

Redefining Futures:

The Role of Basic Income in Career and Educational Development in Ontario

With a Foreword by Guy Standing

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Foreword

By Guy Standing

It should long be a source of regret that the Ontario Basic Income experiment was aborted in 2018, despite widespread interest and support. The Progressive Conservatives had committed to continuing it when they were campaigning to be elected. But immediately they reneged on their word and aborted it on coming into office. They even suppressed the ongoing data being collected to evaluate its impact. Or at least they tried to do so.

Fortunately, much information survived and testimonies from participants have testified to its considerable impact. This report draws a fascinating picture of what it meant to some of the participants. Many of the findings are consistent with those emanating from ongoing and completed pilots and experiments elsewhere, including in US cities and in countries as dissimilar as India, Namibia, Brazil, Finland and Wales.

One finding from all the dozens of experiments is that basic income results in improvement in mental and physical health. Of course, this was a result from the famous Manitoba minimum income experiment that was also curtailed years ago. There too the evaluation data were left unanalysed, until being discovered in a set of dusty boxes many years later.

What this report does is look in detail at the impact of basic income on work activity. This is a subject on which there has been an incredible amount of prejudiced gossip, the claim typically coming from privileged people that a basic income would lead to a reduction in 'work'. There is no evidence from the many pilots and experiments that this is the case. But still the prejudice persists. So, it is vital to make it very clear that most show that a basic income results in an *increase in work*, not a reduction.

There are several reasons for that. It gives people more confidence; it gives more energy; it encourages people to take more 'entrepreneurial' risks, notably by investing in the acquisition and practice of new skills.

There is also another side to the issue. As argued at length in my new book, having a basic income, particularly one that promises a long-term improvement in economic security, changes one's use of time. It leads to more care work, more voluntary work, more communing, and more productive uses of what is regarded as leisure time. It does so indirectly as well, in that it provides greater robustness (or immunity) to social and economic shocks and greater resilience, that is, the ability to recover from shocks or hazards. Above all, it gives social and economic security to the growing precariat, the mass class that will define progressive politics in the decade ahead.

This report adds to the evidence. A basic income system is affordable, it would have positive feedback effects on the economy and it would foster a renewed sense of social solidarity, without which the global drift to a dystopian populist politics will be accelerated. As such, it is becoming a political imperative, as well as a social one. All we need is politicians with moral backbone.

G.Standing, *The Politics of Time: Gaining Control in the Age of Uncertainty* (London, Pelican Books, 2023).

Executive Summary

This report presents a qualitative analysis of how the Ontario basic income pilot influenced the employment and vocational experiences of some of its recipients. Drawing from interviews with 12 individuals who were part of the pilot in Hamilton-Brantford, Thunder Bay, and Lindsay, our study explores the varied impacts of basic income support on their professional and educational journeys, during and following the pilot program.

Below, we highlight the study's key findings, looking first at those related to employment and second at those related to vocational learning experiences.

Summary of Employment Experiences

Positive Shift in Employment Status and Opportunities

The basic income pilot's financial support enabled participants to make strategic career moves, leading to three key outcomes:

1. **Transition to Better Job Positions or New Employment:** The financial stability from the basic income empowered participants to seek more fulfilling and better-paying job roles. Six participants moved to positions that offered improved working conditions and that aligned better with their personal and professional aspirations. Post-pilot, four other participants continued to make significant strides in their professional lives, furthering their career development with new job opportunities and roles. All these transitions were a testament to the pilot's role in enabling participants to prioritize job satisfaction and career advancement.
2. **Increased Job Stability and Security:** The pilot acted as a safety net for four participants, reducing the urgency to accept any available job and paving the way for more stable, long-term employment opportunities. Post-pilot, three other participants experienced continued positive impacts on job stability and security. This increased stability was crucial in allowing all these participants to make more deliberate and strategic career choices, moving away from precarious employment towards roles that offered greater security and satisfaction.
3. **Use of Basic Income to Supplement Low Wages:** Almost all participants (eleven) relied on the basic income to supplement their earnings from part-time or lower-paying jobs. This financial assistance was instrumental in easing financial stress, allowing participants to focus on their overall career progression and personal life balance, rather than merely surviving paycheck to paycheck.

Enhanced Job Performance and Motivation

The pilot enhanced job performance and motivation among participants, demonstrated by two key outcomes:

1. **Increased Motivation to Seek and Retain Employment:** The pilot enabled seven participants to seek new job opportunities or maintain their existing positions. This initiative was a direct result of the economic security provided by the basic income, acting as a safety net against job uncertainties and encouraging participants to manage and improve their employment situations. In the post-pilot phase, this trend continued with one other participant maintaining the same level of motivation and actively pursuing their career goals.
2. **Improved Work Performance and Productivity:** During the pilot, five participants reported improvements in work performance and productivity, attributed to the financial stability from the basic income. This support allowed them to direct greater focus and energy towards their professional duties, leading to better job efficiency and output. This enhanced productivity was extended beyond the pilot phase to one other participant, demonstrating basic income's enduring impact on people's professional lives.

Empowerment to Make Strategic Employment Decisions

The basic income empowered participants to make strategic decisions in their employment, as shown in three key outcomes:

1. **Ability to Refuse Unsatisfactory Employment:** The financial autonomy provided during the pilot enabled seven participants to decline jobs that did not meet their standards for pay, conditions, or job satisfaction. This freedom was crucial in empowering participants to prioritize their well-being and seek employment that better aligned with their personal and professional standards. The pilot played an important role in allowing participants to leave unsatisfactory jobs and pursue roles that suited their skills and interests more closely.
2. **Opportunity to Pursue Entrepreneurial Ventures:** The financial support from the basic income encouraged five participants to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This support provided the stability and resources necessary for participants to start new ventures, expand existing ones, or undertake projects with business potential. The pilot fostered creativity and resourcefulness, enabling participants to explore and establish various entrepreneurial endeavors. After the pilot's cancellation, one other participant demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit by creating a side business.
3. **Increased Job Flexibility and Independence:** Five participants used the financial cushion of basic income during the pilot to explore more adaptable and autonomous work arrangements. This newfound flexibility allowed them to tailor their professional lives to better suit their personal needs and aspirations, whether it was through reallocating time towards academic pursuits, managing a balance between different professional roles, or expanding their professional reach. The basic income facilitated a greater degree of control over their work schedules and tasks, enhancing their independence and ability to make strategic employment decisions.

Enhanced Well-being and Work-Life Balance

The basic income positively affected participants' self-reported mental well-being and work balance in at least three ways:

1. **Reduced Financial Stress Leading to Better Mental Health:** All participants experienced a significant reduction in financial stress due to the basic income, which positively impacted their mental health and emotional state. This reduction in stress led to various improvements, including enhanced peace of mind, better physical health, and stronger family connections. The alleviation of economic pressure improved participants' overall mental well-being, evidenced by decreased anxiety, better coping mechanisms, and a greater sense of satisfaction with their work-life balance.
2. **Opportunity for Personal Development and Growth:** The financial support from the pilot enabled nine participants to invest in their personal development and career advancement. They used this opportunity to enhance skills, pursue educational advancements, and engage in activities that align with their passions and career goals. This investment in personal growth ranged from furthering education to entrepreneurial ventures, reflecting the impact of basic income in facilitating participants' professional and personal enrichment. Post-pilot, one other participant leveraged her resources and experiences during the pilot to achieve significant milestones such as securing a full-time job, obtaining a mortgage and creating a family.
3. **Improved Work-Life Balance:** The pilot also allowed six participants to achieve a healthier balance between their professional responsibilities and personal life. Six participants reported improved work-life balance, managing their working hours more effectively and engaging in fulfilling activities outside of work without the strain of financial instability. This balance extended beyond the pilot, with two other participants continuing to find roles offering both professional satisfaction and personal stability.

