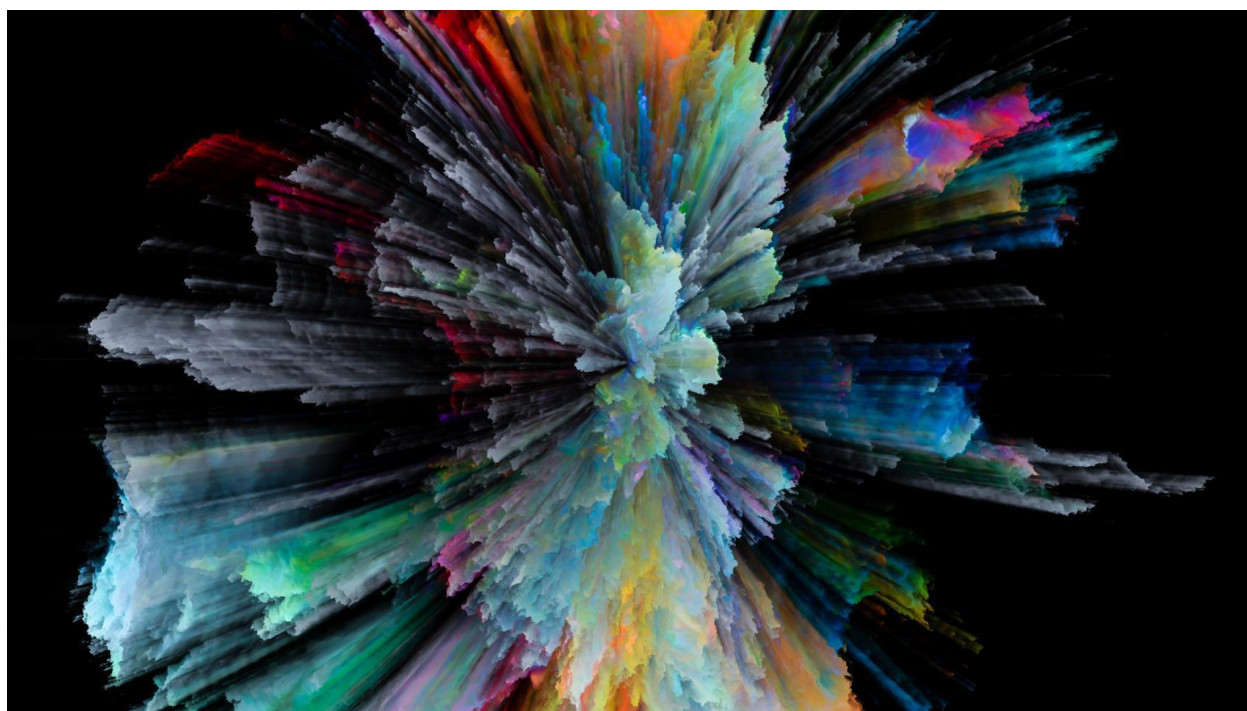Evidence for Community Employment Services:

A Collaborative Regional Approach

Final Report: A Tale of Transformation

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Canadian
Career Development
Foundation

Fondation canadienne
pour le développement
de carrière

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Executive Summary

There has perhaps never been a time when efficient, innovative and impactful career/employment services are more needed. The *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach* project brought together members of a regional coalition of frontline career/ employment agencies serving diverse clients across the Avalon Region of Newfoundland with researchers from the Canadian Career Development Foundation, Goss Gilroy and ARMS to rigorously test PRIME, a new approach to accountability and quality service. This project took a regional approach to addressing national and international challenges currently faced by the career/employment service delivery ecosystem and its funders.

> The project set out to create the necessary systems to support evidence-based career/employment services and engender a culture of evaluation and accountability in which both policy and practice are actively informed and strengthened by better metrics, systems, and approaches.

This project also was intended to build the confidence and capacity of the sector to be innovative in its development of services, strategic in its delivery and impactful with respect to priority client outcomes.

This report presents the findings of this project, which can be summarized as follows:

- A Tale of Client Transformation: Data from PRIME demonstrates statistically and clinically significant positive changes in clients across a robust range of employability indicators and outcomes as they progress through career/employment services.
- A Tale of Practitioner Transformation: Quantitative and qualitative data confirms statistically significant positive changes to practitioners engaged in the Community Employment Collaboration, a regional network of career/employment service providers, who participated in the project and used PRIME. Changes include positive changes to practitioners' professionalism, ethical practice, client engagement, quality service and evidence-based practice.

A third, aspirational Tale of Transformation emerges from this research: A tale of potential transformation at a broader and wider systems level. This project has demonstrated the art of the possible. It has shown how clients, practitioners, their

organizations, and a network of agencies can be transformed and offers a glimpse of how much larger and more complex service ecosystems *could* be transformed. The tools, training, and supports are developed, tested and ready for wider implementation. Moving from "problem to possible" is now within reach for any jurisdiction.

Background

The Need

In the face of complex and unpredictable labour markets, clients with multiple barriers and limited resources, there has perhaps never been a time when efficient, innovative and impactful career/employment services are more needed. Career/employment service providers strive for the best possible outcomes for those they serve and funders want to know that they are getting a strong return on investment, but current data management systems and professional support tools have been woefully limited.

This project set out to address several pervasive issues plaguing career/employment services and the metrics used to evaluate them:

1. Clients present with multiple strengths and complex needs, but these are not comprehensively or consistently assessed. As a result, the constellation of client needs is not understood and there is no data to guide and inform strategic service delivery planning.

2. Most reporting to funders is limited to whether a client becomes employed or is referred to training. What gets measured gets done and these metrics incentivize inadequate employability assessment and premature referrals to work/training, especially when funding is tied to these outcomes. Client needs are not adequately assessed or addressed, clients experience false starts and failures, employers/educational programs are unhappy with referrals and dissatisfied and increasingly unhopeful clients cycle repeatedly through the system. This contributes to a full circle of inadequate metrics leading to inadequate

"Effective career information and guidance systems are a key to making lifelong learning a reality for all. They can help to make the best use of human resources in the labour market as well as in education by allowing better matches between skills and interests and opportunities for work and learning. They are important elements in active labour market policies and active welfare to work policies."
OECD,
https://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/careerguidancepolicyreviewhomepage.htm *(March 2021)*

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services leading to inadequate outcomes. The impact of this cycle extends beyond the individual client and service provider. It contributes cumulatively to a broken service delivery ecosystem characterized by high client recidivism and increasingly complex and costly client needs.

Figure 1 - The Cycle of Inadequate Metrics to Broken Ecosystem
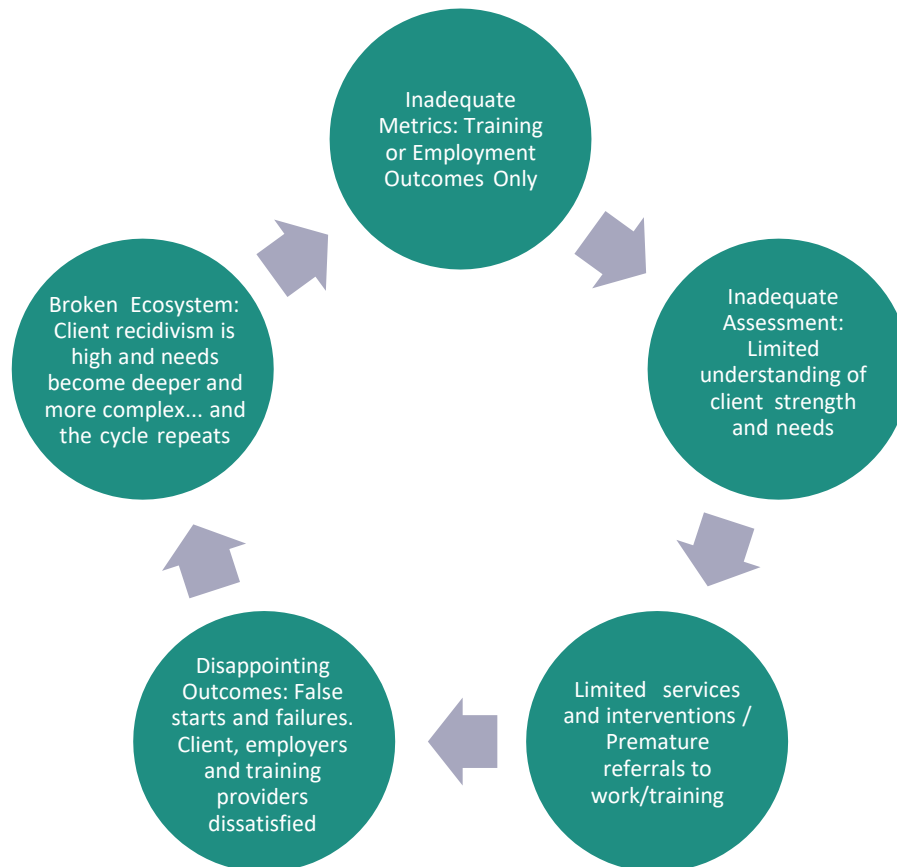
3. The full impact of services – how services address complex client needs and help to move people toward stronger community and labour market attachment – is not known. As a result, there is no strong evidence-based data to inform policy or practice and the entire ecosystem suffers.

4. Meaningful data that is readily accessible and useful to the full range of key stakeholders in the ecosystem is sorely lacking. The only reliable data col lection are counts of employed/trained client, which serve as a flawed and inadequate basis for strategic planning or policy development. Limited or no data is readily available to inform client planning or frontline practice. Clients, frontline staff, age ncies, service delivery networks and funders all need better data and evidence of impact. Clients need accessible and useful data to inform their own career planning. Clients need to see evidence of their employability strengths and needs and of the progress they are making as they engage with supports and services. Frontline

service delivery staff need accessible and useful data to inform their practice. Managers, community developers, and funders need accessible and useful data to see the full story of community assets and needs and the impact of services. In this way, data can inform evidence-based planning, evaluation of services, tactical decision-making, and action. Policy makers need accessible and useful data to inform evidence-based educational and labour market policies.

5. Reporting systems are not integrated into practice. Professionals meet with clients and then, separately need to find time to enter data related to that meeting. As a result, entering data for funders is an unrewarding burden that often is delayed and diluted, resulting in diminished fidelity and data quality.

6. Evaluation often focuses on deficits, while practice is typically grounded in strength-based theories and models.

7. With some notable exceptions, including the Community Employment Collaboration that partnered in this research, career/employment services face chronic challenges in accessing training, professional development and evidence-based tools and resources.

8. As a result, while the career/employment service delivery sector i s keen to demonstrate its impact, the ecosystem across Canada lacks the common framework, language, standards, supports, and capacity needed to ensure rigorous employability assessment, responsive services, quality assurance and accountability.

These issues are seen across Canada and around the world. As long as the employability strengths and needs of service recipients are not assessed and the full impact of career/employment services is not understood, service delivery will be based on best guesses, the service delivery ecosystem will be fragile and return on investment will be unknown.

