

NOTHING ARTIFICIAL ABOUT THIS INTELLIGENCE:



JOURNEYING TOWARD MEANINGFUL INCOME

The role of technology in ending generational poverty



Introduction

Toronto is home to over **360,000** residents (**13.2%** of the population) struggling with poverty in Canada. Despite being one of the richest cities, Toronto continues to have a higher rate of low income than Canada (**11.1%**), Ontario (**10.0%**), and the rest of the regions in the GTHA¹.

For this reason, YSM is continually looking for new ways to connect Torontonians to the resources they need as the city continues to change — from rising inflation to growing housing disparities, increased food insecurity to shortfalls in public sector funding.

More specifically, at YSM we adapt our approach to eliminating generational poverty because poverty itself is complicated. A single parent long-time resident may face completely different hardships than a newly-landed refugee; a 20-year-old struggling with mental illness and unemployment will have a different set of needs than a 60-year-old with fibromyalgia and anxiety looking for financial support.

These are real examples of community members we've supported at YSM; our day-to-day work cannot function within a silo and must shift to meet a community member's unique needs and social

environments — a requirement for long-term impact. This forward-thinking framework puts community members' futures at the forefront as we work to dismantle the many barriers contributing to the experience of poverty. This is what led us to develop TIMES™ (*Transformation Integrated Measurement and Evaluation System*), a custom-built measurement and evaluation system that captures YSM program data in real time.

Over the past six years, TIMES™ has quantified the qualitative experiences we witnessed — and continue to witness — every day. We're learning which programs and services are having the most impact so we can learn which ones are proving most helpful to the people we serve. To gain this understanding, we are measuring: the frequency of program completion; tandem use of multiple programs; and marked changes in behaviour and comprehension.

Throughout 2023, we took a deep dive into the data that surrounds our employment programming — focusing on the various pathways our community members take toward securing meaningful income.

Meaningful Income was the central focus because income can come in many forms

and the journey is not always a straight-forward one. Often the pathway toward meaningful income does not begin directly with employment; instead, it involves deep listening to understand the complex social barriers that affect people on a personal basis. By considering lived experience and circumstances in conjunction with corresponding data, we're able to make sound recommendations that address the core issues which lead to poverty.

But it's not just about numbers. It's about the people who are being impacted by the services that are supporting their journey out of poverty. That's why we featured three stories showcasing the impact that TIMES™ has on our community in our 2023 webinar series, **Pathways to Meaningful Income**. First, we heard from a community member who needed employment support but was suffering from food insecurity and mental health challenges. (Watch the recordings at ysm.ca.)

Second, we had a discussion with one of YSM's employment partners and how we worked with them to build a bespoke program and boost workplace training test scores leading to improved job retention.

Third, we featured a community member who was introduced to YSM by his daughter.

He was struggling to navigate public support systems which kept him from progressing out of poverty. We were there every step of the way, supporting him with program recommendations, applications, meetings and personal counselling. The better he understood the system and the specific aspects that applied to him, his mental health and sense of self-worth both markedly improved.

Since 1896, YSM has understood that support is individualistic. As every new person enters through our doors, we assess and prioritize their individual needs and work with them to provide a unique mélange of support. We have always known anecdotally that we were changing lives — we saw it in the faces of community members. TIMES™ now helps to quantify this, while keeping us accountable to the communities and families that we serve. It puts autonomy back into their hands on the journey toward meaningful income and a future without poverty.

Our vision is to end generational poverty. Through TIMES™ we are now able to envision our progress toward meeting that goal.

¹City of Toronto. 2021 Census: Families, Households, Marital Status and Income: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/9877-City-Planning-2021-Census-Backgrounder-Families-Hhlds-Marital-Status-Income.pdf> . Accessed January 16, 2024.



What is TIMES™?

TIMES™ is YSM's proprietary data aggregation software. It helps us to gather data, measure impact and take data-driven actionable steps. Developed and fine-tuned since 2018, TIMES™ gives us the information needed to address immediate community concerns and create sound succession plans for YSM program users.

This is all in an effort to solidify our theory of change — the intentional steps we take when moving a community member from surviving to thriving — by measuring whether we are moving the dial toward our vision of ending generational poverty. By integrating TIMES™ with the world's leading Customer Relations Management (CRM) software, Salesforce, we have a powerful tool that shows the tangible impact we're having on the lives of our community members.

But how do we ensure that our interventions, programs and services are actually moving people toward a future without poverty? TIMES™ is broken down into 18 wellness indicators. Community members self-identify their current state at the beginning of each program and track their progress across a five-point scale (fig.1).