Summary of Vocational Learning Experiences

We interviewed four participants who received basic income and pursued educational or training initiatives. The program reshaped their human capital and career paths in four crucial ways:

1. **Facilitating Education or Training:** The pilot provided financial support that enabled four participants to focus on their educational and vocational training. This funding covered expenses such as tuition, materials, and living costs, thereby removing financial barriers to education and skill development. Participants, including a first-generation university student and one engaging in a job training program, benefited from this support, which allowed them to focus on their studies without the strain of financial instability.
2. **Enhanced Engagement and Performance:** All four participants reported improved engagement and performance in their academic and vocational pursuits, primarily due to the alleviation of financial pressures. The pilot led to better academic outcomes and deeper involvement in chosen fields, highlighting its role in not just enabling, but enriching educational experiences. This included improved grades, increased participation in campus life, and successful completion of job training programs, demonstrating how financial stability can positively impact educational engagement.
3. **Fostering Strategic Career Planning:** The financial stability from the pilot enabled the four participants to make thoughtful, long-term career decisions. This strategic planning involved aligning education and training with career goals, facilitating shifts from less satisfying jobs to more fulfilling career paths, and planning for future professional growth. Participants used the pilot period to explore opportunities, make education-based career shifts, and consider future prospects, emphasizing basic income's role in supporting goal-oriented career planning.
4. **Transition and Adaptation in Career Paths:** The pilot also played a role in facilitating smoother transitions from education or training into the workforce. It provided the necessary financial security and flexibility for our four participants to confidently navigate and adapt to new roles in their career paths. This previous support was instrumental during times of uncertainty, such as the pandemic, allowing participants to adjust their career trajectories in alignment with their interests and circumstances.

This report, while offering valuable insights into the potential benefits of basic income, does have limitations. Our qualitative analysis is based on interviews with 12 individuals who were specifically selected for their relevant work or educational experiences, in addition to their availability for our study, representing a non-random sample of the pilot program's broader (4,000) participant pool. While the personal narratives in this report provide an understanding of how basic income can positively influence employment and vocational trajectories, these are individual examples and not a comprehensive representation of the program's overall impact. As such, this study should be considered indicative rather than definitive in its assessment of basic income. It underscores the need for further research, particularly in the form of long-term analysis and tracking of participant experiences, to better understand the potential and implications of basic income initiatives on work and educational outcomes.

Introduction

In 2017, the Ontario basic income pilot was launched in Hamilton-Brantford, Thunder Bay, and Lindsay as part of a provincial initiative to explore basic income as an alternative to Ontario's existing social assistance programs. Approximately 4,000 individuals from these communities, along with 2,000 control group members for comparative analysis, were selected to receive basic income payments for three years. These payments were determined based on 75% of Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure, complemented by other tax credits and benefits, aimed at ensuring a minimum income level for subsistence. Guided by recommendations from former Ontario senator Hugh Segal, the initiative was designed as a policy experiment to explore the potential for a more effective replacement of the existing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program with a more generous and less restrictive income support system. This reform aimed to provide low-income individuals, aged 18 to 64, with improved life opportunities by offering up to \$16,989 annually for singles and \$24,027 for couples, with a 50% earnings claw-back provision to encourage continued work participation. Basic income payments marked a substantial enhancement from prior social assistance benefits. Upon enrollment in the pilot, single individuals transitioned from receiving \$721 through Ontario Works (OW) to up to \$1415.75, reflecting a 96.25% uplift. Similarly, individuals with disabilities saw their support increase from \$1151 provided by the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to up to \$1915.75, a 66.44% rise. The pilot also enrolled individuals who were previously not accessing Ontario's social assistance system.

The pilot was abruptly terminated following a change in government in 2018, with the final basic income payments distributed in March 2019. The formal evaluation of the pilot was discontinued, leaving no significant data collected or disseminated. Despite this, community-led initiatives endeavored to recover whatever limited data could be salvaged by conducting surveys and interviews with a smaller subset of participants. These studies explored a broad spectrum of topics, encompassing employment, education, and other areas of life impacted by the basic income.

Building on this foundation, our previous quantitative study¹ delved into various areas, including the employment dynamics of Ontario basic income recipients, revealing several general trends. The findings from our initial study highlighted in bold below, especially, serve as a foundation for our further exploration in this report:

- **Over half of the participants (54%) were employed both before and during the pilot.**
- Nearly a quarter (24%) remained unemployed both before and during the pilot.
- Of those employed before the pilot, 17% became unemployed during its course.
- Among those who became unemployed, 40.6% returned to school to enhance their future employability.
- 5% of participants found work during the pilot, having not worked prior to it.
- **For those continuously employed before and during the pilot, improvements were noted in pay rate (37%), working conditions (31%), and job security (27%).**
- **Additionally, among the continuously employed, there were easier job searches (61%), and increased motivation to find better employment (79%).**

These findings, derived from a sample of 217 participants out of a total of 1000 recipients in the Hamilton-Brantford site, establish the relevance and significance of these trends across a broad spectrum of basic income recipients. Building upon

1 Mohammad Ferdosi, Tom McDowell, Wayne Lewchuk and Stephanie Ross. "Southern Ontario's Basic Income Experience." Report. School of Labour Studies, McMaster University. Available at: <https://labourstudies.socsci.mcmaster.ca/documents/southern-ontarios-basic-income-experience.pdf>

For a more in-depth exploration of the qualitative data of our initial study, refer to our second report that delves into interviews conducted with over 40 participants from the initial study. The report can be accessed at: <https://carleton.ca/cspsc/wp-content/uploads/Life-on-Basic-Income.-Final-report.pdf>

this foundation, this report delves deeper into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind these findings. It does so through new qualitative data gathered from interviews with 12 recipients. For a detailed description of our methodology, please refer to the appendix. This targeted, yet limited, selection allows us to deepen our understanding of various trends, including some not explored in our previous study. It offers valuable insights into how basic income can influence career choices, job performance, and overall professional development.

Importantly, our thematic analysis includes participant experiences during the post-pilot period, defined as the time from the last basic income payment issued in March 2019 up to the time of our interviews, which were conducted between December 2022 and June 2023. This consideration is noteworthy given the pilot’s premature termination, which shortened the duration of support from the intended three years. The full impact of the basic income, especially in terms of longer-lasting benefits, became more discernible over time, extending beyond the period of receiving financial assistance for some participants. This was particularly noticeable among the four participants who were engaged in education or training programs during the pilot. For these individuals, the value of their enhanced skills and opportunities emerged gradually, becoming evident as more time elapsed after the pilot’s end. Additionally, several other participants obtained better jobs during the post-pilot phase, a testament to the enduring impact of the basic income support on their professional trajectories. Given the challenging context of the pilot’s premature termination and the subsequent onset of the March 2020 pandemic, the success stories and outcomes of these participants are particularly remarkable.

Our findings, while providing important insights, should primarily be seen as contributing to a broader dialogue on basic income, rather than offering a comprehensive or definitive evaluation of its impact. Given that our sample consists of only 12 participants, it captures only some of the vast and diverse experiences of the 4,000 individuals involved in the larger pilot program. This limitation underscores the importance of interpreting our results as indicative trends that warrant further exploration to understand better the multifaceted effects of basic income programs and their potential role in shaping employment and educational outcomes.

Demographic Profile of Participants

The following table presents an overview of each participant’s demographic information, including gender, age, and pre-pilot education level, along with detailed data on their employment and vocational profiles. It specifically outlines the duration of their participation in the pilot, the amount of basic income received, employment and educational status during the pilot, and any shifts in work life post-pilot.

Participant	Gender	Age	Pilot Site	Duration on Basic Income (months)	Basic Income Received Each Month (\$)	Highest Level of Education Before Pilot	OW/ ODSP Before Pilot	Paid Work During Pilot	Education/ Training During Pilot	Paid Work After Pilot
1	Male	31	Thunder Bay	14	1800	High School Diploma	OW	Part-time retail (20 hrs per week)	No	Full-time conservator, then union tradesperson
2	Female	32	Hamilton	12	400	Certificate in Admin.	None	Full-time customer service	No	Full-time office worker
3	Female	26	Lindsay	12	714	High School Diploma	None	Part-time retail (10 hrs) and fixed-term contracts	B.A. (Progressing to 4 th year)	Non-profit sector: Full-time entry-worker, then manager, then director
4	Female	33	Thunder Bay	13	1124	High School Diploma	OW	No	Job training program	Full-time recreational worker; Small side business
5	Male	44	Hamilton	12	270	Ph.D.	None	Full-time factory worker, then full-time logistics operator	No	Full-time logistics operator
6	Male	28	Hamilton	12	460 and 1415	B.A.	None	Full-time assistant manager in retail; Part-time student service provider (10 hrs)	B.A. (1 st year)	Part-time peer support worker (15 hrs); [Completed M.A. (2022); Completing second M.A. (2023)]
7	Female	45	Lindsay	14	1134 and 2000	B.A.	None	Part-time fast food worker then part-time clerical worker (20 hrs)	No	Part-time clerical worker (20 hrs) then personal support worker for family member and landlord
8	Female	55	Thunder Bay	18	954	College graduate	ODSP	Part-time custodian (5 hrs) and youth trainer (5 hrs)	No	Part-time custodian (5 hrs) and youth trainer (5 hrs) [Back to ODSP]
9	Female	35	Hamilton	13	709	High School Diploma	None	Part-time music instructor (15-20 hrs) and part-time operations manager (part-time pay, full-time hours)	No	Part-time music instructor; fixed-term contracts [Launching personal business]
10	Female	45	Hamilton	14	740	High School Diploma	OW	Part-time to full-time factory worker then full-time custodian	No	Full-time to part-time custodian, then part-time factory worker [CERB, then ODSP]
11	Male	38	Hamilton	12	900	B.A.	None	Full-time retail worker then full-time recreational associate	No	Full-time recreational associate [CERB, then OW]
12	Female	32	Hamilton	15	1000	B.A.	None	Part-time clerk (10 hrs) then part-time substitute teacher	M.A. (3 rd year)	Freelance substitute teacher (full-time hours)

Our study involved a group of 12 participants from the three pilot sites across Ontario, including Hamilton-Brantford (urban test site), Thunder Bay (semi-urban), and Lindsay (rural). The participants ranged in age from 26 to 55 at the time of their interviews, with a fairly even gender distribution.