PRIME

Beginning in 2011, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) set out to address these pervasive challenges. In partnership with career/employment agencies working with diverse clients across New Brunswick, Quebec and Saskatchewan, CCDF and its technical partner, ARMS, worked to build a new and fundamentally different approach to employability assessment, data collection, accountability and quality service assurance. The result is PRIME. Combining rigorous research with frontline wisdom, PRIME is a r obust online employability assessment tool that uses the Employability Dimensions framework and integrates a range of powerful indicators of health and well-being, social integration, and labour market attachment.

- PRIME uses a common assessment platform to gather information on client strengths/needs at entry to service, track incremental, meaningful client changes over the course of receiving services and capture pre-post changes at exit to create a data story of the full client journey and the impact of services.
- It is used collaboratively with clients (avoiding the need to enter data separate from client meetings). Built with the frontlines, it mirrors and guides quality service and includes embedded coaching, cues, resources and tools tailored to specific client needs.
- PRIME provides governments, supervisors, frontline workers and clients with meaningful data.
- It is grounded in almost 10 years of evidence-based research, rigorous data analysis and the experience and wisdom of frontline professionals and their clientele.
- Behind the curtain, PRIME employs a powerful database to enable robust reporting and analysis.

While its early testing showed very promising results, PRIME had not yet been tested over a sustained timeframe or fully integrated into service delivery.

A Regional Approach to Addressing Global Challenges

The *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach* project set out to do that. It brought together members of a regional coalition of frontline career/ employment agencies serving diverse clients across Newfoundland and Labrador with researchers from the Canadian Career Development Foundation, Goss Gilroy and ARMS to rigorously test PRIME and take a regional approach to addressing national and international challenges.

In Newfoundland & Labrador, there had been a growing desire for quantitative data from funded community employment partners. Updated accountability measures were introduced in 2007; accountability consultations were held in 2012-2013; and a new client tool to assess client readiness was mandated in 2014.

The mandated tool was designed as a pre-post client self-assessment tool, but it was being used as an accountability tool to measure changes in client employability. There was powerful resistance to this use of the tool from frontline staff.
- Staff questioned the validity of a self-assessment measure when often a lack of self-awareness was the key developmental barrier for clients.
- The tool was seen as inconsistent and incongruent with existing service delivery.

- Staff reported misuse of the tool (clients simply pressing random buttons to get through the assessment).
- Uptake in the usage of the tool was low.
- Not surprisingly, data did not capture signs of improvement.

Community partners were consulted and reported their desire to try another tool. There was a desire to take charge of their own data story, demonstrate meaningful impact, learn from evidence-based data to improve service delivery and strategic planning and capture the full journey to employment for funders and policy makers. With these aims, the *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach* project was born.

THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

Phase 1 | 10 Years of ARMS Case Management Data

Mine and analyze reporting data (2008-2018)

Phase 2 | Implement PRIME

Support CDPs in a new way of working, conducting progressive employability assessments and using data in service delivery

Phase 3 | New Evidence & Adapting Practice

Apply learning to policy and practice

Project Goals

- Create the necessary systems to support evidence-based career/employment services and engender a culture of evaluation and accountability in which both policy and practice are actively informed and strengthened by data; and
- Build the confidence and capacity of the sector to be innovative in its development of services, strategic in its delivery and impactful with respect to priority client outcomes.

The Project

Phase 1 (June – December 2018)

The first 6 months of the project focused primarily on conducting an analysis of 10 years of data (2008-2018) collected (prior to the addition of PRIME) and reported by career/employment services across Newfoundland and Labrador. The data collection and reporting tool used across the participating agencies is ARMS and its data was mined and analyzed in this phase. As one might imagine, there was a massive amount of data accumulated over this 10-year period. The question was: What could we learn from it to inform policy, practice and this research project?

The full report is accessible but, in short, the conclusion of the analysts was that, while the data was descriptive, it explained little. It was possible to describe the demographic

characteristics of those seeking services over the 10 -year period, but impossible to glean their real needs or the progress they made as a result of receiving services. There were counts of individuals employed or in training, but no capacity to link changes in employability to services. These findings served as a strong reinforcement of the need for PRIME.

In addition to this "data dive", Phase 1 also focused on preparing agencies to introduce PRIME into their day-to-day practice with clients. A 2.5-day intensive training session was delivered in November of 2018 to all participating Research Partners focused on the process of conducting a rigorous and consistent employability assessment and using PRIME to engage clients in building self-awareness and ensuring fidelity of ratings. The training emphasized the importance of linking interventions to real client needs, strength - based and client-centered approaches, tracking progress and adjusting services to address evolving needs.

Finally, while PRIME would be used to build the client data story, a survey was developed to capture data on practitioners themselves. Survey items focused on their sense of professional identity, assessment of the regional service delivery ecosystem and their commitment to professional development, professional standards, certification and growth. Baseline data was gathered in the fall of 2018 from both Research Part ners and career development practitioners in other agencies across the region.

Phase 2 (December 2018 – February 2020)

This 14-month period was devoted to the full implementation of PRIME by trained staff across the 6 participating agencies. Research partners were encouraged to use PRIME with every client, gathering initial employability assessment data at intake, updating assessments as clients progressed through services and completing a full final assessment at exit. In doing so, a data picture reflecting the full journey of the client from entry to exit emerges and the predictive capacity of indicators measured within PRIME begins to also tell the story of the impact of career/employment services.

A number of follow-up training and support sessions were held with all participating Research Partners throughout Phase 2. These sessions were focused on sharing tips and strategies, reinforcing key training points on the employability assessment and servi ce delivery process, and promoting effective use of PRIME to strengthen service delivery. These sessions were also, importantly, opportunities to gather feedback from career development practitioners on their experience using PRIME and their ideas of how t o enhance PRIME. Research partners said PRIME was really good, but they had some

specific and strategic recommendations based on their experience of using it day-to-day to improve it. As a result, in June of 2019, a 2.0 version of PRIME was launched.

As one might imagine, changing a tool midstream in a research project was not without challenges. PRIME 1.0 had been used by the Research Partners from December to May and now, they were hungry to shift to using the "new and improved" PRIME 2.0 that reflected the best of their input and ideas. This project is about learning from data AND about transforming services, and so we had to pivot. As of June 2019, all new clients would benefit from using PRIME 2.0; for those clients who had been assessed in PRIME 1.0 prior to June 2019, the agencies had the following choice:
- Continue using PRIME 1.0 with those clients until the end of the project/their exit from services; or
- Re-enter all assessment data already entered in PRIME 1.0 since December 2018 into PRIME 2.0.

While some agencies chose to juggle the two versions, continuing in PRIME 1.0 with older clients and using PRIME 2.0 with all new clients starting from June 2019, others invested the time to re-enter data so that all clients would be shifted to PRIME 2.0.

Phase 2 was singularly focused on the integration of PRIME (1.0 and then 2.0) into regular, day-to-day services. All Research Partners were encouraged and supported to use PRIME with every client at intake and to capture any progress along the way as services were delivered. PRIME would also be used at exit, creating a consistent and comprehensive data picture and supporting quality, client-centered services across the full service-delivery spectrum. PRIME recorded the outcomes of employment and training, but they were now captured in the context of all the incremental changes that occurred leading up to those outcomes and in a deeper way, including measures of their quality and sustainability.

Phase 3 (March 2020 – November 2020)

While the Research Partners have all opted to continue using PRIME throughout Phase 3, the formal data collection period ended in February 2020. A follow up survey, mirroring the survey conducted in the fall of 2018, was disseminated to all Research Partners and career development practitioners in other agencies across the region in March/April 2020. All data (practitioner surveys, PRIME 1.0 and PRIME 2.0) has been analyzed and the findings are reported herein.

Working with Research Partners, the broader Community Employment Coalition, the career/employment service delivery ecosystem across Newfoundland & Labrador,

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nationally and internationally, the remainder of Phase 3 focused on ensuring that learning is integrated and applied to deepening the quality of service and its impact on all client groups. The findings will be mobilized to inform further research and to contribute to strategic planning, evidence-based policy decisions and stronger, more meaningful accountability. The transformative potential of this project is significant – from creating sustained positive changes for clients to building a culture of quality, client-centered accountability in frontline services; from tenuous reporting systems to meaningful evaluation that is embraced by all players in the delivery ecosystem; from inconsistent and fragmented services to a common standard, approach and tracking protocols; from funding decisions based on inadequate data lacking essential context to rigorous evidence-based models.

The Research Team

The following agencies contributed to the research design, the redesign of PRIME, its implementation, data gathering and analysis:

- AXIS Career Services | Association for New Canadians,
- Community Centre Alliance (CCA),
- John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador,
- Salvation Army

- Single Parents Association of Newfoundland and Labrador,
- Women in Resource Development Corporation (WRDC)

The research lead was the Canadian Career Development Foundation. Goss Gilroy conducted the data analysis. Technical data and software support was provided by ARMS and community engagement was led by the Community Employment Collaboration. Project oversight was managed by the Collective Interchange Co-op.

Project Deliverables

- Phase 1 Report: Results of Data Dive – An analysis of 2008-2018 ARMS data was completed and a report prepared and submitted. Presentations were provided to Community Partners, key stakeholders across the region, representatives from the provincial government and the NLWIC.
- Tailored PRIME instrument – Community partners were engaged in refining the PRIME tool to ensure it reflected their realities and priorities. The resulting PRIME 2.0 is now used by agencies in BC, SK, MB, ON, and NL. It has been adopted for

provincial use by the Government of Saskatchewan and was profiled by the OECD as a best practice.

- Delivery of PRIME training and refresher sessions, resulting in a cadre of trained PRIME facilitators. Initial training was delivered in November of 2018. Multiple refresher sessions and follow up supports were offered, both face-to-face and remotely throughout 2019-2020. A full second PRIME training was delivered in January 2021.

- Practitioner survey instrument – A comprehensive survey was developed and disseminated, representing the first ever mapping of NL career development sector.

- Recorded Interviews – Interviews were conducted with frontline staff and managers who participated in the project to explore their experiences and learning and to solicit their feedback and recommendations.

- Phase 2 Reports: Results of PRIME analysis and Practitioner Survey/Interviews, providing statistical analyses from PRIME data collected November 2018 – February 2020 and surveys conducted in Fall 2018 and Spring 2020 with practitioners and managers from across NL (who participated in the research and who did not).

PRIME was profiled by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a best practice and CCDF was invited to share the findings of this project at an OECD international presentation in 2021.

- Community Partner and Stakeholder Briefing Sessions – Multiple sessions were delivered throughout the life of the project, with formal stakeholder briefings at the conclusion of each project phase. Presentations of findings were also offered to stakeholders across Canada through conference sessions and webinars. International interest has also been strong, with targeted briefings held with leaders from Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, and Finland.

- Community Capacity Building Plan – In Phase 3, the emphasis was on building capacity and sustainability. A targeted onboarding support tool was developed and a series of training/professional development sessions were delivered.

- Final Report – This report represents the culmination of this project.

Findings

This section presents two tales of transformation:

- ▪ Part 1: The significant changes in clients as they participated in caree r/employment services; and
- ▪ Part 2: The significant changes in participating practitioners as they became community-based researchers and evidence-based professionals.