Every YSM case manager has their own Salesforce profile which provides visibility to each community member that they work with (fig.2) and the service deliveries we provide them (fig.2). With the data, we can now show correlations of the intricate intersectionality between generational poverty and the 18 indicators (fig. 3), confirm theories and generate new hypotheses to explore.

Snapshot of TIMES™ Wellness Indicators & Five-Point Scale

Transformation Integrated Measurement and Evaluation System

DOMAIN	INDICATOR	RELIEF → TRANSITION		
		1	2	3
Connection	Family Structural Stability	Estranged from family or family equivalent	Belongs to an unstable family or family equivalent	Belongs to a viable family or family equivalent
	Relationships	Isolated	Minimal involvement in a trusting relationship	Directly engages with others and in building relationships
	System Navigation	No ability to navigate their local context	Some knowledge of services in their local context	Knows what and how to access in their local context but requires assistance
Economic	Employment Readiness	No identified employable skills	Develops knowledge of employable skills	Develops the practice of employable skills
	Employment Status	No work or informal work	Temporary precarious work	Unsustainable precarious work
	Economic Judgment	No financial literacy or sound decision making	Has some financial literacy but does not apply to decision making	Has some financial literacy and starts to apply to decision making

Fig. 1

Service Delivery Volumes

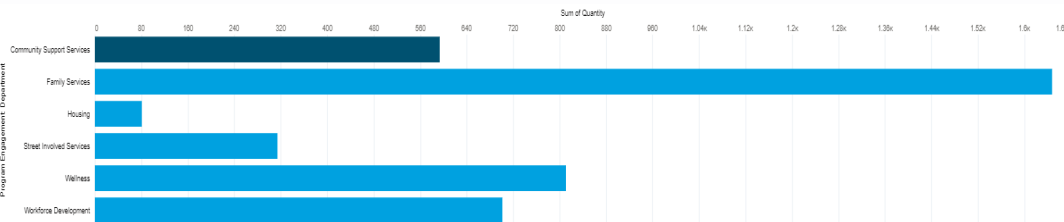


Fig. 2





All Completed Employment Program Engagements

TIMES Indicator Correlations at Program Engagement Start
 All Completed Employment Program Engagements (447 assessments)