The duration participants were on basic income varied between 12 to 18 months. The monthly basic income received by participants ranged from \$270 to \$2,000 CAD.

In terms of educational background before the pilot began, five participants held high school diplomas, four had completed Bachelor of Arts degrees, one was a college graduate, one had attained a Ph.D., and another had earned a professional certificate.

During the pilot program, three participants were progressing towards their degrees, with two working towards Bachelor of Arts degrees and one pursuing a Master of Arts, while a fourth participant was completing a job training program.

Before the pilot, three participants were receiving benefits from Ontario Works (OW), and one participant was a recipient of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). After the cancellation of the pilot, the participant who was previously on ODSP returned to receiving ODSP benefits. Additionally, two other participants, who were not initially on social assistance, enrolled in OW after the pilot.

During the pilot phase, eleven out of twelve participants were engaged in some form of paid work, and following the pilot, all 12 participants became involved in paid employment. However, three of these participants eventually transitioned to social assistance programs (OW/ODSP) due to personal circumstances during the pandemic. In terms of notable employment shifts, seven out of the twelve participants (i.e., Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 12) successfully transitioned from part-time or less stable employment to more secure, full-time roles. These shifts were not confined to any single sector but spanned across various fields such as retail, conservation, non-profit, and skilled trades. This transition highlights the pilot's significant role in enhancing job stability and opportunities for the majority of our study participants. The move to more fulfilling full-time employment for these participants reflects the potential of basic income to positively impact employment trajectories, though it is important to acknowledge the individual factors and varied experiences that shaped these outcomes.

Furthermore, the remaining five participants also experienced beneficial changes in their employment trajectories, illustrating the ranging positive effects of basic income, even for those who did not shift from part-time to full-time employment. In the next section of this report, these findings, along with many other insights, will shed light on the impact of the basic income program, particularly in terms of its capacity to transform career trajectories, enhance professional growth, and contribute to overall personal fulfillment and work satisfaction.

The pilot also facilitated four participants in pursuing further education or training programs. These vocational pursuits led to advancements in their professional lives. Specifically, three of these participants successfully leveraged their education and training to secure more stable, full-time positions. Meanwhile, the remaining one participant was in the process of completing a second Master's program at the time of his interview, with hopes of securing a full-time position in his field of study after obtaining the proper educational credentials and completing his practicum experience. In a later section of this report, these findings will highlight the potential of basic income in fostering skills acquisition and enhancing job placement opportunities.

Employment Experiences

Our qualitative analysis covers a range of themes related to work: positive shifts in employment status and opportunities, enhanced job performance and motivation, empowerment in making strategic employment decisions, and improvements in well-being and work-life balance. These themes together paint a general picture of how basic income affected participants' professional and personal lives, both during and after the pilot period. By incorporating specific examples from participants, we illustrate these work themes and their corresponding subthemes, offering a detailed portrayal of the pilot's impact on employment trajectories. For more detailed information about our thematic analysis methodology and related matters, see the appendix methodology.

Positive Shift in Employment Status and Opportunities

Our interviews testified to empowering changes in our participants' professional lives. Of central importance was the pilot's financial support in enabling participants to make strategic career moves. This influence is evident in three specific yet interconnected subthemes: First, the *Transition to Better Job Positions or New Employment*, where several participants leveraged the financial security from the basic income to find new jobs or transition to better employment positions, prioritizing job satisfaction and improved employment conditions. Second, *Increased Job Stability and Security*, highlighting how the basic income served as a safety net, reducing the urgency to accept just any job and leading to more stable, long-term employment opportunities. Third, the *Use of Basic Income to Supplement Low Wages*, where basic income was crucial in supplementing earnings from part-time or lower-paying jobs, thereby easing financial stress and allowing participants to focus on their overall career and personal life balance. These subthemes collectively demonstrate how the basic income facilitated a transformative impact on the employment status and opportunities of our participants.

Below each subtheme will be examined in detail, drawing upon specific examples from participants to illustrate how these aspects of the pilot program manifested in their experiences.

Transition to Better Job Positions or New Employment

During the basic income pilot, six participants moved into more favorable employment roles or secured new job positions. This transition was enabled by the financial stability offered by the basic income, empowering them to focus on finding work that was more satisfying and offered improved job conditions.

- **Participant 5:** Transitioned to a better-paying job with better working conditions and opportunities for overtime pay.
- **Participant 6:** Was promoted to a full-time assistant manager role at his retail job, a position that offered benefits, a pay raise, commission, and performance bonuses. Although he felt this promotion might have occurred independently of basic income support, the financial stability the pilot provided influenced his decision to accept this new role. He was grappling with mental health issues at the time, balancing both work and school, which made the prospect of additional responsibilities daunting. Additionally, he took up a part-time job in the education sector, which aligned with his interests in community and social work.
- **Participant 7:** Moved from a minimum wage job at a fast-food restaurant to a part-time secretary role paying nearly \$20 an hour.
- **Participant 11:** Shifted from a traditional service sector job to a role at a recreational center, earning a similar wage but aligning his work with personal beliefs and interests, thereby improving his working conditions and job satisfaction considerably.
- **Participant 10:** Increased her working hours from part-time to full-time at a factory. Her enhanced performance led to an accepted offer for a full-time maintenance position within the same company, providing more hours and a higher wage.

- **Participant 12:** While pursuing her Master's degree, she initially worked part-time at a store. The basic income allowed her to be selective in her job search, eventually securing a teaching position that aligned with her qualifications. This role represented a significant step towards her career goal in education.

In the period after the cancellation of the basic income pilot, four participants continued to make significant strides in their professional lives. The skills and experiences gained during the pilot, coupled with the financial stability it provided, continued to influence their career paths, leading to new job opportunities and roles that furthered their professional development.

- **Participant 1:** Left a job at a superstore post-pilot to secure a groundskeeper position, which later led to a full-time role as a construction worker.
- **Participant 2:** Secured a full-time office job, which was a substantial improvement over her previous call center job. This new role offered a more supportive work environment, better working conditions, and additional employment benefits.
- **Participant 3:** Obtained a 40-hour-a-week job at a non-profit organization and a 15-hour-a-week contract to manage a community center. These opportunities arose from networking and reduced working hours at a store during the pilot, aligning with her community sector aspirations. She was promoted to manager and later became the director of another nonprofit job.
- **Participant 4:** Achieved full-time employment at a recreational center, excelling as the top salesperson.

Increased Job Stability and Security

In the pilot period, we noted an impact on job security and stability for four participants. This safety net provided by basic income lessened their need to hastily accept any available job, paving the way for them to seek more stable and long-term employment opportunities.

- **Participant 5:** The basic income alleviated the need to hastily accept any job, allowing him to be more selective. This led to the discovery of a more stable opportunity after a five-week successful search for suitable work.
- **Participant 7:** The financial safety net of the basic income facilitated her transition to a higher paying, less physically demanding secretary role, offering greater job security and a better match for her skills and personal circumstances.
- **Participant 9:** Made strategic career decisions, prioritizing long-term, stable career goals over immediate survival jobs. Reducing her teaching hours at a studio where she was underpaid, she could focus on establishing a media business, a move that reflected a shift towards a more secure and personally fulfilling career path.
- **Participant 12:** The financial support from the basic income enabled her to pursue job opportunities that were not only more aligned with her qualifications and interests but also offered greater professional stability. This support allowed her to be selective, focusing on securing teaching roles that promised a more consistent and stable career trajectory in her chosen field of education.

