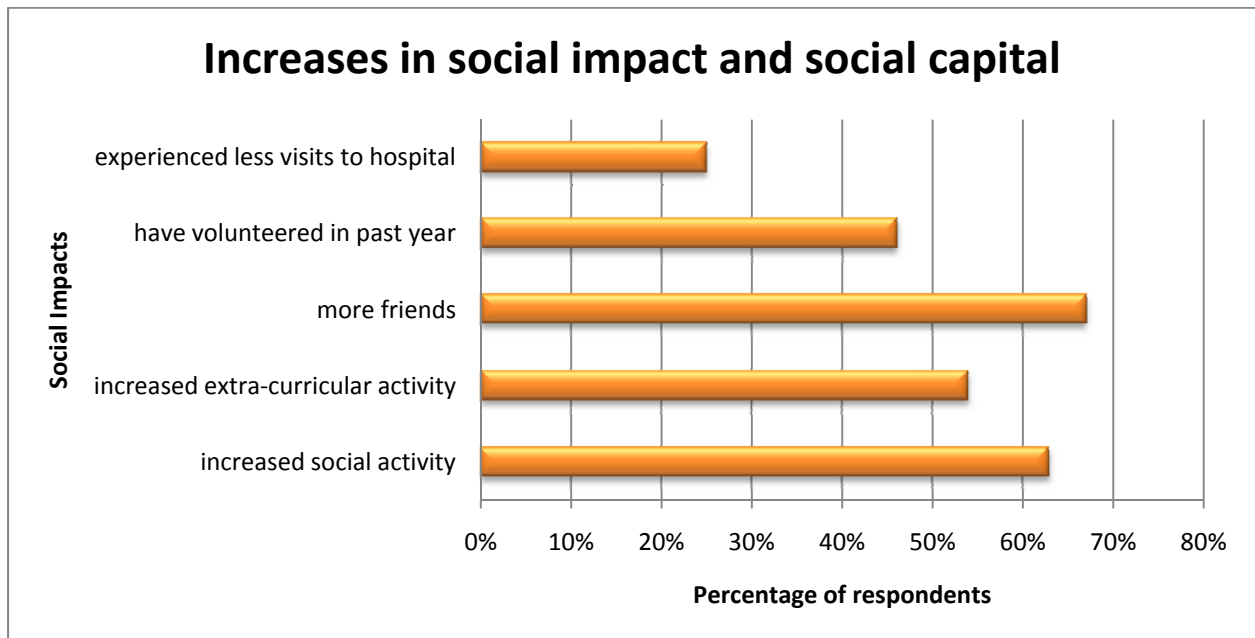
Beyond increases in income, there were further financial impacts on savings and debt. 42% of employees reported an increase in savings, while 54% did not; and 33% of employees reported reduced levels of debt, while 63% did not.

Overall, employment has increased employees' financial security. 58% of employees feel their job has provided a regular source of income that they did not have before and 54% of employees report an increase in disposable income. In addition, 21% of employees reported opening up a new bank account; being linked in to the mainstream financial system is instrumental in ensuring financial wellbeing.

Social Impacts

A core benefit of Causeway's social enterprises is their ability to provide many positive social impacts to employees. Increases in extra-curricular activity, increased social activity, more friendship, increased volunteerism and fewer visits to hospital are among the social impacts created for employees by Causeway. Figure 6 demonstrates the improvements in social capital and social involvement among employees.

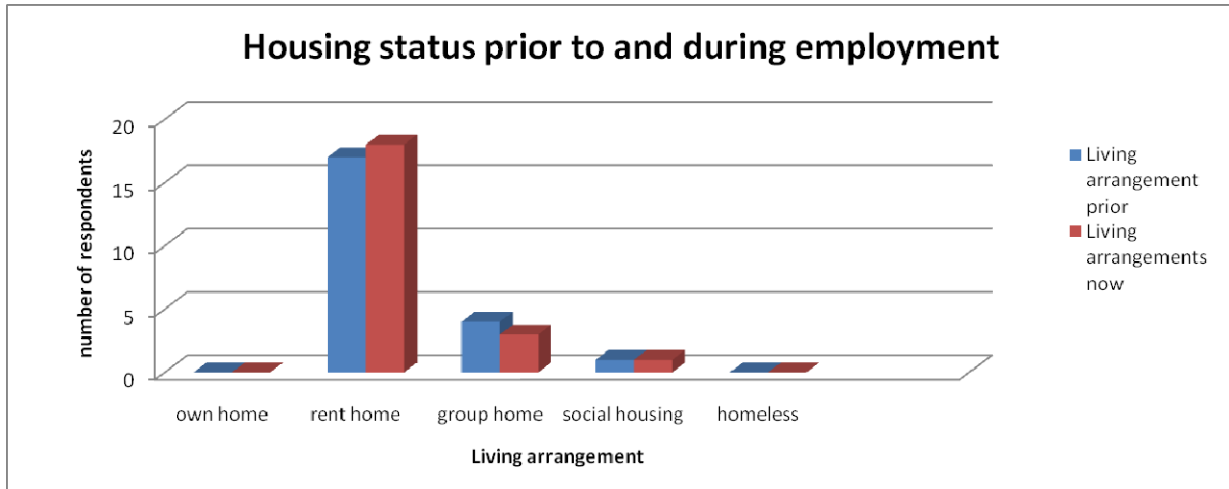
Figure 3 - social and social capital impacts