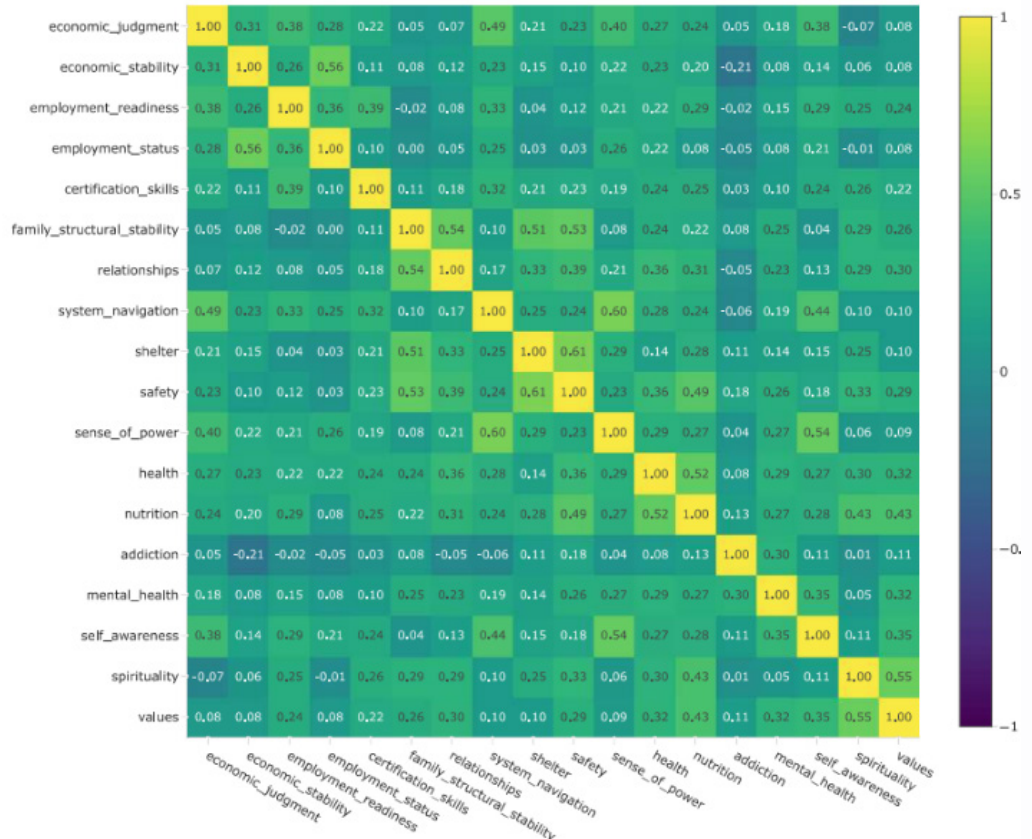


Fig. 3

YSM has also used TIMES™ to support and monitor our organization-wide short and long term strategic planning process to monitor the efficacy of our programs by measuring the movement of people toward financial and social stability and the number of participants per YSM program. Doing so has led us to more adequately resource and uncover the areas of our programming that are making significant impacts on community members year-over-year (fig.4). During this period of time, we also concurrently ran successful pilot programs with Children’s Aid Society of Toronto and the City of Toronto using TIMES™.

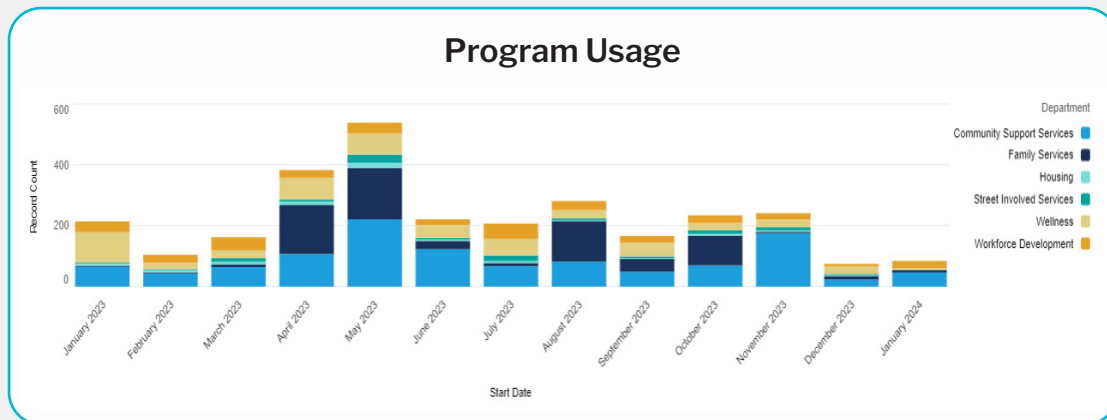


Fig. 4

Throughout this initial application of TIMES™, we identified four wellness indicators that have a profound influence on outcomes: Relationships, Self-Awareness, Sense of Power and Values. By adjusting our programming to ensure these four indicators are addressed, we catalyze progress toward financial stability and improved wellbeing.





RISE

Respond
Invite
Support
Engage

RISE: YSM's Model of Care

YSM's RISE (**R**espond, **I**nvoke, **S**upport, **E**ngage) model of care is a pivotal part of how we serve communities experiencing poverty. By using this framework, we provide immediate relief services as an entry point to more comprehensive programs and services. Offering support when they need it, how they need it, and at their own pace has created an encouraging environment for community members to develop long-term skills for a stable future.

The four-step pathway (fig.5) advances community members toward exiting the generational cycle of poverty.

Respond to immediate community needs

YSM provides no-cost, low-barrier access to urgent support services, including meals, our Food Bank, warm clothing, hygiene kits, mental health interventions and housing supports. This is especially important for people with refugee status, those fleeing violence and street-involved youth, as they may feel like there is no one they can trust.

Invite community members to programs

This stage is aimed at gently inviting individuals to engage more deeply in our programs and services through relationship and trust building, including anger management, support groups, financial literacy training and goal-setting courses. Program recommendations are tailored to meet community members' long-term goals.

Support for long-lasting solutions

As community members navigate the system, they will inevitably encounter hurdles or have questions. It is our responsibility to be there to support every community member for the long haul. This can include an introduction to a mentor, specific "hard skills" training to advance employment readiness and more.

Engage with community

Once stabilized, we invite community members to continue engaging with YSM and their community by volunteering and becoming influencers, leaders and mentors for others who are struggling. It is only through working collectively that we have had countless breakthroughs and successes over the years, changing the course of families and individuals generationally.