The post-pilot cancellation period revealed continued positive impacts on job stability and security for three participants.

- **Participant 1:** Leveraged the financial stability provided by the basic income to pursue volunteering, which paved the way for enhanced employment prospects. This engagement in volunteering culminated in a groundskeeper position, eventually leading to a stable and enduring career as a full-time construction worker.
- **Participant 3:** Maintained a workload of 60-70 hours a week across multiple jobs, including a stable 40-hour-a-week position. This workload indicates a significant improvement in job security compared to her earlier employment situation before the pilot.

- **Participant 4:** Since the cancellation of the pilot, she has been employed in a more stable and secure full-time role at a recreation center, where she has distinguished herself as the top salesperson.

The experiences of participants in the previous and current subthemes underscore the transformative role of basic income in facilitating not just financially rewarding employment, but also in aligning job opportunities with personal interests, career aspirations, and long-term stability. This support system empowered them to transition from jobs driven by immediate necessity to roles that offered both professional growth and personal fulfillment. By providing a financial cushion, the basic income pilot mitigated the risks associated with changing jobs, enabling participants to leave less desirable positions—a step they might not have taken without this safety net. This strategic career decision-making, encouraged by the pilot's stability and confidence boost, underscores the foundational impact of basic income on achieving meaningful employment changes. Participants' narratives consistently affirm that the positive shifts in their employment were not coincidental but directly attributed to the financial security and flexibility the basic income afforded them, allowing for a shift towards more secure and satisfying career paths.

Use of Basic Income to Supplement Low Wages

During the pilot, eleven participants relied on the basic income to supplement their earnings from part-time or lower-paying jobs. This financial assistance played a role in helping them manage essential expenses and alleviate financial stress.

- **Participant 1:** The basic income augmented his earnings from a part-time cashier clerk role, easing his financial burden.
- **Participant 2:** Used the basic income to enhance her income from a shift-based job with irregular hours, helping her cover necessary living costs.
- **Participant 3:** Used the basic income to bolster her reduced income from a retail job, helping her manage finances more effectively and concentrate on her studies.
- **Participant 5:** Basic income bolstered his earnings during times of low-paying work, lessening his financial stress.
- **Participant 6:** Continued part-time work while receiving basic income, which he used to augment his income and save for educational expenses.
- **Participant 7:** Used the basic income to supplement her earnings from jobs in the fast-food industry and later in bookkeeping, enhancing her family's quality of life. This support also improved her mobility and work attire.
- **Participant 8:** The basic income boosted her earnings from part-time roles in maintenance and youth training, relieving the financial strain of living on a limited budget.
- **Participant 9:** Enhanced her income from two precarious jobs, which was crucial as she was developing a new business and needed to reduce working hours, ensuring her living expenses were met.
- **Participant 10:** The basic income enhanced her financial situation, allowing her to settle debts, save money, and afford necessities.
- **Participant 11:** Used the basic income to boost his income at a recreational center, maintaining a stable lifestyle while pursuing work that resonated with his personal values.
- **Participant 12:** The additional income was vital in covering her substantial living expenses, including housing and utilities, offering her financial leeway for healthier lifestyle choices and personal well-being.

These accounts illustrate the role of basic income in improving the financial well-being of the study participants. By enhancing their earnings from various types of employment and cushioning the impact of month-to-month fluctuations in work income, the pilot not only alleviated immediate financial pressures but also provided the flexibility to pursue personal and professional goals

with greater financial security. This additional support was instrumental in improving their overall quality of life and enabling them to make strategic decisions about their work and education. This clear pattern across diverse employment scenarios underscores the basic income's effectiveness as a critical support mechanism for those in varying job situations.

Enhanced Job Performance and Motivation

The basic income pilot affected the participants' engagement and efficiency in the workplace in at least two key ways: First, it *Increased Motivation to Seek and Retain Employment*, as the financial cushion provided by basic income inspired several participants to actively seek new job opportunities or maintain their existing roles with the assurance of a safety net against unexpected job loss. Second, it *Improved Work Performance and Productivity*, as the additional income from the pilot fostered a more concentrated and efficient approach to work tasks, leading to enhancements in performance and productivity. Together, these subthemes point to the effect of the pilot on not only the participants' ability to secure and sustain employment but also on their overall productivity and motivation in their professional roles.

Below, we delve into each subtheme, incorporating specific participant experiences to showcase how the basic income influenced their job performance and enthusiasm in the workplace.

Increased Motivation to Seek and Retain Employment

During the pilot, seven participants demonstrated increased initiative in securing new job opportunities or maintaining their existing positions. This renewed focus on employment was bolstered by the economic reassurance offered by the basic income, serving as a protective buffer in the face of potential job uncertainties such as the loss of shifts or not being paid on time. Their confidence in having this financial backing inspired a more active approach to managing their employment situations.

- **Participant 4:** Actively sought better job opportunities and was able to make strategic decisions, such as saving money and relocating to another city for work through a jobs training program.
- **Participant 5:** Sought better employment after his layoff from a factory job. This initiative demonstrates the influence of the pilot program in fostering work incentives and proactive job search efforts.
- **Participant 7:** Transitioned from a demanding low-wage job in a fast-food restaurant to a much better-paying part-time secretarial role. This shift was driven by the motivation to improve her employment situation during the pilot.
- **Participant 8:** Despite her chronic health condition and responsibilities as a single mother, she maintained her two jobs. This ongoing employment commitment, in the face of personal challenges, underscores her strong motivation to remain employed. Basic income support not only bolstered her morale but also enabled her to manage her health more effectively, thereby enhancing her capacity to stay employed and engage more fully in life.
- **Participant 10:** Increased her working hours from part-time to full-time. This decision was influenced by the confidence gained from improved mental health and diet, affirming the basic income's role in enabling participants to commit more fully to their jobs.
- **Participant 11:** Left his stressful clerk job to pursue a role at a recreational center, aligning with his personal interests in more community-oriented work. This change reflects the influence of the basic income in fostering confidence and autonomy, enabling him to seek a more human connection with customers in a less stressful environment, fostering a mindset receptive to positive change.
- **Participant 12:** Basic income covered the higher costs of job hunting, such as commuting expenses for various teaching assignments and the resources needed for crafting tailored resumes and cover letters. The extra support enhanced her motivation and confidence in seeking employment that aligned with her career aspirations to become a full-time teacher. It supported more focused and rewarding job searches.

In the post-pilot period, the experiences of three participants further illustrate their increased motivation to seek and improve their employment status, continuing the positive trends established during the pilot.

- **Participant 1:** Showed a proactive approach in changing his career path, first to a groundskeeper and later to a construction worker. This shift, inspired by his desire to sustain the lifestyle he experienced during the pilot, reflects a motivation to improve his professional life.
- **Participant 4:** Exemplified increased drive and dedication in her role as a salesperson at a recreational center, fueled by the financial stability and confidence gained from the basic income. Excelling as the top salesperson reflects her commitment to advancing in her professional life.
- **Participant 6:** Actively sought and secured two part-time roles that closely matched his academic and professional interests. Both demonstrated his ongoing alignment with his career and academic objectives, showing a sustained motivation to engage in work that complements his skills and passions.

The collective experiences of participants illustrate the empowering effect of the basic income on their motivation to seek and retain employment. Whether it was transitioning to more fulfilling roles, increasing work hours, or maintaining employment despite personal challenges, participants showed a proactive approach in advancing their career trajectories. The correlation between the participants' enhanced motivation for job seeking and retention and the benefits of basic income is evident, extending even beyond the pilot period. Their consistent reports of increased confidence and strategic employment choices, persisting after the end of the basic income provision, underscore its impact in not only alleviating financial concerns but also actively encouraging a more dynamic and ambitious approach to their professional endeavors.

Improved Work Performance and Productivity

Throughout the pilot, five participants displayed enhanced work performance and productivity, a change they felt was made possible by the basic income. This income supplement allowed them to focus more intently on their job responsibilities, leading to marked improvements in their efficiency and professional output.