Findings - Part 1: The Client Transformation

PRIME was implemented for a period of 14-months by career development practitioners at 6 agencies serving diverse client groups across the Avalon Region. PRIME was used to guide rigorous and consistent employability assessments and to record comprehensive data on clients' employability strengths and needs at intake, as they progressed through services and at exit from services. This section summarizes findings and speaks to clients' presenting strengths and needs and how they change by virtue of participating in career/employment services. A detailed delineation of data tables and analyses can be found in *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach: PRIME Data Analysis* (2020).

Image by Carina Nilsson @Drawing Change

A key to interpreting the results of the data analysis is having a sound understanding of the process used to collect the data and any impacts this process may have on results emerging from the analysis. Essentially, the data collection process is designed to:

- Facilitate an analysis of strengths and challenges at an individual level as part of the client intake process;
- Encourage use of individual-level analysis to target employment programs and services that would be most effective in assisting the client in addressing challenges and to draw on identified strengths; and
- Facilitate further analyses of individual-level strengths and challenges to measure the impact of programs and services over time, either as a measure of progress or as a final outcome once the individual has completed their action plan and/or exited from service.

As part of this process, there would typically be a PRIME assessment done at intake, and a final assessment done at the point where the client has completed their action plan and/or exited from service. In addition, one or more PRIME progress assessments may be conducted to record changes in individual strengths/challenges as a basis for adjusting action plans and as a measure the impact of programs and services over the course of service delivery.

As noted in the project description, Phase 2 data collection occurred between December 2018 and the end of February 2020. This analysis includes all clients across the six participating community groups that initiated an intervention (a program or service) or PRIME assessments during this period.

A total of 2,616 clients received 9,815 interventions during Phase 2. Of the clients served, 40% (1,039) had an initial PRIME assessment. This percentage varied by community group from a high of 60% to a low of 25%.

Figure 2 groups clients as **active** or **complete**, based on their completion of PRIME assessments. A large majority of clients were active (82%), meaning the organization was still working with the client at the end of the research period. Another 18% of clients were considered complete where a final assessment was recorded.

Figure 2 - Active and Complete PRIME Assessments

PRIME Assessment Types
(n=1,039)

Complete
18%
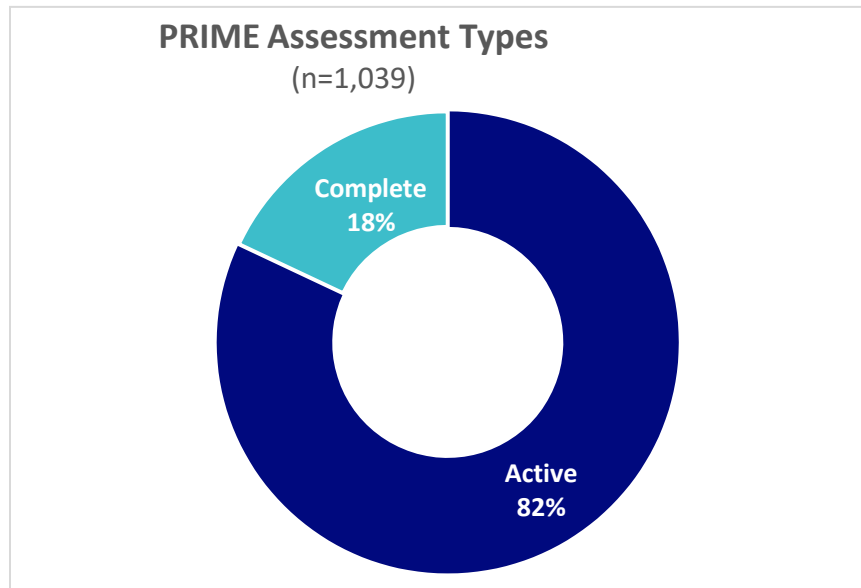
Active
82%

Figure 3 provides a more detailed overview of the different completion scenarios that occurred among the client group. Of the clients considered active (the first two bars), some have completed an initial assessment only, while others have completed at least two assessments - an initial and a progress assessment. Of those clients who are considered complete (Bars 3 and 4), some have completed two assessments while others have completed three or more.

Figure 3 - PRIME Assessment Completions

Combination of PRIME Assessment Types
(n=1,039)

57%	25%	7%	12%
Initial Only	Initial + Progress	Initial + Final	Initial + Progress + Final

Figure 4 - Client Profile

Nearly **1 in 4** were under age 25

Female **49%**
Male **51%**

57% had at least some post-secondary

But, nearly **1 in 3** did not have a high school

53% were single

9% were single parents

20% self-identified as a person with a disability

3% self-identified as an Indigenous person

Almost 40% were in receipt of funding because they couldn't find work

Figure 4 presents an overview of the client group assessed. This includes all clients who completed an initial assessment (regardless of whether or not they also completed a progress or final assessment).

The majority (62%) of clients assessed were under the age of 35 and nearly one in four were under the age of 25. The mean age was 34.

Male and female clients were equally represented.

Education attainment varied considerably. The majority had completed a university degree or some post-secondary education. Thirty percent did not have a high school diploma.

The majority of clients assessed were single, 35% were married (or equivalent) and another 9% were single parents.

A total of 20% self-identified as being a person with a disability. This is consistent with overall ARMS data collected across the Region.

Three percent self-identified as an Indigenous person.

Additionally, 38% reported receiving funding because they could not find work – 10% receiving Employment Insurance (EI) and 27% receiving Income Assistance (IA).

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For analysis purposes, client assessments were grouped according to **initial assessments** and **recent assessments**, with the change from one to the other indicating client progress. Recent assessments can refer to a progress or final assessment (whichever is most recent).

Assessment data was also grouped according to six Employability Dimensions:

Pre-Employability/ Job Readiness	Career Decision Making	Skills Enhancement
Work Search/ Entrepreneurship	Employment Maintenance	Employability Influencers

- Pre-Employability/Job Readiness: Some clients may be actively struggling with issues that prevent them from focussing effectively on learning or work. Issues in this dimension may be external or systemic in nature, such as a lack of safe housing, dependent care, transportation or access to health services. Issues may also be related to a psychological or attitudinal readiness to engage in career development. Work in this dimension focuses on addressing these issues in order to build basic readiness to look for work, get a job or keep a job.
- Career Decision Making: Some clients may have stability with respect to readiness, but don't have a clear sense of career direction. When a client moves too quickly to jumping into training or work without being clear on their career direction, they may not succeed and cycle back into services because the "fit" was off. Work in this area focuses on building self-awareness and awareness of labour market realities and opportunities, so that the client can make informed decisions about the kind of learning and work options that could be right for them.
- Skills Enhancement: Some clients are clear about the kind of work they want to do, but they don't yet have the competencies or qualifications needed to do it. Work in this dimension often focuses on understanding entry requirements, inventorying/assessing client skills, assessing options for learning and supporting access to education, training or some other form of learning/development.
- Work Search/Entrepreneurship: It is one thing for a client to gain the knowledge and skill set to do the work they want to do; it is another to be able to find and successfully secure or create that work. Work in this dimension focuses on

teaching/coaching clients to build the skills and strategies they need to successfully find or create work. For entrepreneurs, this means having and executing a strong business plan. For those seeking employment, it means researching options, building their self-marketing tools and implementing a successful search strategy.

- Work/Job Maintenance: Some clients may readily find work, but struggle to keep it. Work in this dimension focuses on helping clients to understand workplace responsibilities and expectations, build self-awareness, accept and act upon corrective feedback and build the skills and strategies they need to keep work once they've found it.

- Other Employability Influencers: Previous research identified an additional Dimension that influences success in career development. This category focuses largely on intra-personal factors, such as feeling hope for the future, the capacity to bounce back from setbacks, self-efficacy and the motivation to build toward a preferred future.

Each Dimension was measured using a series of associated assessment variables. In total, clients were assessed across 37 variables.

Previous studies have underscored the importance of a robust employability assessment to inform client career planning, the choice of program interventions, and to ensure policy targets priority needs and is based on rigorous evidence of impact. The following may be accessed at https://ccdf.ca/research/.

- Evidence-based Employment Services (2015)
- Assessing the Impact of Career Development Resources and Practitioner Support across the Employability Dimensions (2013)

CLIENT AREAS OF STRENGTH AND NEED - AT INTAKE

PRIME is intended to capture a series of snapshots of current client employability strengths and needs across these 6 dimensions which, cumulatively, provides a rich story of the full journey through services towards the achievement of career goals and movement to labour market attachment.

At intake, the goal is to use PRIME as a framework to guide a robust initial assessment of employability strengths and needs, and to record accurate data on the results of that assessment. As with every stage of service delivery, the initial PRIME assessment reflects

first and foremost the realities and priorities of the client. For some, it may make sense to collect comprehensive data across all dimensions at intake; for others, there may be a focus on one area that the client urgently needs addressed. Accordingly, initial assessments did not always include ratings across all dimension areas or across all variables.

The PRIME assessment does not force the initial employability assessment into a strict structure. Rather, it provides a rigorous guide as a backdrop to an accurate, client-focused, strength-based assessment as a basis for goal setting and choosing interventions and as a baseline upon which to build a full data story.

Figure 5 presents the percentage of initial assessments completed, by dimension area. A high proportion of clients completed assessments in most areas, with the exception of Employment Maintenance (32% completions). Dimension areas with high completion may indicate areas where support is most needed.

Figure 5 - Percentage of Initial PRIME Assessments Completed by Dimension

Percentage of Initial Assessments Completed by Dimension
(n=588)

Dimension	Percentage
Pre-Employability/Job Readiness	99%
Career Decision Making	95%
Skills Enhancement	69%
Work Search/Entrepreneurship	88%
Employment Maintenance	32%
Employability Influencers	92%
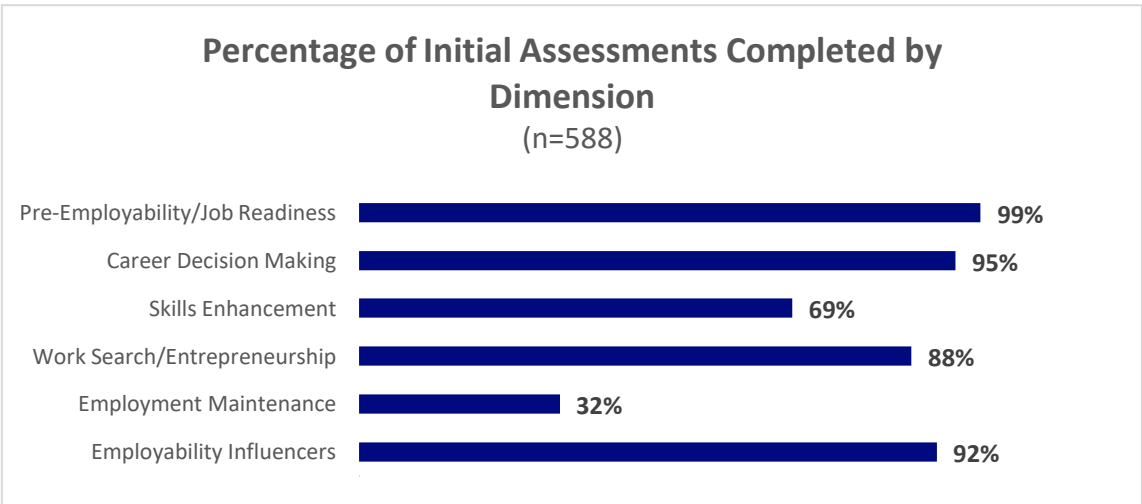
While a strong focus on work search might be expected, the dominant focus on issues related to pre-employability/job readiness, career decision-making and intra-personal employability influencers at intake is noteworthy. The dominant metrics used to assess the impact of career/employment services and to underpin funding decisions have been limited to whether a client is referred to training or moves into employment. These findings confirm that the range of needs – and impacts – go far beyond these two metrics. It raises important questions about the constellation of services offered and the

sustainability of these two outcomes in the absence of addressing the full range of issues being presented by clients.