RISE model

Full System of Care

RESPOND	INVITE	SUPPORT	ENGAGE
Drop In	Health	Life Skills	Community Development
Food	Counselling	Education	Organizing
Clothing	Mentorship	Housing	Advocacy
Community Support	Spiritual Support	Stabilization	Volunteer Engagement

Fig. 5

More than **60%** of community members require services within the first two stages of RISE— Respond and Invite — as determined by TIMES™. Though we walk with them throughout the complete four-step journey, this information is vital for resource allocation and increasing community impact.

Through the use of TIMES™, we're also able to answer additional questions such as: What are the specific programs being used? How are program outcomes impacting each other? Demographically, who is using these programs?

An example of this can be seen in program use (fig. 6). Individual community members who use more than one program (graph on the right), initially show lower TIMES™ indicator scores than those who are engaged in one program only. This can be interpreted to mean that participants who engage in 3+ programs require layered support when compared to the typical one program user. Further, these participants often enroll in more programs to determine what options work best for them.

We can therefore safely assume that if someone is being onboarded and requires more wraparound services, they are more likely to have multiple underlying issues that need to be addressed to create long-term, sustainable change.

Average Indicator Score by Total Programs

Closing TIMES

Average Indicator Score by Total Programs
Closing TIMES

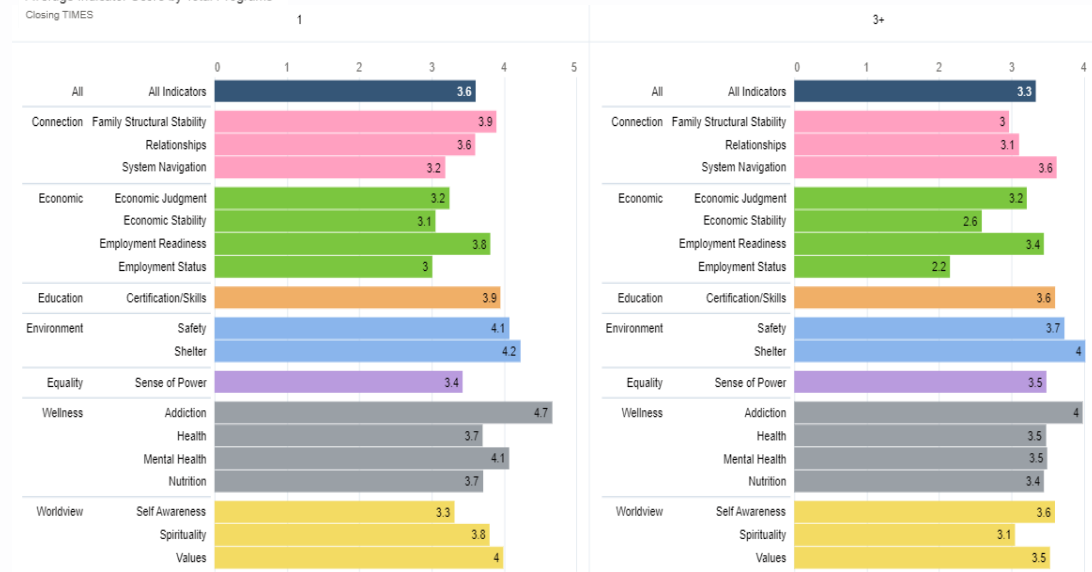


Fig. 6





PATHWAYS TO MEANINGFUL INCOME: **THREE JOURNEYS**

Part 1: An individual's journey

CHASE'S STORY

When 26-year-old Chase arrived at YSM, his stomach was aching. Living with food insecurity heightened Chase's hypersensitivity to noise and light, and peaked his depression and severe OCD — his days were defined by debilitating headaches and suicidal thoughts. This put Chase's life on hold.

Using the RISE model, we supported Chase with his immediate needs such as warm meals, clothes and mental health resources before considering the next step toward a meaningful income. This placed him in a mental and physical space to begin the journey toward long-term goal setting.

The data collected by TIMES™ to date shows that many people like Chase enter through YSM's doors. They require a variety of support services prior to employment readiness programming.

When it comes to meaningful income generation, it could mean many things. For some it means landing a job that supports their long-term goals, for others it's discovering and applying for government subsidies to provide access to immediate childcare support and housing.

Ultimately, meaningful income is self-defined. At YSM, it is our mission to provide the support systems to steer community members toward the resources they are seeking based on their own goals. The journey from poverty to employment is complex, often requiring a variety of support services along the way.

In Chase's case, it was clear that pushing him directly into employment programs wouldn't address his mental health concerns. These barriers had to be addressed before he could focus on employment to the fullest of his abilities.