63% of respondents reported an increase in social activity, 54% report an increase in extra-curricular activity, 67% report having more friends and 46% reported volunteering. Increases in social activity and increased social capital are linked to higher levels of overall happiness. Happier people tend to be more productive and healthier.

In contrast to many of the positive social outcomes for employees, employment has had little impact on housing status/living arrangements for employees. As figure 7 shows, employment has had very limited effect on improving employee living standards. Only one employee was able to move out of a group home and in to rental housing as a result of employment.

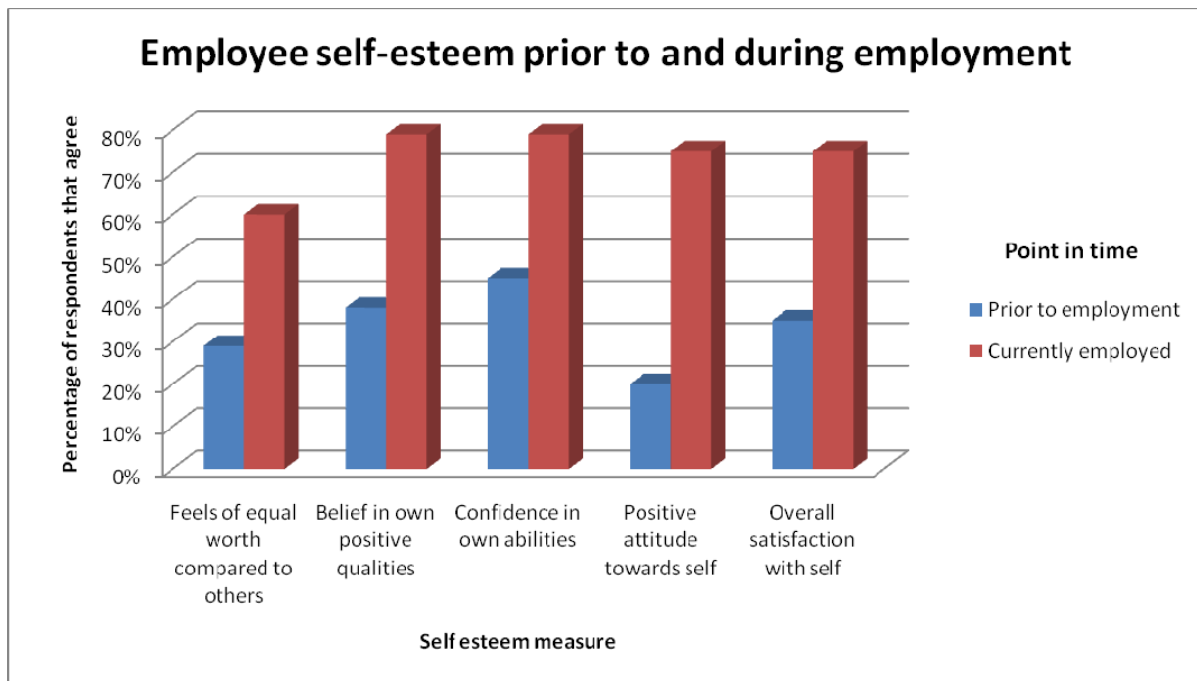
Figure 4 - Housing status prior to and during employment



Personal Impacts

Marginalized populations are often more likely to experience social exclusion, which can lead to lower self-esteem and unhappiness. Under such conditions, further negative outcomes often result in the form of drug use and hospitalization. Employment through Causeway’s social enterprises has had a very strong impact on boosting self esteem among employees. Figure 8 shows the dramatic increases in self esteem for employees that are currently employed relative to their self esteem prior to employment.