Similarly, Figure 6 presents the individual variables that were most often assessed at intake across all dimensions. These may also provide insight as to the areas of greatest need.

Percentage of Initial Assessments Completed by Variable
(n=594)

Variable	Percentage
Having adequate transportation	96%
Knowing own interests, values, strengths/skills	93%
Seeing self as competent and worthwhile	89%
Feeling hopeful about ability to achieve goals	89%
Open to new ideas and change	88%
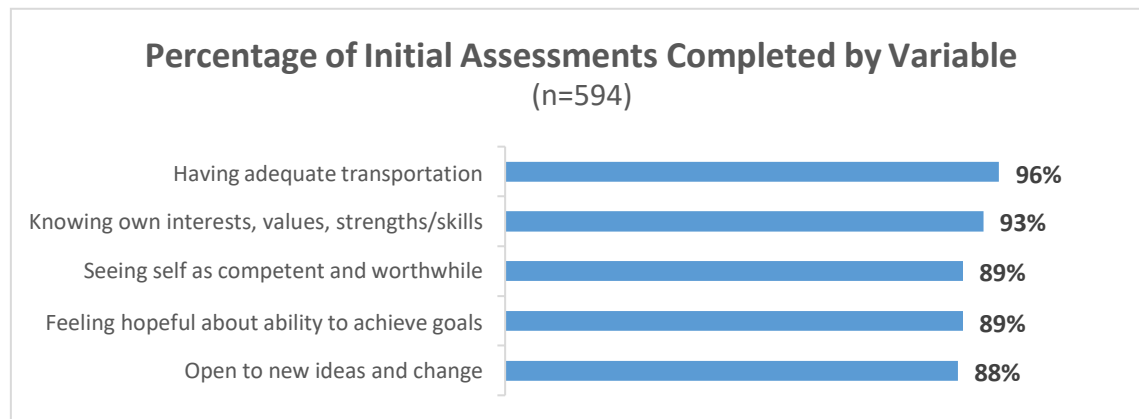
Again, it is noteworthy that these top indicators all fall within dimensions of pre - employability/job readiness, career decision making and intra-personal employability influencers and not in traditional areas of skills development or work search. This suggests that clients are coming to career/employment services with complex needs and that a broader policy and programming lens may be needed to ensure these needs are addressed as a precursor or complement to effective skills development or work search services.

Figure 7 represents clients' greatest areas of strength and areas of need at intake using a slightly different index. The coloured inner circles represent the areas of strength, across all dimensions, by identifying the variables that were assessed with a high rating (4 or 5 out of 5) at initial assessment.

The outer circles in the figure, shaded in grey, represent areas of greatest need for assistance. These are the variables assessed with a low rating (1 or 2 out of 5) at initial assessment. (Of note, the size of the circles does not symbolize the extent of need).

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Figure 7 - Areas of Strength and Need at Intake

Figure 7 - Areas of Strength and Need at Intake

CLIENT PROGRESS

The following sections outline client progress along each dimension from initia l
assessment to recent assessment. Progress is measured by the difference between the
initial mean rating and the recent mean rating.

1. *Pre-Employability/Job Readiness*

The first dimension is made up of 9 unique variables. When comparing assessment
variables from initial assessment to recent assessment, all areas saw an increase
that was statistically significant. The different between initial and recent mean
ratings is displayed below. The largest increases were specific to:

- having support for use of addictive substances
- having support for mental health challenges as needed
- having adequate childcare

Of note, these three variables were specific to subgroups of clients, as can be
noted from the small number of responses among these variables.

Figure 8 - Client Progress in Pre-Employability/Job Readiness Dimension

Pre-Employment /Job Readiness Progress

Category	Value
Have support(s) for use of addictive substances as needed (n=31)	0.61
Have support(s) for mental health challenges as needed (n=50)	0.44
Have adequate child care (n=49)	0.43
Have strategies to stay motivated (n=174)	0.42
Have adequate transportation (n=185)	0.37
Take responsibility for own choices and behaviors (n=174)	0.32
Have support(s) for physical health challenges as needed (n=55)	0.27
Have supportive relationships (n=161)	0.23
Have stable and safe housing (n=137)	0.1

2. Career Decision Making

Seven variables were used to measure Career Decision Making. All 7 variables saw an increase that was statistically significant from initial assessment to recent assessment. The areas that saw the greatest change were:

- knowing entry requirements, employment rates and conditions
- knowing issues that could affect hiring
- researching learning/employment options

Figure 9 - Client Progress in Career Decision Making Dimension

Career Decision Making Progress

Know entry requirements, employment rates and conditions in preferred community for desired…	0.65
Know issues that could affect hiring for desired employment (n=175)	0.61
Research learning/employment options that connect to interests, values and strengths/skills (n=161)	0.58
Follow through on agreed upon action plan steps (n=121)	0.49
Evaluate learning/employment options based on research and self-knowledge (n=163)	0.43
Set achievable learning/employment goals (n=178)	0.42
Know own interests, values, strengths/skills (n=187)	0.36

3. Skills Enhancement

All 3 of the variables measuring Skills Enhancement showed a statistically significant increase from initial to recent assessment. The largest increase was specific to having strategies to address anticipated challenges.

Figure 10 - Client Progress in Skills Enhancement Dimension

Skills Enhancement Progress

Have strategies to address anticipated challenges (n=126)	0.44
Choose education/training program(s) based on research and self-knowledge (n=133)	0.32
Apply for chosen education/training program(s) (n=123)	0.29
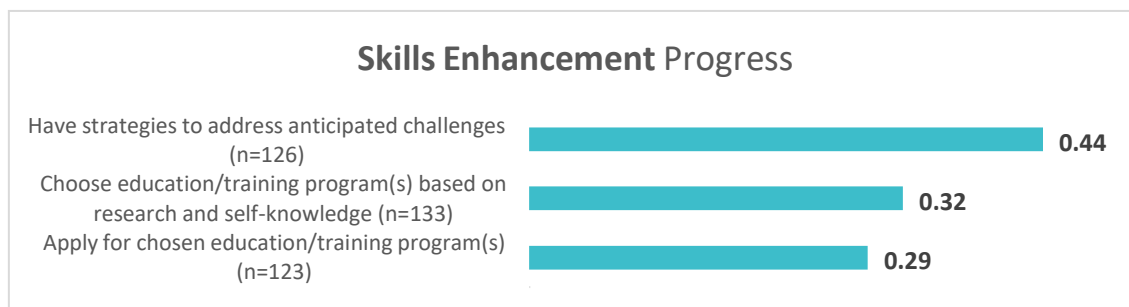
4. *Work Search/Entrepreneurship*

Of the 9 variables that make up the Work Search/Entrepreneurship dimension, 8 showed progress that was statistically significant from initial to recent assessment. Greatest progress was specific to:

- having work search/marketing tools
- demonstrating effective interviewing and self-marketing skills
- understanding workplace norms and expectations in preferred area of employment

The variable that did not see a positive change – having a realistic business plan – was an assessment specific to entrepreneurs and only had seven responses. This wasn't sufficient for the change to be considered a reliable indicator. It is possible that this represents a gap in services/practitioner training. Alternatively, it is possible that this negative progress may reflect a "reality check" provided by a skilled practitioner, supporting a client to move from an unrealistic plan to one that is more rooted in solid research and reflection.

Figure 11 - Client Progress in Work Search/Entrepreneurship Dimension

Work Search/Entrepreneurship Progress

Variable	Progress
Have work search/marketing tools (resume, portfolio, social media profiles, references, website etc.) (n=161)	0.66
Demonstrate effective interviewing and self-marketing skills (n=166)	0.61
Understand workplace norms and expectations in preferred area of employment (n=153)	0.60
Identify potential employers/opportunities (n=175)	0.57
Use online resources effectively in work search/entrepreneurship (n=150)	0.49
Meet skill requirements for preferred area of employment (n=174)	0.48
Use strategies, supports and networks to stay motivated in work search (n=153)	0.47
Have an achievable employment goal (n=176)	0.39
Entrepreneurs have a realistic business plan (n=7)	-0.14

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5. *Employment Maintenance*

All Employment Maintenance assessment variables had a statistically significant increase in their ratings compared to their initial assessments. However, it should be noted that a small number of clients completed these assessment variables (between 54 and 61 responses).

Figure 12 - Client Progress in Employment Maintenance Dimension

Employment Maintenance Progress

Variable	Value
Seek assistance when needed (n=61)	4.5
Know responsibilities and expectations related to current employment (n=56)	3.5
Act on corrective feedback (n=54)	2.5
Demonstrate skills and attitudes needed in current employment (n=58)	4.3
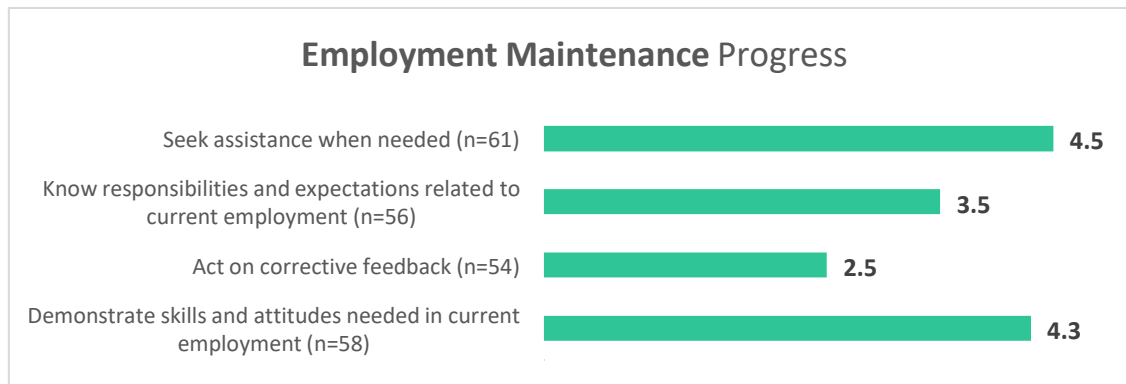
6. *Employability Influencers*

All 5 variables measuring Employability Influences saw a significant increase from initial to recent assessment. Greatest progress was seen in:

- ability to bounce back from disappointments/setbacks
- following through on commitments