Using TIMES™ to analyze the data of those seeking employment between June 2021 and May 2023, over **85%** required initial mental health support. They also needed housing assistance (**25.4%**), youth drop-in services (**23.7%**) and Food Bank access (**22%**).

The vast majority of those looking for employment access more than one YSM program; between February to May 2023, of the **118** community members receiving employment services, **36** participated in two YSM programs, **21** joined three programs and **59** were involved in four or more (fig.7).

When coupled with the fact that those who participate in more than one program tend to score lower on TIMES™ wellness indicators (fig. 6), we come to the conclusion that taking a wraparound approach can positively impact employment programming efficacy.

Understanding TIMES™ data helps us to meet and adapt to our community's definitive needs, critical to individual and social change. By evaluating the services that are — and aren't — working, we identify which programs and wellness indicators have the most fruitful outcomes on an individual's journey out of poverty.

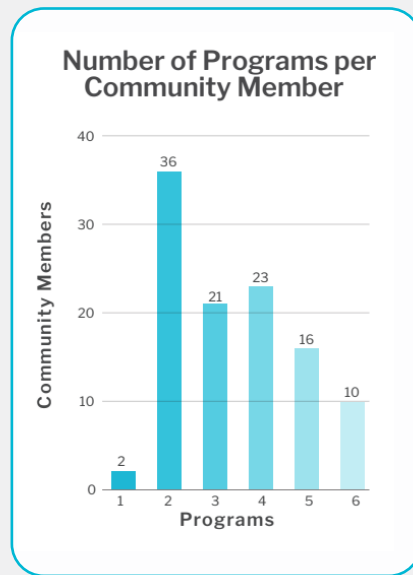


Fig. 7

Part 2: An employer's journey

THE PARAGON SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

For four years, Paragon Security has been a YSM partner, connecting job seekers to meaningful employment. As a company, they align with YSM's beliefs to empower and uplift communities and provide opportunities in an employee-centred, holistic way.

The partnership began with a tailored approach to training and recruitment, pipelining YSM community members towards employment at Paragon, which requires a security licence. Customized training led to high comprehension and knowledge among the candidates — but yet there was a high failure rate upon final security licence testing. Through interviews and assessments, we learned that while candidates understood the curriculum, many didn't have the technical know-how of test taking.

By adding a Test Taking Workshop to the Paragon Security training program, community member pass rates increased to an astounding **85%**, which led to high rates of employment and the start of earning meaningful incomes.

When connecting community members to the right employers, there is an extensive preliminary phase necessary to prepare them for the workforce. Through the use of TIMES™, we're able to understand that the bulk of employment programming participants' time goes to career exploration (**41.4%**) but the range of additional services varies. It includes supervised visits to meetings and appointments (**7.8%**), art/music therapy (**6%**), groups and courses (**5.9%**), and various other categories (fig. 8).

Time Allocation for Employment Seekers

HOURS FOR THE AVERAGE PARTICIPANT BY TOP 10 SERVICES

TOTAL HOURS FOR ALL SERVICES DURING THE PROGRAM FOR THE AVERAGE PARTICIPANT = 197 HRS

Top 10 Services	Hours/Participant
Career Exploration	81.5
Supervised Visit	15.3
Art or Music Therapy	11.8
Groups & Courses	11.6
Individual Counselling	11.4
Life Skills Coaching	10.6
Job Matching	10.0
Pastoral Care	8.5
Micro Counselling	5.2
Home Visit	4.8

Fig. 8

Doing this preliminary work prepares community members for the workforce while also providing a basis of support throughout their employment. We highlighted the continual, adaptive training style in webinar 2. (Watch the recordings at ysm.ca.)

By working with employers and community members in a continual, adaptive style, we identify hurdles along the way and develop solutions to overcome them. With this approach, we see marked changes in our community members' wellness indicators, with significant gains in the Economic and Equality categories.

Fig. 9 depicts the changes to one's average indicator score upon completing the employment programming.²