- **Participant 6:** Acknowledged that the basic income enabled him to shift his focus from financial worries to his job responsibilities, especially after his promotion to a team leader position. This increased focus contributed to a more engaged approach to his work.
- **Participant 7:** Expressed that the basic income invigorated her work drive, making her want to work more. This increased motivation not only likely improved her performance in her new secretarial role but also extended her engagement to activities beyond paid work, like volunteering at her children's daycare. She reflected on leaving her previous minimum wage job due to burnout and suggested that the basic income helped her find a more sustainable balance in her new role, potentially enhancing her productivity.
- **Participant 9:** Found that the financial stability from the basic income allowed her to exceed the bare minimum in her work. Freed from survival worries, she could invest more creatively and thoughtfully in her roles in two artistic jobs and developing her media business, enhancing her overall work quality.
- **Participant 10:** Increased her work hours from part-time to full-time at a factory, a decision driven by improved mental health and a desire for greater productivity. Better mental well-being enhanced her focus and efficiency at work, leading to an offer for a full-time custodial position within the same company.
- **Participant 11:** Experienced a more relaxed and fulfilling work environment at his new job. The work's alignment with his personal interests in holistic wellness and the community-centric nature of his workplace fostered a more collaborative atmosphere, contributing to higher engagement and productivity.

After the cancellation of the pilot, one participant's experience further illustrates improved work performance and productivity.

- **Participant 4:** Demonstrated an improvement in her work performance and productivity as the top salesperson in her job. This was influenced by the confidence and work ethic she developed during the pilot while completing a jobs training program. Her newfound drive led her to not only excel in sales but also to assume a leadership role, training other employees in sales techniques. This showcases her professional growth and her ability to inspire and lead others in her workplace.

The basic income pilot boosted work performance and productivity for several participants by increasing their focus and efficiency at work. The financial support allowed them to redirect their attention from monetary worries to professional duties, resulting in improved work quality and increased engagement. Participants experienced an increased work drive, expanded their professional activities, and even assumed leadership roles. By liberating participants from immediate financial pressures, basic income appears to have catalyzed their enhanced work performance and productivity, suggesting a transformation in their professional demeanor and output that aligns with the period and influence of this financial support.

Empowerment to Make Strategic Employment Decisions

The basic income pilot empowered participants in making strategic career choices in three ways: First, basic income gave participants the *Ability to Refuse Unsatisfactory Employment*, as it provided the financial freedom to decline jobs that did not meet their criteria for pay, conditions, or satisfaction, thereby prioritizing their well-being. Second, the financial support allowed participants *Opportunity to Pursue Entrepreneurial Ventures* by starting or expanding their own businesses, thereby emphasizing the pilot's role in encouraging entrepreneurship. Together, these subthemes underscore the impact of the basic income in enhancing participants' autonomy and flexibility in their employment decisions.

In the following sections, we will explore each subtheme in detail, drawing upon specific experiences of participants to demonstrate the role of basic income in reshaping their approach to employment.

Ability to Refuse Unsatisfactory Employment

During the pilot, seven participants used the financial freedom provided by the basic income to make discerning choices about their employment. This financial autonomy allowed them to turn down jobs that did not meet their expectations in terms of salary, working conditions, or overall job satisfaction. The basic income thus played a crucial role in empowering these participants to prioritize their well-being and seek employment that aligned better with their personal and professional standards.

- **Participant 1:** Initially felt constrained by his part-time job at a store due to low pay and limited advancement opportunities. The financial safety net provided by the basic income enabled him to leave this unsatisfactory role and secure a groundskeeper position.
- **Participant 2:** Described her service sector job as stressful and toxic, with undervaluation and verbal abuse from management. The basic income gave her the confidence to prioritize her mental health and leave her undesirable workplace, despite having worked there for several years.
- **Participant 5:** Used the security from the basic income to avoid temporary employment that could hinder the search for more suitable work, recognizing the difficulty of leaving such jobs once started.
- **Participant 6:** The financial stability from the basic income allowed him to leave an unsatisfying assistant manager position to focus on his education, making a conscious decision to prioritize a better future despite uncertainties surrounding the pilot.
- **Participant 7:** Leveraged the basic income to transition from a job at a fast-food restaurant to a clerical role that was more aligned with her skills and preferences.

- **Participant 8:** Contemplated leaving her physically demanding service job due to health concerns but chose to stay due to the uncertainty of the basic income pilot's continuation. Had the pilot been guaranteed to continue, she would have felt more secure in deciding to leave the job to pursue another line of work.
- **Participant 9:** Empowered by the basic income, she reduced hours spent on less satisfying work to focus on developing her media business, aligning her work more with her long-term career goals.
- **Participant 11:** Realized his clerk job was not fulfilling his desire for meaningful work and felt underutilized. He described the role as unfulfilling and stressful, with classism in client treatment and intense workloads not reflective of his wages. The basic income encouraged him to seek employment that resonated with his aspirations and values.

In the post-pilot period, one participant's actions exemplify a continued empowerment in confronting unsatisfactory employment situations.

- **Participant 6:** Showcased increased assertiveness in the workplace, influenced by the confidence gained during the pilot. This was evident in his decision to file a labour law claim against his employer for unpaid overtime, indicating his willingness to challenge unfair employment practices and advocate for his own well-being.

Opportunity to Pursue Entrepreneurial Ventures

During the pilot, five participants engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Basic income provided these individuals with the resources and stability necessary to explore and engage in entrepreneurship, whether it was starting new ventures, expanding existing ones, or undertaking projects with business potential. This financial support not only facilitated these endeavors but also nurtured participants' creativity, resourcefulness, and confidence in their entrepreneurial pursuits.

- **Participant 1:** Demonstrated entrepreneurial skills and initiative by starting and expanding a volunteer organization focused on improving the community and environment, which later aided in securing a groundskeeper position, showing an indirect but valuable entrepreneurial impact.
- **Participant 3:** Used the time afforded by reduced hours at her job to engage in various side gigs, including consultancy for an entrepreneurship program, curriculum development for a course, and administrative roles, as well as serving as a supplemental instructor. Additionally, she conducted a literature review for an advocacy group, displaying an entrepreneurial approach to income diversification through varied educational and consultancy engagements.
- **Participant 7:** Played a key role in a home renovation project with entrepreneurial implications. Investing part of her basic income in the project, she helped convert a space into a complete apartment, indirectly supporting her husband's carpentry business and creating potential for future rental income.
- **Participant 8:** Harbored aspirations to start her own marketing business, inspired by her educational background and a shift in personal circumstances. The pilot provided a sense of possibility for pursuing this long-held dream, though the program's abrupt cancellation put her plans on hold.
- **Participant 9:** Leveraged the financial support to invest in her media business by purchasing equipment and reducing hours at her other jobs, enabling her to focus on becoming self-employed with full-time hours and sufficient pay.

After the pilot's cancellation, one participant demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit, taking steps to establish and consider a new business venture.

- **Participant 4:** Initiated a side business as an independent distributor for a marketing company, showcasing her entrepreneurial skills and the initiative to create additional income streams.

Enhanced Well-being and Work-Life Balance

The basic income affected participants' overall work-life balance and mental well-being. We explore three subthemes. First, the alleviation of financial worries *reduced Financial Stress Leading to Better Mental Health*. Second, financial security from the pilot provided *Opportunity for Personal Development and Growth* by enabling participants to invest in personal development and training, thereby advancing their career prospects. Finally, additional income *Improved Work-Life Balance* by allowing participants to achieve a better balance between their professional responsibilities and personal life, including the ability to work fewer hours or take necessary breaks without financial strain. Together, these subthemes demonstrate the role of basic income in fostering a healthier, more balanced, and fulfilling lifestyle for our participants.

Reduced Financial Stress Leading to Better Mental Health

All participants reported experiencing a reduction in financial stress, thanks to the support provided by the basic income.

- **Participant 1:** The reduction in financial stress enabled him to explore new job opportunities without the fear of housing insecurity, significantly improving his mental health.
- **Participant 2:** Found mental relief with the extra income, which eased stress over irregular earnings and ensured the coverage of essential expenses.
- **Participant 3:** Experienced a notable decrease in financial stress and anxiety, leading to an enhanced sense of peace.
- **Participant 4:** Improved physical health, weight gain, and self-worth, along with stronger family connections and a stable relationship, all contributed to better mental health.
- **Participant 5:** Enjoyed better mental health due to reduced financial stress and anxiety.
- **Participant 6:** Experienced an improvement in mental health as the pilot provided relief from his financial concerns.
- **Participant 7:** Benefited from reduced anxiety and panic attacks, improved dietary habits, and a transition to a less stressful job, all contributing to significantly better mental health.
- **Participant 8:** Found that the basic income's financial stability helped manage her chronic condition, positively affecting her overall mental health.
- **Participant 9:** Gained time for cooking, a stress-relieving and fulfilling activity, and experienced fewer periods of anxiety, enhancing her mental well-being.
- **Participant 10:** Reported a significant improvement in mental health, attributed to reduced financial stress and access to healthier food options.
- **Participant 11:** Transitioned from a high-stress job to a more positive and relaxed work environment, fostering better mental health and job satisfaction.
- **Participant 12:** Alleviated financial pressures and improved dietary choices, combined with the pursuit of wellness activities, led to enhanced mental and physical well-being.