Figure 5 - Employee self-esteem prior to and during employment



In all aspects of self-esteem and confidence, employee outcomes have improved dramatically. Prior to employment, 29% say that they agreed that they were a person of worth on equal basis with others, 25% disagreed and 25% strongly disagreed. 50% of employees did not feel that their personal worth was on equal basis with others. In stark contrast, when employed, respondents have much higher levels of self-esteem. 17% report that they strongly feel that they are a person of worth on equal basis with others, while 67% respondents agreed. There was close to a 30% increase in levels of self-esteem as a result of employment.

Before employment, 42% of employees did not feel that they had good qualities, while 38% did. When asked how they felt about their qualities in the present, 79% felt very strong or strong about their personal qualities, and no one reported feeling that they did not have good qualities.

Employment has also increased employees' confidence in their own abilities. Before the program, 45% reported that they felt they could do work as well as others, while 33% felt that they could not. Once employed, 79% of employees believed that they could do work as well as others and only 4% (one respondent) felt that they could not.

In terms of attitude directed towards one's self, employment has had a strong impact as well. Prior to employment, 58% of individuals had a negative attitude towards themselves, and only 20% had a positive attitude. Once employed, 75% of respondents had a positive attitude and only 8% (2 out of 24 respondents) had a negative attitude toward themselves.

In terms of overall satisfaction with oneself, prior to employment just 33% of employees were satisfied with themselves while 45% of employees were not. Once employed, there was a strong change, 75% of employees identified as being satisfied with themselves (38% of which identified themselves as very satisfied) and only 8% identified themselves as not satisfied with themselves.

Overall there has been a significant increase in self-esteem as a result of the program. People that are earning an income and feel that they are contributing to an organization feel better about themselves. Because employees are exposed to people with similar issues as themselves and are in a flexible, understanding work environment, social outcomes have improved. Friendships, self-worth and confidence are non-monetary, yet extremely important benefits of Causeway's social enterprises. Causeway's social enterprises generate income and give this marginalized group the opportunity contribute. This employment adds stability to employees' lives and can prevent a range of other social problems.

EMPLOYEE TESTIMONIALS

In the words of several respondents, employment at Causeway's social enterprises have helped because:

"It gives me the chance to earn wages, have job flexibility, and the chance to work on skills and gain confidence."

"I have Less responsibility in the sense that the work is not too hard for focusing or concentration where in an old job I wouldn't have been able to do it when ill."

"I have a lot less pressure and there is more understanding between myself and coworkers."

"There is more support and understanding of mental illness."

"Training is always ongoing, flexibility is a must, and makes me competent in lots of skills."

"I get support, camaraderie, understanding, coaching, and problem solving skills."

"I get more responsibilities here, I like the dress code. There is less pressure here, people here are more real, I like working with people who are more content. There is no office politics, people are more sensitive."

"My workplace and employer have been very supportive and patient. I have grown and matured and developed".

IMPLICATIONS

A diverse work environment likely contributes to positive social outcomes.

There is a wide range of education levels and ages among employees in Causeway social enterprises. This diversity likely sparks positive peer group effects among employees.

The nature of employment offered empowers employees

Employee accommodations such as flexible working hours, a multitude of duties for workers and ongoing employment training highlights the flexible nature of Causeway social enterprises and its ability to tailor to the needs of marginalized populations.

Because part-time work compliments disabilities payments, and causeway social enterprises tailor to the needs of employees, these organizations are helping improve the economic status of marginalized populations.

Improved financial outcomes

Employment has increased employees' financial security. The majority of employees feel their job has provided a regular source of income that they did not have before as well as increases to their disposable income. In addition, 1/5th of respondents reported opening up a new bank account; linking respondents in to the mainstream financial system and allowing them to actively save and spend is instrumental in ensuring financial wellbeing for this group.

Improved social outcomes

Causeway's social enterprises have facilitated many positive social impacts for employees such as increases in number of friendships, volunteerism, social activity, extra-curricular activity and health. Employees are more productive and engaged in their community because of their employment.

Improved personal outcomes

There has been a significant increase in self-esteem as a result of the program. Employees that are now earning income feel that they are contributing more to society and feel better about themselves. Because they are exposed to people with similar issues as themselves and are in a flexible, understanding work environment, social outcomes also improve. Friendships, self-worth and confidence are non-monetary, yet extremely important benefits of Causeway's social enterprises.