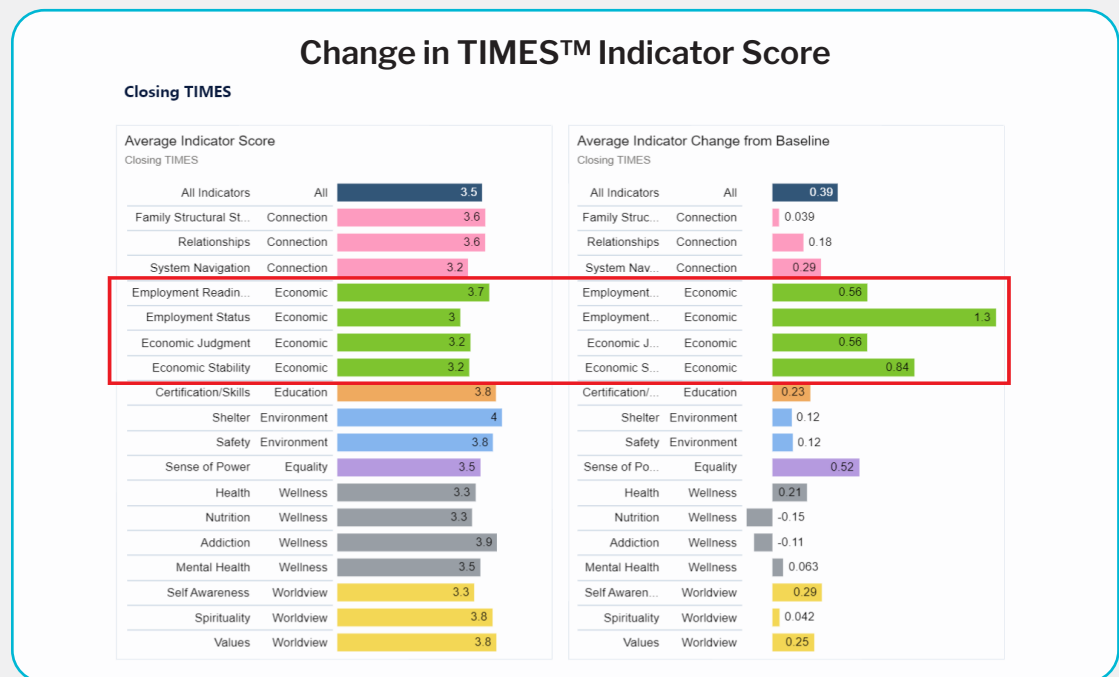


Fig. 9

²Negative nutrition and addiction scores reflect the continued presence of food insecurity and substance use in Toronto. YSM works alongside various food banks and addiction agencies to provide additional support services.

Part 3: Systems navigation

STEVE'S STORY

As a single father and owner of a struggling roofing business, Steve was lost in a maze of debt and overdue taxes, compounded by illiteracy challenges, health concerns and social anxiety. This led to isolation, hoarding and alcoholism to cope. Steve's physical health also waned as arthritis and fibromyalgia left him in crippling pain. The physical, emotional and mental toll weighed on him and began affecting his relationship with his two daughters.

Steve wanted to change his life but didn't know where to begin or how to navigate the available supports. His 20-year-old daughter, Alice, introduced him to YSM as she was seeking her own support programs. At the time, Alice was carrying the burden of caring for the family, and was the primary caregiver to her younger sister who was struggling with addiction.

We tailored services (fig. 10) that reflected Steve's needs. This process saw us connecting him to health practitioners, social assistance programs, addiction services and professionals, such as lawyers and accountants.

As a result, Steve has experienced a significant increase in his system navigation TIMES™ score, which correlates to improvements in addiction and mental health. This has created a critical shift in the life of Steve and his family as he has decluttered his home, filed his taxes, folded his business, enrolled in financial support, connected with physiotherapists and no longer depends on substances to cope. This has given Alice the opportunity to focus on her own financial goals and dreams, creating an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty for future generations.

Ending generational poverty in Toronto requires much more than simply making community improvements for the short term. Instead, it requires working to dismantle the many barriers that keep community members trapped in the cycle of poverty.

Many of these neighbours often rely on social support programs, such as Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and require assistance navigating the various resources available to them. For Steve, nearly a third of the support we provided to him was dedicated to Systems Navigation, such as applying for OW and ODSP and assisting with meetings and paperwork.

Despite supporting Steve with this stream of financial assistance, receiving OW and/or ODSP is not enough to end the aggressive cycle of poverty. On average, recipients of OW or ODSP live 60% below the poverty line.³ Clearly, social assistance is inadequate for basic living and additional supports are needed to make ends meet. Without these, a single parent, for example, may have to choose between paying for rent, groceries or the daycare that enables them to work.

Because each community member's experience is unique, TIMES™ helps us to connect the dots between their individual needs and the multiple supplementary services at their disposal. This is one of the many ways through which generational poverty can be eliminated.

Once we provide guidance toward the appropriate community agencies, organizations and government programs and services that meet their needs, we're in their corner every step of the way, from accompanying them to meetings, to coaching and paperwork help.

By guiding community members through the complex system of social support, we're helping to establish a deeper sense of self-confidence and systems competence.