From alleviating anxieties related to job security and housing to fostering a healthier lifestyle and improved self-esteem, the basic income significantly contributed to participants' psychological well-being. This reduction in financial stress was instrumental in enhancing their overall mental health, as evidenced by decreased anxiety, better coping mechanisms, and improved life satisfaction. The consistent improvement in mental health across all participants underscores basic income's impact in fostering a more resilient and emotionally stable life, transforming their ability to navigate everyday stresses with greater ease.

Opportunity for Personal Development and Growth

Nine participants took advantage of the pilot's financial support to focus on enhancing their skills and broadening their career opportunities. The added security from basic income provided a foundation for them to pursue educational advancements, skill-building activities, and other avenues for self-improvement. In this section, we delve into the ways these individuals leveraged the pilot's resources to foster their career development and personal enrichment.

- **Participant 1:** His engagement in community volunteering during the pilot contributed to his personal growth, enhancing his sense of community involvement and self-development.
- **Participant 2:** Experienced personal growth during the pilot, learning valuable lessons about setting boundaries and recognizing self-worth in professional settings.
- **Participant 3:** The financial support from the basic income allowed her to concentrate on her education and explore side gigs aligned with her passions, paving the way for potential full-time employment in fields she cared about.
- **Participant 6:** Leveraged the financial stability from the basic income to return to school, enhancing his expertise in mental health and community work. He secured part-time roles related to his field of study, combining practical experience with academic learning for his professional development.
- **Participant 7:** Considered further education in healthcare but eventually chose to prioritize immediate job opportunities due to the pilot's cancellation announcement. The contemplation of advancing her studies, however, signified a desire for professional growth and development.
- **Participant 8:** Felt empowered by the basic income to explore various life-enhancing opportunities like home improvements and further education, reflecting personal growth and an improved quality of life.
- **Participant 9:** Used the financial support to invest time and resources into developing her media business, a step towards personal growth and professional self-realization.
- **Participant 11:** Explored spiritual and psychological interests through various activities alone and with others, indicating a journey towards personal development.
- **Participant 12:** The basic income allowed her to focus on completing her Master's program without the stress of multiple jobs. Engaging in side research related to her academic interests further showcased her commitment to personal and academic advancement.

In the post-pilot period, one participant's journey exemplifies significant personal development and growth.

- **Participant 4:** Used the skills she obtained from a job training program to improve her employability after the pilot ended. This commitment to skill development was a key factor in her subsequent success at her new job. Alongside her partner, she achieved significant milestones such as securing a mortgage and buying a vehicle, showcasing their collective financial stability and personal growth.

The experiences of these participants illustrate how the basic income pilot enabled them to pursue educational opportunities, engage in meaningful activities aligned with their passions, and make strategic decisions for their career advancement. Whether it was enhancing skills through education, exploring spiritual pursuits, or achieving key life milestones, these narratives point to the impact of basic income in enriching the personal growth and career trajectories of our participants.

Improved Work-Life Balance

During the pilot period, six participants reported significant improvements in their work-life balance, thanks to the support of basic income. This financial backing enabled them to effectively manage their working hours, ensuring a healthier equilibrium between professional duties and personal life without succumbing to financial pressures. The basic income support facilitated not only adjustments in work schedules but also allowed participants to pursue educational objectives, participate in volunteer activities, and spend quality time with their families, all without the looming stress of financial instability. Their collective experiences highlight a more harmonious balance of professional obligations and personal well-being. Importantly, this positive shift towards balancing professional satisfaction with personal stability continued even beyond the pilot's duration, indicating a longer influence on participants' choices and opportunities in their roles.

- **Participant 1:** Achieved a better work-life balance by combining part-time work with volunteer activities, enhancing his overall sense of fulfillment.
- **Participant 3:** Enhanced her work-life balance by reducing work hours to focus more on her educational goals and passion projects.
- **Participant 6:** Initially used the basic income to prioritize education over full-time work, aiming for a better balance. The pilot's unexpected cancellation, however, impacted this planned equilibrium.
- **Participant 7:** Found a healthier balance between work and family life, engaging in meaningful activities like volunteering for her children's daycare, facilitated by reduced financial pressure.
- **Participant 9:** Gained the flexibility to balance work with personal interests, such as cooking and socializing, thanks to the financial cushion of the basic income.
- **Participant 11:** Improved his work-life balance by engaging in fulfilling activities outside of work, like spiritual practices and retreats, while working in a job that supported his personal well-being.
- **Participant 12:** Enjoyed a more balanced schedule between work and study, leading to increased opportunities for self-care and relaxation during the pilot program.

In the post-pilot period, the experiences of three participants further demonstrate basic income's impact on achieving a more balanced work-life dynamic.

- **Participant 1:** Found improved work-life balance in new roles as a groundskeeper and later in construction, offering better pay and autonomy than his previous precarious job.
- **Participant 4:** Attained personal life stability, marked by enhanced relationships and starting a family, reflecting a more balanced and healthy integration of work and personal life.
- **Participant 5:** Capitalized on a new job opportunity to work extra hours for overtime pay, enabling him to plan a special vacation with his children. This ability to balance hard work with rewarding personal experiences reflects successful work-life management.

Vocational Learning Experiences

Our qualitative analysis explores four key areas of vocational learning experiences in this section: *Facilitating Education or Training*, boosting *Engagement and Performance* in vocational pursuits, *Fostering Strategic Career Planning* and the *Transition and Adaptation in Career Paths*. These themes offer a general picture of how the pilot program reshaped vocational learning and career paths for some individuals. Drawing on participants' stories, we aim to illustrate basic income's impact on their vocational journeys and future professional goals.

Facilitation of Education or Training

This theme focuses on how the pilot provided crucial financial support for participants to embark on or continue their educational and vocational training endeavors. For the four participants, the financial support from the pilot covered essential expenses such as tuition fees, materials, and living costs, providing the financial stability needed to focus on their studies and training. This support allowed them to engage more fully in their academic and vocational endeavors without the burden of financial strain, underscoring the effectiveness of basic income in eliminating economic obstacles to education and skill development.

The experiences of four participants provide an illustration of this theme. Their stories highlight the significant impact of the pilot in enabling their educational and vocational training pursuits and will also offer valuable insights into the other three themes discussed later.

- **Participant 3:** Benefited from the pilot's financial support during her third year of university, easing the burden of working full-time and enabling better focus on studies. As a first-generation university student, this support was vital for her educational journey and well-being.
- **Participant 4:** Used the basic income to engage in a jobs training program, which was crucial for re-entering the workforce. The financial buffer provided by the pilot allowed for focused participation in vocational training without the pressure of immediate financial survival.
- **Participant 6:** Influenced by the pilot to return to school, citing the financial feasibility provided by the basic income as a key factor. The support enabled him to manage living expenses while pursuing multiple degrees, including a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree, highlighting basic income's potential in supporting expanded academic endeavors.
- **Participant 12:** The basic income was instrumental in her ability to concentrate on graduate studies, providing a financial safety net that alleviated the need for multiple part-time jobs and enabling the completion of her Master's degree.

Enhanced Engagement and Performance

With the alleviation of financial pressures, participants reported an improvement in their ability to concentrate on their studies or vocational training. This financial relief translated into not only better academic and skill development outcomes but also a deeper involvement in their chosen fields. The pilot, therefore, played a factor in not only facilitating educational and vocational endeavors but also in improving the quality and effectiveness of these pursuits. The following accounts from the four participants will further illuminate this theme, offering insights into the influence of financial stability on educational engagement and performance.

1. **Participant 3:** Experienced a boost in academic engagement and performance. Basic income support allowed her to participate more in campus life, including joining groups and activities, which were previously unfeasible due to full-time work commitments. The participant noted a marked improvement in grades and overall engagement, emphasizing that the basic income facilitated a more holistic university experience, encompassing academic, social, and extracurricular aspects, vital for personal and professional development.