Figure 13 - Client Progress in Employability Influencers Dimension

Employability Influencers Progress

Variable	Value
Able to bounce back from disappointments/setbacks (n=86)	0.55
Follow through on commitments (n=123)	0.48
Open to new ideas and change (n=182)	0.42
Feel hopeful about ability to achieve goals (n=183)	0.39
See self as competent and worthwhile (n=183)	0.33
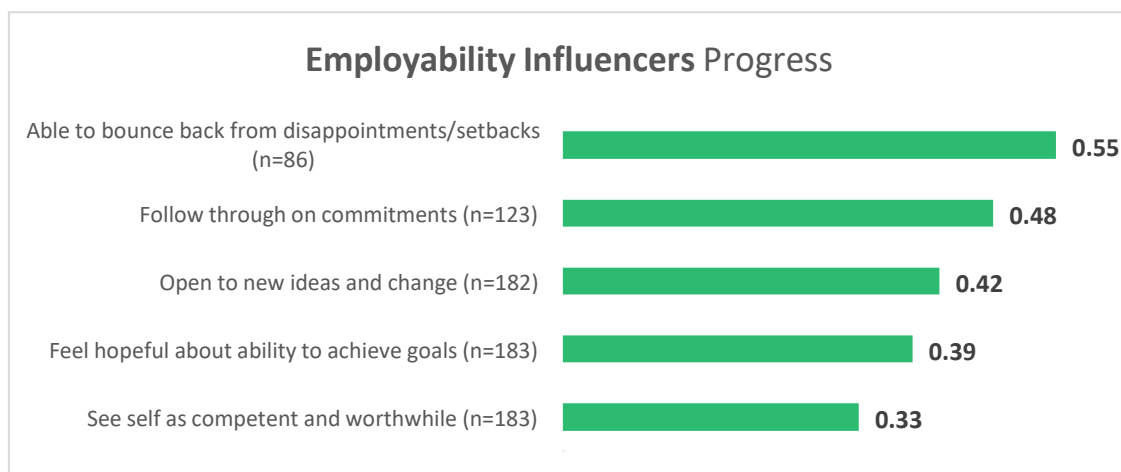
7. Overall Assessment Ratings

The following presents the mean assessment ratings both at initial assessment and recent assessment. The overall mean assessment rating increased from 3.4 to 3.8 (a statistically significant change). This 0.4 change is equivalent to nearly half of the clients increasing one full rating point.

A significant change was also evident across all 6 dimensions. The greatest progress occurred in Career Decision Making and Work Search/Entrepreneurship.

Figure 14 - Overall Client Progress by Dimension

Overall Progress - By Dimensions

Dimension	Initial	Recent
Overall (n=193)	3.4	3.8
Pre-Employment/Job Readiness (n=189)	3.6	3.9
Career Decision Making (n=188)	3.3	3.8
Skills Enhancement (n=137)	3.5	3.8
Work Search/Entrepreneurship (n=185)	3.3	3.8
Employability Maintenance (n=68)	3.7	4.1
Employability Influencers (n=186)	3.6	3.9
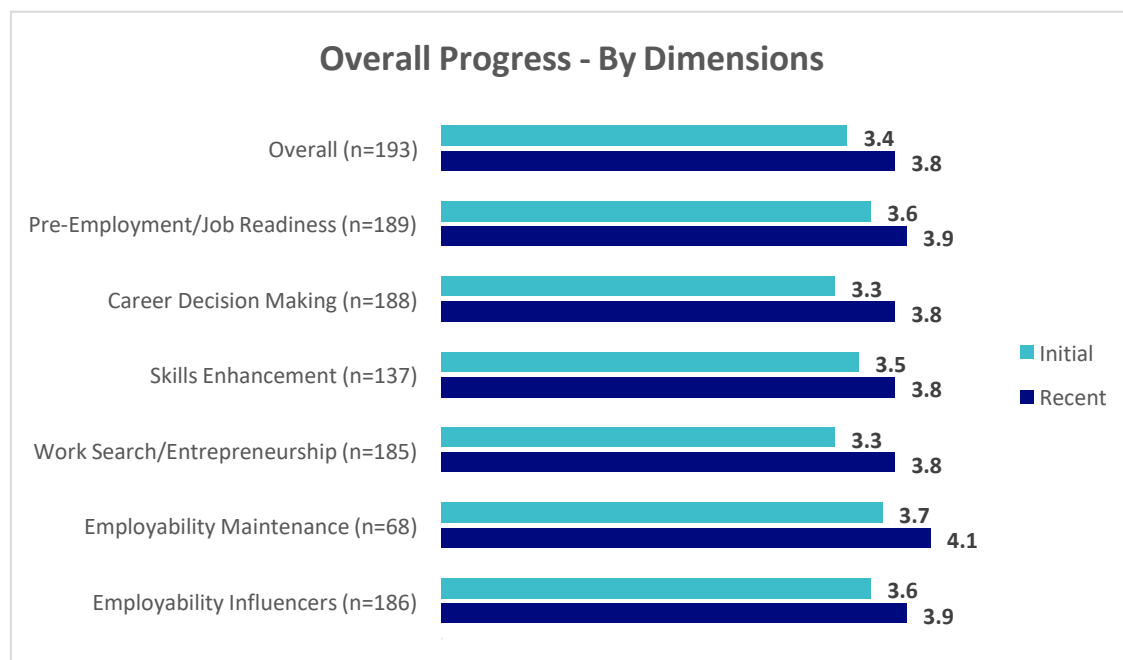
8. Additional Mental Health Assessment

Independent from the development of PRIME, it has become evident that some specific variables used to assess dimensions may also be used to assess contributors to mental health. In consultation with authors of a book with specific focus on career development and mental health (D. Redekopp and M. Huston), the following existing PRIME variables have been identified as mental health indicators and assessed against main contributors to mental health. Given this important focus, the following presents the percentage of clients who completed each assessment variable.

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Figure 15 - Assessments Completed of Mental Health Variables

Mental Health Variables - % of Assessments Completed

Variable	%
Having support(s) for use of addictive substances as needed (n=31)	16%
Having support(s) for mental health challenges as needed (n=50)	26%
Having strategies to stay motivated (n=174)	90%
Taking responsibility for own choices and behaviors (n=174)	90%
Having support(s) for physical health challenges as needed (n=55)	28%
Having supportive relationships (n=161)	83%
Following through on agreed upon action plan steps (n=121)	63%
Setting achievable learning/employment goals (n=178)	92%
Knowing own interests, values, strengths/skills (n=187)	97%
Having strategies to address anticipated challenges (n=126)	65%
Seeking assistance when needed (n=61)	32%
Ability to bounce back from disappointments/setbacks (n=86)	45%
Following through on commitments (n=123)	64%
Open to new ideas and change (n=182)	94%
Feeling hopeful about ability to achieve goals (n=183)	95%
Seeing self as competent and worthwhile (n=183)	95%

The following saw the greatest proportion of completions, potentially indicating areas of where support is most needed:

- Knowing own interests, values, strengths/skills
- Feeling hopeful about ability to achieve goals
- Seeing self as competent and worthwhile

However, as noted earlier in the report, it is important to note that several variables are relevant only to a subset of the client group assessed (for example, support for use of

addictive substances, for mental health challenges, and for physical health challenges). This is evident in the small proportion of completions among these (16% to 28%). Mental health variables were also assessed in terms of progress from initial to recent assessment (displayed below).

Figure 16 - Client Progress across Mental Health Variables

Mental Health Variables - Progress

Variable	Value
Having support(s) for use of addictive substances as needed (n=31)	0.61
Having support(s) for mental health challenges as needed (n=50)	0.44
Having strategies to stay motivated (n=174)	0.42
Taking responsibility for own choices and behaviors (n=174)	0.32
Having support(s) for physical health challenges as needed (n=55)	0.27
Having supportive relationships (n=161)	0.23
Following through on agreed upon action plan steps (n=121)	0.49
Setting achievable learning/employment goals (n=178)	0.42
Knowing own interests, values, strengths/skills (n=187)	0.36
Having strategies to address anticipated challenges (n=126)	0.44
Seeking assistance when needed (n=61)	0.52
Ability to bounce back from disappointments/setbacks (n=86)	0.55
Following through on commitments (n=123)	0.48
Open to new ideas and change (n=182)	0.42
Feeling hopeful about ability to achieve goals (n=183)	0.39
Seeing self as competent and worthwhile (n=183)	0.33

Increases from initial to recent assessment were statistically significant across all mental health variables. Of the variables presented above, the following saw the greatest progress among clients:

- Having support(s) for use of addictive substances as needed
- Ability to bounce back from disappointments/setbacks
- Seeking assistance when needed

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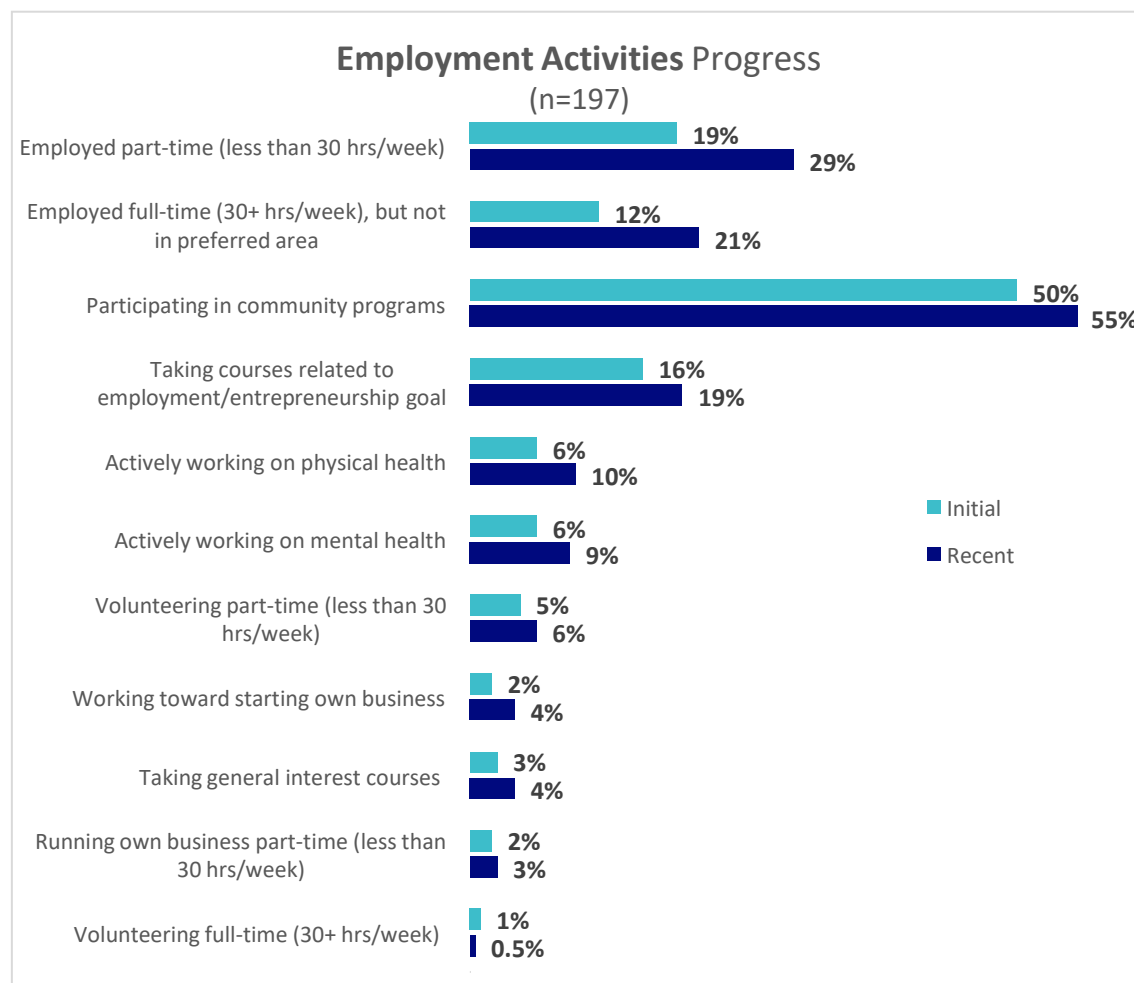A Collaborative Regional Approach

PRIME assessments captured activities of clients related to employment, both during the initial assessment and recent assessment. The following presents progress that occurred.