Systems competence establishes a strong knowledge base and leads to individuals dictating their own self-advocacy while navigating the social support landscape. This is why Systems Navigation has become a critical TIMES™ indicator in the pursuit of ending chronic poverty.

³Maytree. *Welfare in Canada: Ontario*: <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/ontario/>. Accessed December 20th 2023.

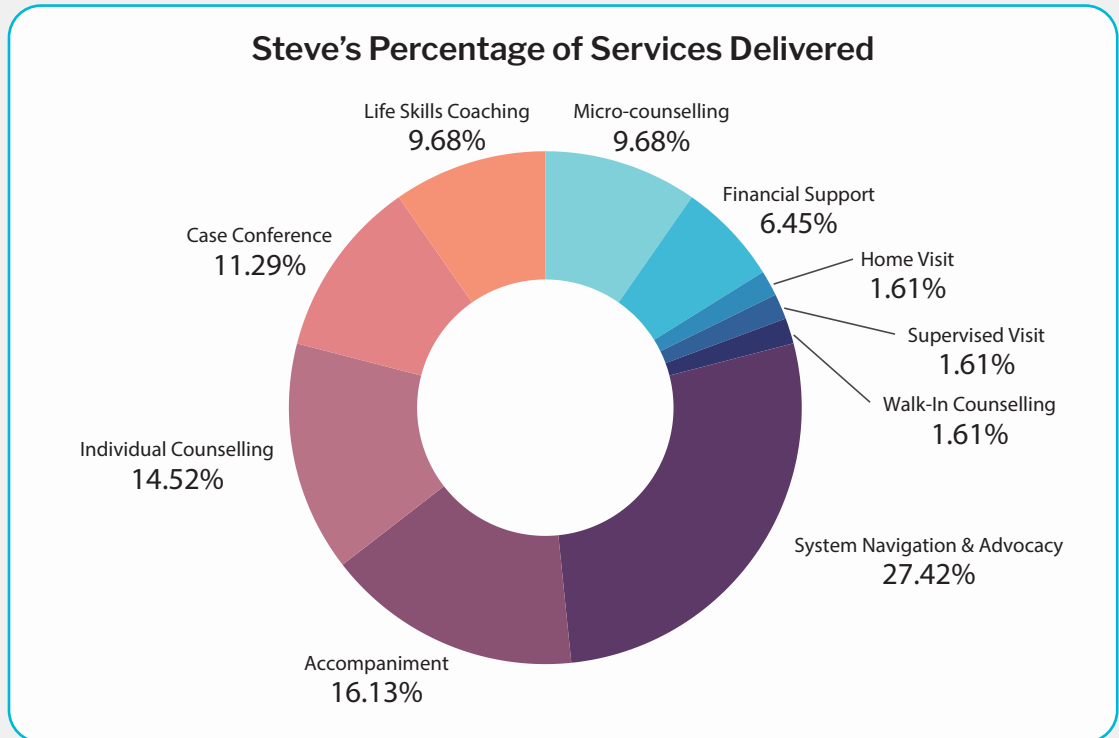
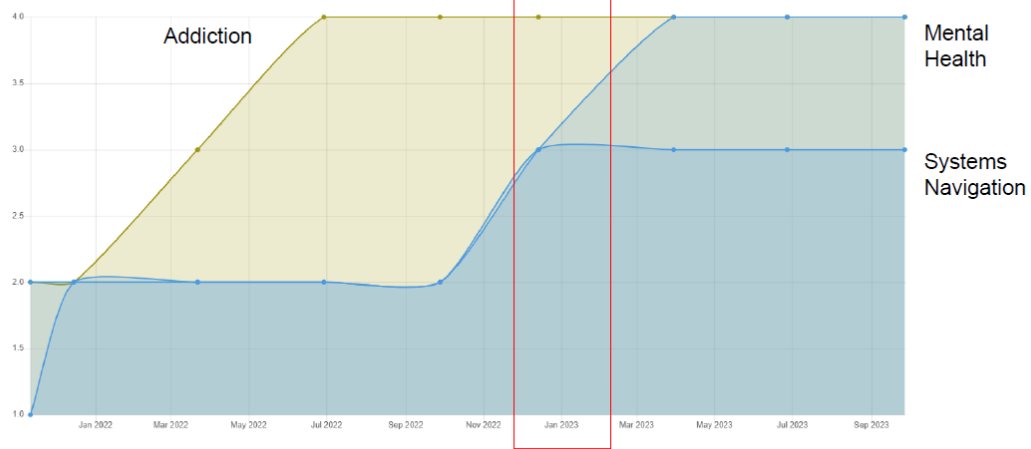


Fig. 10

The data provided through TIMES™ provided statistical proof of the many barriers that seem to be keeping many people *trapped in* poverty. Socially, we see the impact of Systems Navigation on two other TIMES™ metrics: Mental Health and Sense of Power (fig.11). As Steve continued to navigate the system, he began feeling more at ease and self-confident in governing his life outcomes. Even when Steve's Systems Navigation aptitude seemingly plateaued, his Mental Health and Sense of Power continued to rise.