2. **Participant 4:** Reported enhanced effectiveness in a job training program. The stability of basic income increased her confidence and reduced anxiety, contributing to the successful early completion of the program and subsequent employment. The participant's improved mental health and overall outlook were key factors in this change, demonstrating how financial security can positively impact vocational training engagement and outcomes.
3. **Participant 6:** Highlighted the pivotal role of the pilot in reducing financial stress, enabling better focus on academic pursuits. This reduced stress led to improved academic performance and deeper study engagement. With the financial support, they could decrease working hours and devote more energy to academics, enhancing his academic involvement. This newfound focus was especially significant given previous struggles with education due to mental health issues, underscoring the effect of financial stability on educational engagement.
4. **Participant 12:** Experienced an improvement in academic performance, with reduced financial stress leading to enhanced focus on studies. The ability to balance academic responsibilities with personal wellness activities, like taking walks, positively influenced her mental health and well-being. The participant was able to engage more deeply with her studies and achieve a sense of peace, attributing these improvements to the alleviation of financial worries, which in turn facilitated greater academic engagement and performance.

Strategic Long-Term Career Planning

This section highlights the significance of financial security in facilitating not just immediate vocational choices but also in enabling thoughtful planning for future career development. By being freer from immediate financial constraints, participants could align their learning and training choices more closely with their professional aspirations, emphasizing the role of financial stability in supporting goal-oriented career planning. The experiences of the four participants reveal the impact of such financial support in shaping deliberate and future-focused educational and career pathways.

1. **Participant 3:** Used the pilot period to explore and engage in opportunities that aligned with her interests and values, even though she did not have a clear long-term career goal initially. This exploratory phase included part-time work and volunteer activities that shaped her career path more indirectly than through deliberate long-term planning. Her strategic planning involved leveraging emerging opportunities, which led to roles more aligned with her education and indirectly contributed to her career development. This experience highlights the importance of exploratory phases in strategic career planning, particularly for students still discovering their career paths.
2. **Participant 4:** Her decision to relocate for better opportunities and participate in the jobs training program demonstrated a deliberate focus on building skills and experiences for her career. The financial cushion from the basic income allowed her to think beyond immediate survival, focusing on longer-term goals and rebuilding vital social networks.
3. **Participant 6:** He strategically used the period of financial stability to decide on furthering his education, driven by his long-term career aspirations. His experience reflects how financial security can facilitate thoughtful career choices aligned with personal values and interests, marking a shift from struggling in retail to pursuing a fulfilling and aligned career path.
4. **Participant 12:** Explored teaching opportunities and considered further education to enhance her career prospects. The basic income gave her the freedom to thoughtfully plan for her future without immediate financial pressures, reflecting on her fit for various fields and seeing her graduate research as relevant to contemporary educational challenges.

Transition and Adaptation in Career Paths

This theme emphasizes the role of basic income in facilitating participants' move from education or training into the workforce, enhancing their confidence and adaptability in the process. The financial stability and flexibility provided by the pilot were instrumental in easing the challenging shift to employment, allowing individuals to select jobs that were not just in line with their educational achievements and personal passions but also supportive of their long-term professional development. This support system significantly reduced stress and bolstered confidence, highlighting the importance of financial backing in helping individuals strategically navigate and adapt to their evolving career landscapes.

1. **Participant 3:** The pilot enabled her to transition smoothly from education to employment, moving away from survival jobs to roles that aligned with her interests and education. This financial stability opened up opportunities for meaningful employment, such as consultancy and a role at her university, allowing her to engage in work that was both fulfilling and aligned with her values. Her career path post-pilot, which included impactful positions like program director at a nonprofit, showcased a significant shift towards using her academic knowledge, personal interests and social connections in her professional life.
2. **Participant 4:** She experienced a significant reduction in stress about entering the workforce thanks to the pilot, which facilitated a smooth transition from the jobs training program to full-time employment. The confidence and stability she gained during this period enabled her to move to a stable, fulfilling employment. Her quick transition into the workforce, even completing the training program early due to early job acquisition, highlights the role of financial support in enabling a confident and effective adaptation to career changes.
3. **Participant 6:** The basic income pilot provided him with the financial security to leave an unsatisfactory job and focus on his education, leading to advancements and a shift towards a career path more aligned with his interests. This support was crucial during the pandemic, allowing him to adapt to changing circumstances and navigate the uncertainty of job loss. His ability to take on different roles and focus on his studies, facilitated by the basic income, illustrates the importance of financial stability in transitioning smoothly in one's career, especially during challenging times.
4. **Participant 12:** The basic income eased her transition from education to the workforce, giving her the flexibility to pursue employment that matched her interests and career goals. With this financial cushion, she could confidently explore teaching opportunities, a crucial support amidst job market uncertainties. The basic income allowed her to be selective in her job applications post-Masters, emphasizing the significance of financial support in enabling graduates to choose jobs that better align with their professional aspirations and not just out of financial necessity.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

For the people in our study, basic income provided an enabling framework to improve their employment situation. The stability and predictability of the income encouraged measured risk taking in the labour market and training. Participants could afford to leave bad work situations and wait for better or more appropriate ones. Participants could afford to complete education and training that was likely to produce benefits over the long term. And participants could perform better at work because their financial worries were less immediately pressing.

These overwhelmingly positive experiences contrast with the participants' prior realities in low-paid work or in receipt of provincial social assistance. As previous research has argued, Ontarians in low-wage work do not have access to much training in the workplace,² while leaving a job in order to pursue training or education is not economically feasible short of substantial savings. Employment insurance rules punish voluntary quits and thus discourage people from taking the risk of leaving bad jobs to find better or more appropriate work. Meanwhile, social assistance recipients who try to get ahead in terms of education or employment often find themselves enmeshed in a set of rules that leave them worse off.³ They are also hamstrung by low benefit rates that make it difficult to sustain work readiness.⁴

Our research design was not one that could capture the extent to which basic income can unlock lasting individual and collective economic gains through better skills matching, skills upgrading and improved work productivity.⁵ We therefore cannot make strong claims about what a universal basic income would or would not do in terms of work and training outcomes. The study nevertheless indicates important policy gaps around training and employment.

Recent social policy thinking centres the importance of public policies to help workers “flow” through situations of job loss or precarious work and back into secure work. Of particular importance are “buffers” that allow people to retain and grow their skills and employability in tough times, and to have access to jobs where they can apply these.⁶ The basic income provided a valuable buffer to this study's participants, a buffer they lacked on social assistance or in precarious work.

Policy Implications

How does one fill the gap around training and employment? Advocates of a basic income guarantee have long underlined the “fit” of basic income with these needs. The basic income could provide the buffer that enables citizens to navigate work and training in a manner that increases productivity. Policymakers should consider integrating basic income elements into broader social safety nets to support strategic career advancement and transitions. Considering that participants earning under \$34,000 per year (or \$48,000 for couples) benefited from the Ontario pilot being studied here, policies should target similar low-income groups for maximum impact. The program's model of reducing the basic income amount by \$0.50 for every dollar earned should be highlighted as an effective incentive for participants to seek employment without the fear of losing all their benefits. This approach can motivate individuals to transition from part-time to full-time employment or better-paying jobs, as seen in examples in this report.

2 Andrew Galley, [Renewing Canada's Social Architecture: Employment Skills Training](#) (Toronto: Mowat Institute, 2015); Amy Cervenak, [Service Class Prosperity in Ontario](#) (Toronto: Martin Prosperity Institute, 2009).

3 John Stapleton, [Why is it so tough to get ahead? How our tangled social programs pathologize the transition to self-reliance](#) (Toronto: Metcalf Foundation, 2007).

4 Dean Herd, Yuna Kim and Christine Carrasco, [Canada's Forgotten Poor? Putting Singles Living Deep in Poverty on the Policy Radar](#) (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2020).

5 For example, we cannot compare against a “control group” who did not receive basic income, or know whether success in getting more stable jobs displaced someone else who otherwise would have had access to that work. In a situation where a large number of people with low incomes received some basic income, the labour market dynamics would be very complex. For instance, a large number of people improving their training would not necessarily produce a corresponding increase in the number of jobs demanding this training.

6 Anton Hemerijck, Stefano Ronchi and Ilze Playgo, “[Social investment as a conceptual framework for analysing well-being returns and reforms in 21st century welfare states](#),” *Socio-Economic Review*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2023).