As can be seen in the table below, clients most often indicated that they were:

- participating in community programs
- employed part-time
- employed full-time
- taking courses related to their employment/entrepreneurship goal

However, the greatest increase from initial to recent assessment was the proportion of clients who indicated they were employed part-time (increase of 10 percentage points) or employed full-time (increase of 9 percentage points).

Figure 17 - Client Progress in Employment Activities

Employment Activities Progress
(n=197)

Activity	Initial	Recent
Employed part-time (less than 30 hrs/week)	19%	29%
Employed full-time (30+ hrs/week), but not in preferred area	12%	21%
Participating in community programs	50%	55%
Taking courses related to employment/entrepreneurship goal	16%	19%
Actively working on physical health	6%	10%
Actively working on mental health	6%	9%
Volunteering part-time (less than 30 hrs/week)	5%	6%
Working toward starting own business	2%	4%
Taking general interest courses	3%	4%
Running own business part-time (less than 30 hrs/week)	2%	3%
Volunteering full-time (30+ hrs/week)	1%	0.5%

The most recent PRIME results showed that over half of clients were employed (53%). Another 43% were either in school, training, or unemployed but looking for work.

Figure 18 - Client Employment Outcomes
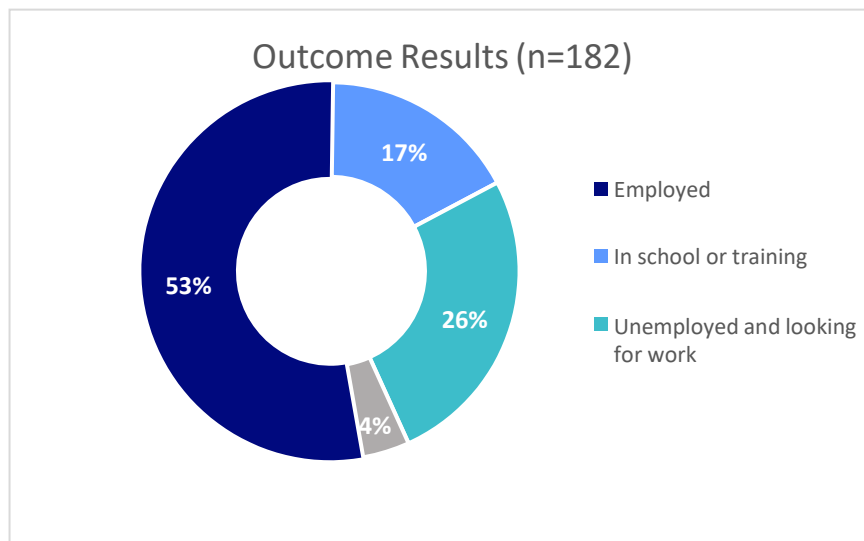
This analysis of PRIME data provides a comprehensive overview of the insights the tool can provide. Results show potential areas of client need in terms of support and areas of greatest strength. Based on the analysis of preliminary and recent assessments, PRIME is also a valuable tool to assess client progress across the full range of Employability Dimensions. In addition, several variables were found to be strong predictors of success in finding future employment.

Due to the range of areas PRIME touches on, the tool may also be adapted to support specific assessment areas outside of the original scope– for example, mental health.

Overall, PRIME is an effective and responsive tool offering multiple benefits: applicability across diverse client groups, utility as a practitioner tool, and a strong predictor of success in finding employment. Once sufficient data is compiled, the tool has the potential to help guide practitioners' choice of interventions and identify the specific interventions best suited for clients based on their unique desired outcomes. It also provides a much richer basis for policy decisions to ensure career/employment services meet the actual described needs of the client. Meeting these needs leads to sustained outcomes.

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Findings - Part 2: The Practitioner Transformation

Frontline career/service providers from across six agencies serving diverse clients in the Avalon Region participated in this project. By virtue of their participation, they assumed new dual roles as career practitioners and researchers. These six agencies are members of the Community Employment Collaboration (CEC), a network of career/employment service providers in the Region. This section examines the impact of the CEC and, specifically, participation in this community-based research project on a range of indicators of professionalism, ethical practice, client engagement, quality service and evidence-based practice. While the CEC is a regional collaboration, it broadened its reach for this aspect of the research project and surveyed career service providers from across Newfoundland and Labrador. A detailed delineation of survey data tables and analyses can be found in *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach: Analysis of Practitioner/Manager Survey Responses* (2020).

PROFESSIONALISM — "This has been the most successful and insightful work-learning experience I have ever had."

ETHICAL PRACTICE — "Prime ensures all career practitioners are using similar practices, and it streamlines the work overall."

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT — "More client engagement, more discussion, better follow through. A vision for the future."

QUALITY SERVICE — "Prime instills hope for building a future story. It meets clients where they are."

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE — "Prime gives relevant, real-time information that reflects the client's journey."

PRIME: MEASURING THE IMPACTS ON THE JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT

Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

The Data Collection Process

A survey was conducted with career/employment service providers across the province, including community, post-secondary, and public sector providers. This represented the first ever mapping of the provincial career development sector. Two rounds of data collection with two groups of respondents were conducted as follows:

- Group 1: Agencies participating in the research project
- Group 2: Agencies not in the research
- Time 1 (Baseline): Before using PRIME (Fall 2018)
- Time 2: After using PRIME (Spring 2020)

In addition to collecting demographic data about the practitioner and basic information their agency and clients served, the survey tool gathered quantitative and qualitative data regarding a wide range of factors contributing to professional identity, com petence, ethical practice, accountability, quality service, impact, client engagement and connection to a broader professional community of practice nationally and internationally. The survey also gathered data on the state of the regional career/employment service delivery system and solicited recommendations for improvement. Finally, the survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on the experience and impact of the project and using PRIME on participating practitioners. See the full survey in *Evidence for Community Employment Services: A Collaborative Regional Approach: Survey Protocol* (2020).

Data Analysis

RESPONDENT PROFILE

In total, 81 career/employment service providers completed the survey. Overall, no significant demographic differences were found between Groups 1 and 2. The age, gender, region, years of experience in the sector, education or employment profile did not differ significantly between Groups 1 and 2.

Figure 19 - Respondent Profile

	TIME 1 (Fall 2018, prior to research)	TIME 2 (Spring 2020, after research)	TOTAL
GROUP 1 (research participants)	18	13	31
GROUP 2 (non-research participants)	33	17	50
TOTAL	51	30	81

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Age, Gender and Region

Respondents were dominantly females between the ages of 41 and 50 in the Avalon region of the province.

Years of Experience in Career/Employment Sector & Education

Respondents typically had 10-14 years of experience working in the career/employment sector. Most respondents held a Bachelor's degree in a field related to human services and participated in on-the-job training. It is noteworthy that, overall, almost 1/5 respondents had not completed a single course specifically related to career development. Approximately 25% of Group 2 respondents have not completed a single course focused on career development (versus 10% in Group 1); the percentage of Group 1 respondents in this category reduced from 17% to 10% between Times 1 and 2.

Employment Profile

In relation to their work time, respondents typically spent 75% - 100% of their time devoted to providing direct career development/employment programs and services and worked in an agency that provides community funded career services. Most respondents provided services to adults between 25 and 45 years of age.

PROFESSIONALISM

Data related to 13 specific indicators was collected. These indicators were grouped around 3 critical aspects of professionalism:

1. *Preparedness for Professional Practice*
- Degree of clarity regarding scope of practice
- Access to needed training and professional development
- Adequacy of training for professional role
- Access to resources/tools to support practice
- Knowledge of needed competencies
- Mastery of needed competencies

2. *Connection to a Professional Community of Practice*
- Strength of regional professional network
- Perceived value of membership in professional association
- Connection to national/international professional sector

3. *Professional Identity and Engagement*
- Strong identity as a Career Development Professional
- Pride in professional title
- Interest in certification
- Pursuit of certification

PROFESSIONALISM

"THIS HAS BEEN THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND INSIGHTFUL WORK-LEARNING EXPERIENCE I HAVE EVER HAD."

- 100% ARE CONNECTED TO AND SUPPORTED BY THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY, UP FROM 66.7%

- I AM CLEAR ABOUT THE SCOPE OF MY PRACTICE AS A CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER.
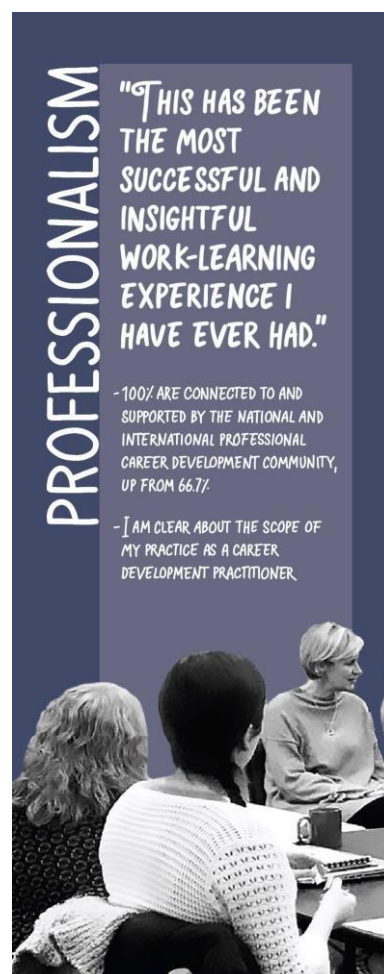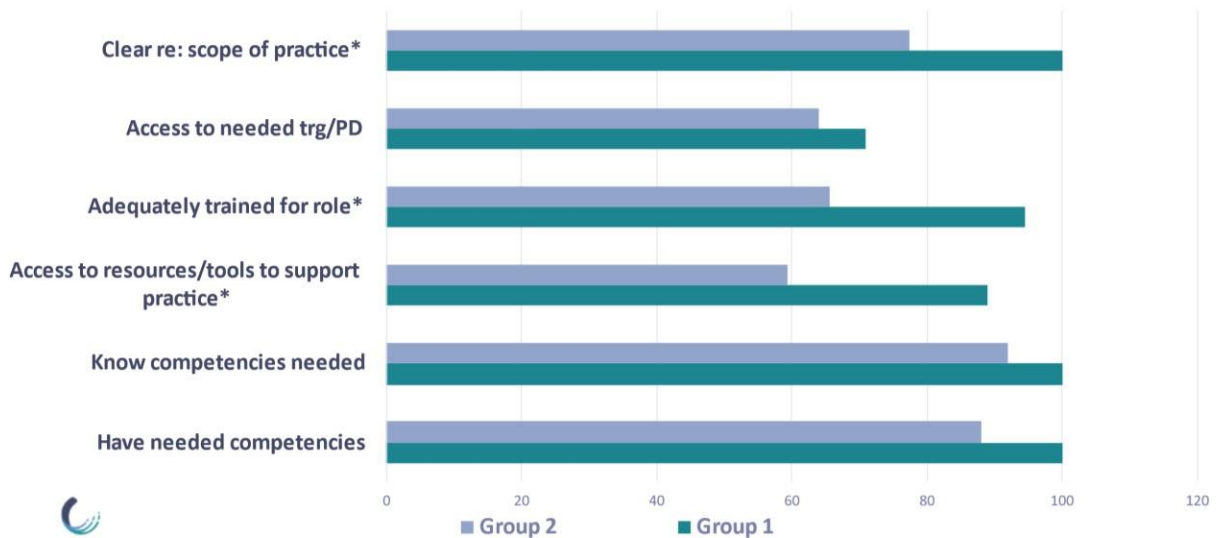
Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