TIMES™ gives us the opportunity to visualize the programs that have the most profound impact on outcomes and helps us prioritize the right individualized resources. The software has also shone a light on how critical it is to empower and place self-governance at the centre of YSM's programming.

TIMES™: Systems Navigation, Addictions & Mental Health



TIMES™: Systems Navigation & Sense of Power

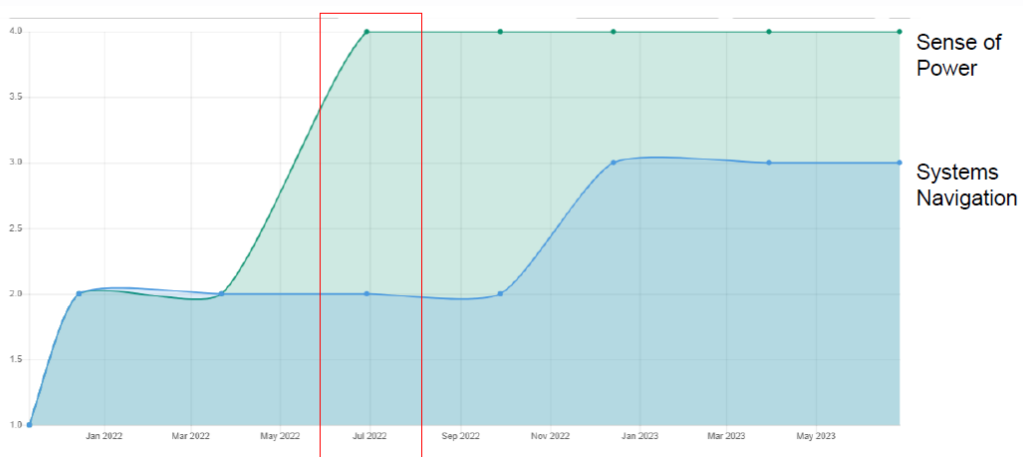


Fig. 11

Conclusion

Ending generational poverty is our vision for the future of Toronto. To achieve this, we must take a holistic approach tailored to meet individual and community needs — it's not one size fits all.

Everyone has their own experiences and circumstances that result in the outcomes of today. By listening to community needs and applying the RISE model of care framework, we, ultimately, make informed program recommendations using TIMES™ data.

TIMES™ holds us accountable to our community. We are able to accurately measure and monitor our programs and their impact on moving community members out of chronic poverty toward stability. We visually determine where community members begin, how they are progressing and the improvements that can be made along the way to support them further.

With TIMES™, we are more present than ever, guiding all community members toward being self-confident in their abilities to thrive, whether that's through direct employment or a suite of support services that establish stability in their lives, propelling them toward meaningful income.

Often the pathway toward meaningful income begins with deep listening to understand — and dismantle — the complex social barriers that affect people on a personal basis. Poverty reduction is a concerted effort: goal-setting and finding the right organizations, government bodies and community programs that support this process.

As we continue our work with TIMES™, we welcome partners to the table who share our vision, connecting our resources, skills and experience to help move Toronto closer to the kind of city we all believe is possible.





Thank you to our partners for making
Pathways to Meaningful Income possible.



Avonlea Trust

YSM SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Martin Centre (Head office and community usage space)
306 Gerrard Street East

Evergreen Centre for Street-Involved Youth
365 Spadina Avenue


Davis Centre & Church at the Mission (Food Bank, Cornerstone and Bridges' programming)
270 Gerrard Street East

Genesis Place (YSM's Transitional Housing Complex)
280 Gerrard Street East

Double Take Thrift Store & Computer Literacy Centre
310 Gerrard Street East


**TO LEARN HOW DATA CAN MOVE YOUR POVERTY
REDUCTION STRATEGY FORWARD, CONTACT:**


Alisa Velthuisen
ReVISION Partnership Manager


 avelthuisen@ysm.ca



CONNECT WITH US:


 **416-929-9614 OR 1-800-416-5111**


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