The basic income structure also provided buffers that were valuable in producing a positive longer-term labour market “flow”. The reduction in financial stress and related improvements in self-reported mental health are important here. It was also valuable in facilitating strategic long-term career planning. With the rise of gig economies, flexible work arrangements, rising living costs and unaffordable housing, policies should adapt to provide adequate support structures that accommodate irregular income patterns.

Beyond Basic Income

In the absence of a basic income guarantee, this study still raises policy implications for income security programs. There are blueprints for reworking social assistance and unemployment benefits to produce a buffer that could allow people with low incomes to move in and out of employment and training without being scarred by extended periods of poverty or joblessness. For instance, in rethinking “adult benefits” in Canada almost twenty years ago, the Caledon Institute proposed Temporary Income and Employment Preparation benefits to support training and job search efforts with stable and adequate income benefits. In this model, people out of work but actively looking for employment would receive a flat-rate income-tested benefit even if they did not qualify for EI, while people requiring training would follow employment preparation plans and be treated like workers by receiving bi-weekly flat rate benefits.⁷

A recent innovation that includes a few of these features is Quebec’s ‘Aim for Employment Program’ (*Programme Objectif Emploi*), which provides first time social assistance applicants with immediate employment and skills development interventions. It is tied to a \$70 per week participation allowance, while participation in training or self-employment measures provides \$370-\$475 per week. Early evaluations indicate some successes in increasing employment rates and earnings for participants.⁸ The program’s specific eligibility conditions nevertheless limit its capacity to act as an ongoing buffer.

More recently, Canadian researchers have considered how to design federal income security interventions that might alleviate poverty, especially for single working-aged adults. For instance, the Maytree Foundation has published a proposal to turn the Canada Worker’s Benefit into the Canada Working-Age Supplement. In their preferred model, all Canadian adults would benefit from an annual \$3000 floor with a potential \$1000 boost tied to employment earnings. This would start being taxed back when employment earnings reached \$22,944 and disappear at employment earnings of \$42,944.⁹ In a recent report for the Institute for Research on Public Policy, Gillian Petit considers how changes to existing federal benefits might confront the cost-of-living crisis for low-income households. She ultimately recommends tweaking the GST/HST credit, either to offer a \$100 per month top-up spread among low- and middle-income households, or a \$150 per month top-up targeted at those in deep poverty.¹⁰ Both reports recognize the need for greater income security for adults with low incomes as a precondition for building better individual and collective outcomes.

The accounts in this study nevertheless set the bar high for these more targeted solutions. As they show, it is when policy provides true *security* that people in poorly paid work or receiving social assistance can find the footing to build a better path through the labour market. If new income security interventions still leave people well below the poverty line, they may not produce a sufficient buffer to enable the kinds of measured risk-taking documented by this study’s respondents.

7 Ken Battle, Michael Mendelson and Sherri Torjman, [Towards A New Architecture for Canada’s Adult Benefits](#) (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2006).

8 Ministère du Travail, de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité Sociale, [Rapport d’évaluation des effets nets du Programme Objectif Emploi](#) (Montréal : Direction de l’évaluation, 2021).

9 Garima Talwar Kapoor, Mohy Tabbara, Sherri Hanley and Sasha McNicoll, [How to Reduce the Depth of Single Adult Poverty in Canada: Proposal for a Canada Working-Age Supplement](#) (Toronto: Maytree Foundation, 2022).

10 Gillian Petit, [Improving Access to Food and Essential Needs: Options for a More Generous Cash-Transfer Benefit](#). IRPP Study no. 93 (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2024).

Appendix: Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in conducting our study, including recruitment strategies, interview processes, and participant selection criteria, and thematic analysis.

Recruitment strategy

Recruitment for this study was complicated by the fact that we were trying to reach a very small and specific population, namely people who had been part of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot in 2018-19 *and* who had engaged in education, training or employment while part of the pilot. The recruitment process primarily used social media platforms and networks affiliated with the Basic Income Canada Network (BICN) and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR).

- **Social media campaigns:** Recruitment ads were disseminated through Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook ad campaign commenced in July 2022 and concluded in October 2023. Twitter ads began slightly later, in December 2022, to supplement the recruitment process due to initial slow responses from the Facebook campaign. These Twitter ads continued until October 2023.
- **Networks outreach:** Additionally, the study's recruitment ad was circulated via the BICN's monthly email newsletter. Outreach efforts extended through the networks associated with the HRPR as well.

Interview process

The interviews were conducted from December 2022 to June 2023. Despite an initial target of 30 interviews, the study concluded with 12 in-depth interviews. Key aspects of the interview process include:

- **Mode of interviews:** A majority of the interviews, 11 in total, were conducted over the phone using a tape recorder, while one interview was conducted via Zoom with audio only.
- **Pilot testing of interview guide:** The interview guide was collaboratively designed by the research team, with input from our community partners, the HRPR. Prior to its use in the study, the guide was tested on individuals not participating in the study to ensure its effectiveness in eliciting relevant information.
- **Ethical considerations:** Informed consent was obtained through email, using a comprehensive document that outlined the study details, the research team, participant rights, data protection, and contact information for the McMaster University Ethics Board, which provided ethics clearance for the study.
- **Duration and structure:** Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was comprehensive in nature. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a detailed questionnaire that covered experiences before, during, and after the basic income pilot, focusing specifically on employment and vocational experiences. All interviews were conducted by Mohammad Ferdosi, who possessed experience in conducting interviews with Ontario basic income and social assistance recipients as part of previous research projects.
- **Participant-led direction:** While the interviews were guided, participants were given the freedom to steer the conversation at any time, allowing them to elaborate on any aspects of their experiences.
- **Transcription:** All recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional for accuracy and thoroughness.

Participant selection

The process of participant selection entailed the following aspects:

- **Initial contact:** Interested individuals responded to our recruitment call via social media, BICN, or the HRPR, expressing their desire to participate in the study through email.
- **Screening questions:** To ascertain eligibility, potential participants were asked a series of screening questions via email. These questions primarily sought to confirm whether the individuals had engaged in work, education, or training programs,

either part-time or full-time, during the basic income pilot.

- **Eligibility criteria:** Eligibility was contingent upon having work experiences, educational or training experiences, or a combination of these during the pilot period. Individuals with no working or educational/training experiences during the pilot were not eligible for participation. Additionally, participants needed to be able to provide documentation as proof of their recipient status in the pilot program.
- **Response rate and participant selection process:** Approximately 35 individuals responded to our recruitment call in total. Those who did not qualify for the study typically lacked work or vocational experiences, often due to disabilities, such as current recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program.
- **Participant compensation:** Participants were compensated with an honorarium of \$125 CAD via wire transfer upon the completion of their interviews.

Continued recruitment efforts

Even after conducting the twelfth interview in June 2023, efforts to recruit additional participants continued until the end of October 2023. This persistence stemmed from our initial goal to conduct more interviews. After several months of continued recruitment effort without additional participants, we decided to proceed with the data we had. Although we cannot conclude that saturation was achieved, our final interviews showed a considerable thematic consistency with our earlier interviews.

Thematic analysis process

The thematic analysis of the qualitative data was a process aimed at identifying patterns and commonalities in the participants' experiences relating to the impact of basic income on employment and vocational experiences. The following steps were undertaken:

1. **Initial data review:** The process began with an in-depth review of the interview transcripts. This initial review was aimed at gaining an understanding of the participants' narratives and the context of their experiences.
2. **Identification of preliminary themes:** During the review, notes were taken, and preliminary themes were identified. These themes were based on recurring patterns, ideas, and concepts that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their pilot and post-pilot experiences.
3. **Coding of data:** Following the identification of preliminary themes, the transcripts were coded. This coding involved assigning labels to specific portions of the text that corresponded to the identified themes or sub-themes.
4. **Comparative analysis:** The coded data were then compared across different participants to identify commonalities and variations in their experiences during the pilot and post-pilot periods. This comparative analysis helped in understanding how basic income support impacted individuals in similar or differing ways during both periods.
5. **Frequency count of themes:** To determine the prevalence of each theme, a frequency count was conducted. This count involved tallying how often each identified theme or sub-theme appeared across all participants' narratives. This quantitative aspect of the analysis helped to highlight the most prominent themes and concerns shared among the participants.
6. **Theme refinement and finalization:** Based on the comparative analysis and frequency counts, the preliminary themes were refined. This refinement process involved merging similar themes, subdividing complex themes, and discarding themes that lacked sufficient evidence. The result was the establishment of a set of distinguishable themes related to work and vocational learning that represented the collective experiences of our participants during the pilot and post-pilot periods.