Across all 13 indicators, we see more positive ratings for Group 1 (participants in the research project and used PRIME) than for Group 2 (non-participants). The first set of indicators related to respondents' preparedness for professional practice. These indicators speak to the extent to which a career/employment service provider has the requisite clarity, training/professional identity, resources/tools, and competencies to practice professionally. Respondents who had participated in the research project and used PRIME consistently rated themselves as better prepared across all 6 indicators. Statistically significant differences were found between Group 1 and Group 2 with respect to their clarity of scope of practice, adequacy of training, and access to professional resources/tools.

*Figure 20 - Survey Results - Prepared for Professional Practice*

Prepared for Professional Practice

Similarly, we see more positive ratings for Group 1 (participants in the research project and used PRIME) than for Group 2 (non-participants) across all 3 indicators related to their community of practice. Group 1 respondents reported having stronger professional networks and placing greater value on membership in a professional association. The difference between Group 1 and Group 2 ratings with respect to their connection to regional, national and international professional networks was statistically significant.

Figure 21 - Survey Results - Community of Practice

Figure 21 - Survey Results - Community of Practice
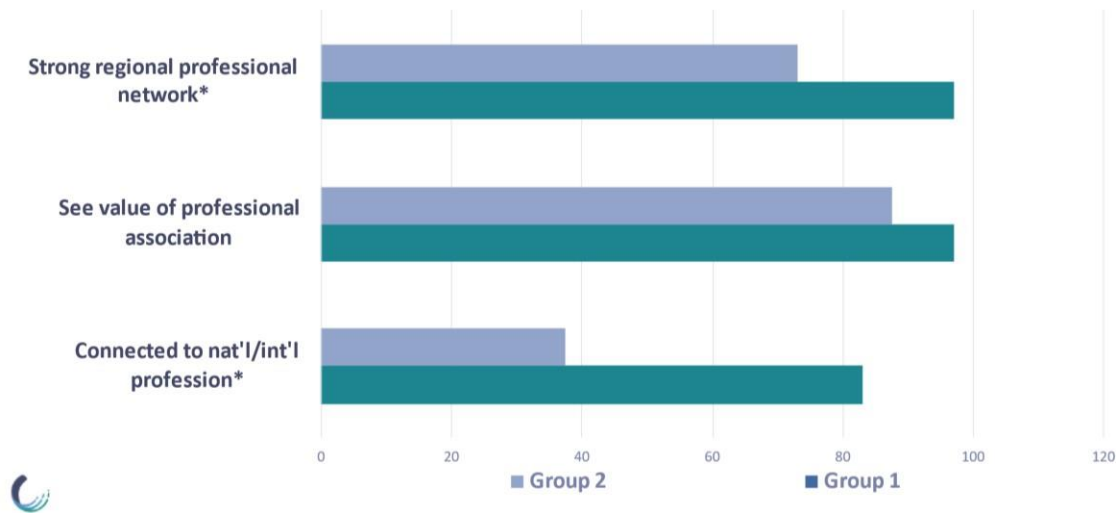
With respect to professional identity and engagement, Group 1 respondents rated all 4 indicators more positively than Group 2 respondents. The positive difference between Group 1 and Group 2 respondents' commitment to pursuing certification was statistically significant.

Figure 22 - Survey Results - Professional Identity & Engagement

Figure 22 - Survey Results - Professional Identity & Engagement
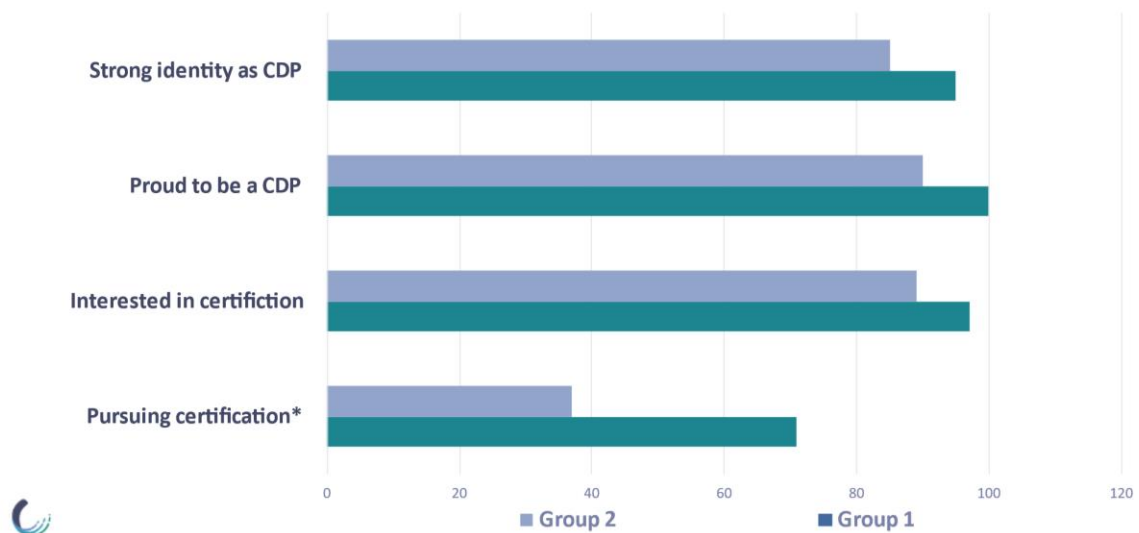
ETHICAL PRACTICE

Ethical practice is a foundational underpinning of the career development profession. Certified professionals abide by a Code of Ethics and implement an ethical decision-making model to guide their response to ethical dilemmas. With respect to ethical practice, respondents who had participated in the research project rated themselves more strongly on both indicators. The difference between Group 1 ratings and Group 2 ratings was statistically significant both with respect to their understanding and their application of the ethical guidelines established for the career development sector.
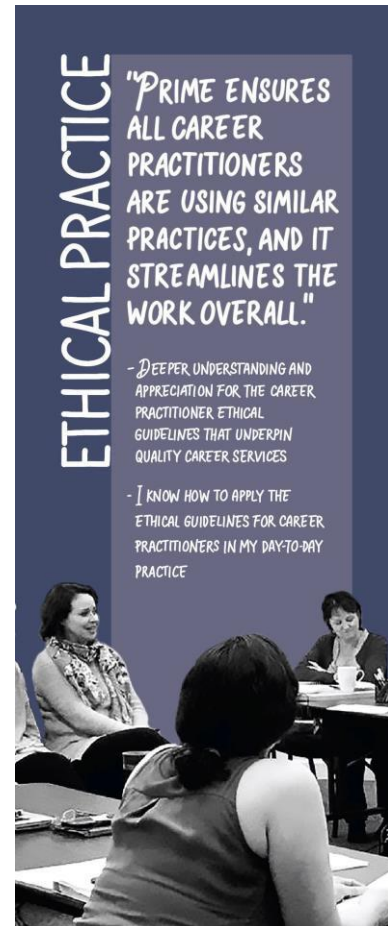

"PRIME ENSURES ALL CAREER PRACTITIONERS ARE USING SIMILAR PRACTICES, AND IT STREAMLINES THE WORK OVERALL."

- DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION FOR THE CAREER PRACTITIONER ETHICAL GUIDELINES THAT UNDERPIN QUALITY CAREER SERVICES

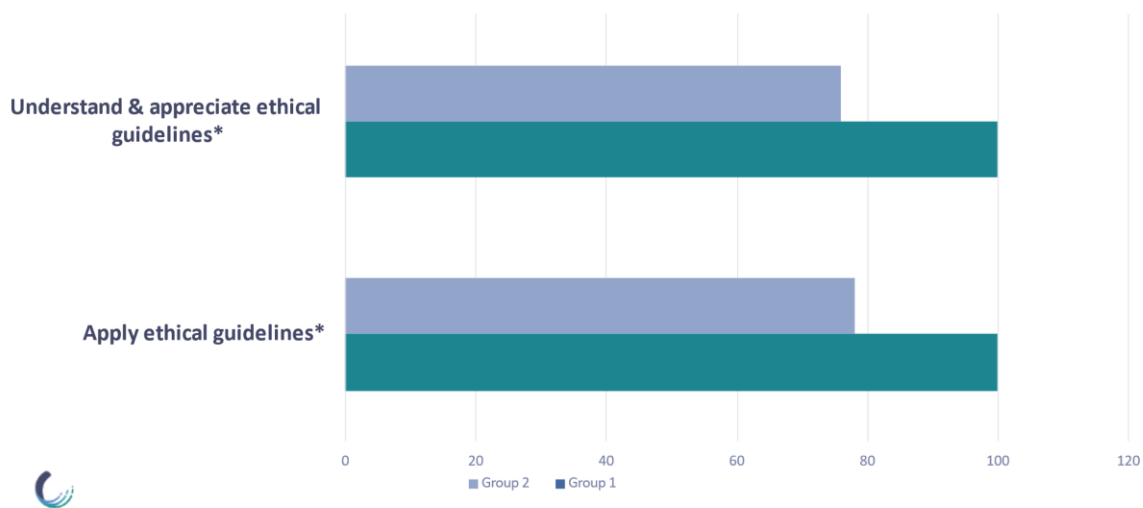- I KNOW HOW TO APPLY THE ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR CAREER PRACTITIONERS IN MY DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICE

Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

Figure 23 - Survey Results - Ethical Practice
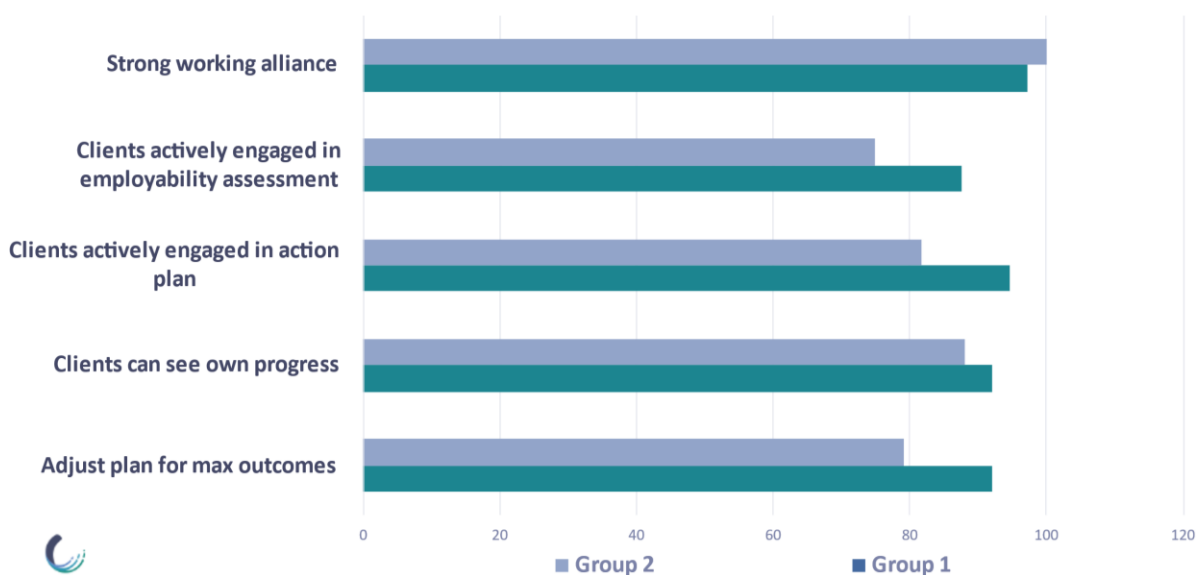
CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

Data was collected on 5 indicators of client engagement. These speak to the heart of the relationship between service providers and recipients and its power in creating an active collaboration in which the client is the architect of their preferred future. The working alliance is underpinned by trust, respect, and partnership. It is an essential underpinning for client engagement in and ownership of the process of defining their goals, taking targeted action, and achieving career outcomes.

"MORE CLIENT ENGAGEMENT, MORE DISCUSSION, BETTER FOLLOW THROUGH. A VISION FOR THE FUTURE."

- 100% OF CLIENTS ARE ENGAGING IN THEIR ACTION PLANS, UP FROM 88.9%

- 100% OF CLIENTS SEE THEIR PROGRESS, UP FROM 83.3%

- 100% OF CLIENTS SEE WHERE AND HOW THEIR ACTION PLANS NEED ADJUSTING, UP FROM 83.3%

Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

Figure 24 - Survey Results - Client Engagement

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Respondents who had participated in the research project and used PRIME consistently rated indicators of client engagement more positively than respondents who had not participated. While both Groups 1 and 2 rated their working alliance with clients very strongly both at Times 1 and 2, only Group 1 respondents rated this indicator more positively at Time 2 (after having participated in the research project) than at Time 1.
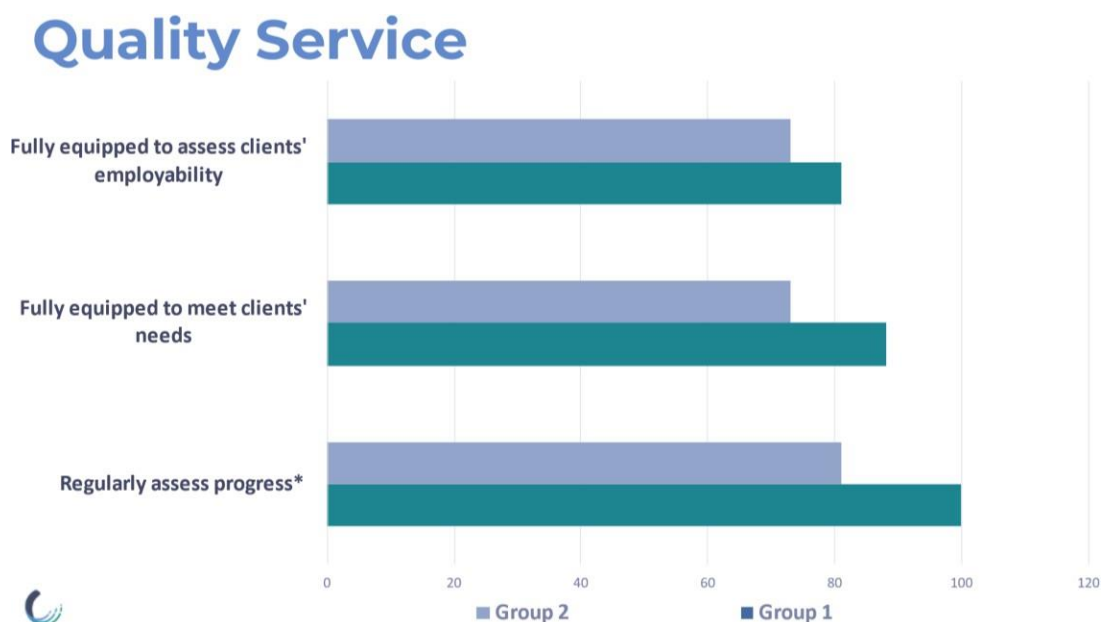
QUALITY SERVICE

This element focused on the extent to which clients' employability strengths and needs were accurately assessed and used as the basis for choosing interventions, supporting goal setting/action planning, assessing progress and adjusting services based on evolving client strengths, needs and priorities. Quality career/employment services were rated based on 3 indicators. Across all quality indicators, respondents who had participated in the research project and used PRIME rated their capacity more positively. The difference between Group 1 and Group 2 with respect to their rated capacity to accurately assess client progress was statistically significant.

QUALITY SERVICE

"PRIME INSTILLS HOPE FOR BUILDING A FUTURE STORY. IT MEETS CLIENTS WHERE THEY ARE."

- CDP'S ABILITY TO ACCURATELY ASSESS THEIR CLIENTS' EMPLOYABILITY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS AT INTAKE INCREASED FROM 77.8% TO 83.3%

- CDP'S ABILITY TO DELIVER CAREER SERVICES THAT MEET THEIR CLIENTS' NEEDS INCREASED FROM 83.3% TO 91.7%

Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

Figure 25 - Survey Results - Quality Service

EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE

The final category reflecting the practitioner transformation is the degree to which they were evidence-based in their practice. Data related to 9 specific indicators was collected. These indicators were grouped around 2 critical aspects underpinning a culture of accountability and the application of learning from rigorous and meaningful evaluation:

1. *Evidence Informed Practice*
- System used to collect and report data provides relevant/useful feedback
- System used to collect and report data enhances practice
- Data collected and reported is meaningful and accurately reflects the real progress and outcomes of clients
- Practice is informed by research and evidence
- Practice is strengthened by research and evidence

2. *Impact*
- Strong evidence of positive impact of services on clients
- Capacity to prove impact of specific interventions/services on clients
- Motivation to improve the impact of services on clients
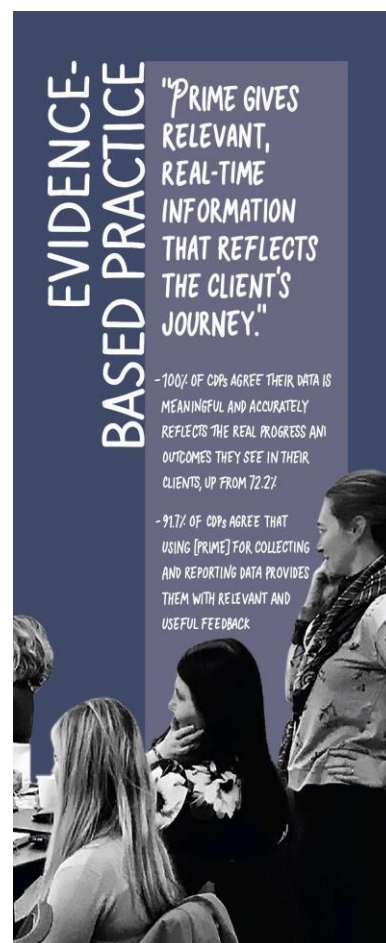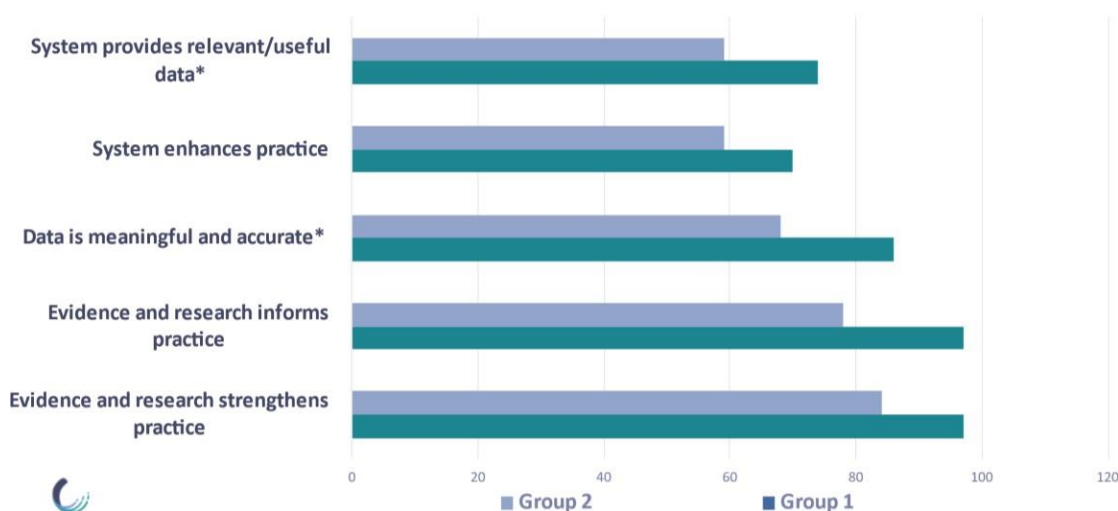- Empowerment to improve the impact of services on clients

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

"PRIME GIVES RELEVANT, REAL-TIME INFORMATION THAT REFLECTS THE CLIENT'S JOURNEY."

- 100% OF CDPs AGREE THEIR DATA IS MEANINGFUL AND ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE REAL PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES THEY SEE IN THEIR CLIENTS, UP FROM 72.2%

- 91.7% OF CDPs AGREE THAT USING [PRIME] FOR COLLECTING AND REPORTING DATA PROVIDES THEM WITH RELEVANT AND USEFUL FEEDBACK

Image by Christy Gharbo @VizualWorx

Figure 26 - Survey Results - Evidence-Based Practice

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With respect to evidence-informed practice, respondents who participated in the research project and used PRIME consistently rated all 5 indicators more positively than respondents who did not participate in the project. The differences were statistically significant when it came to having a system that provides relevant and useful data and having access to data that is meaningful and accurate.

Figure 27 - Survey Results - Impact
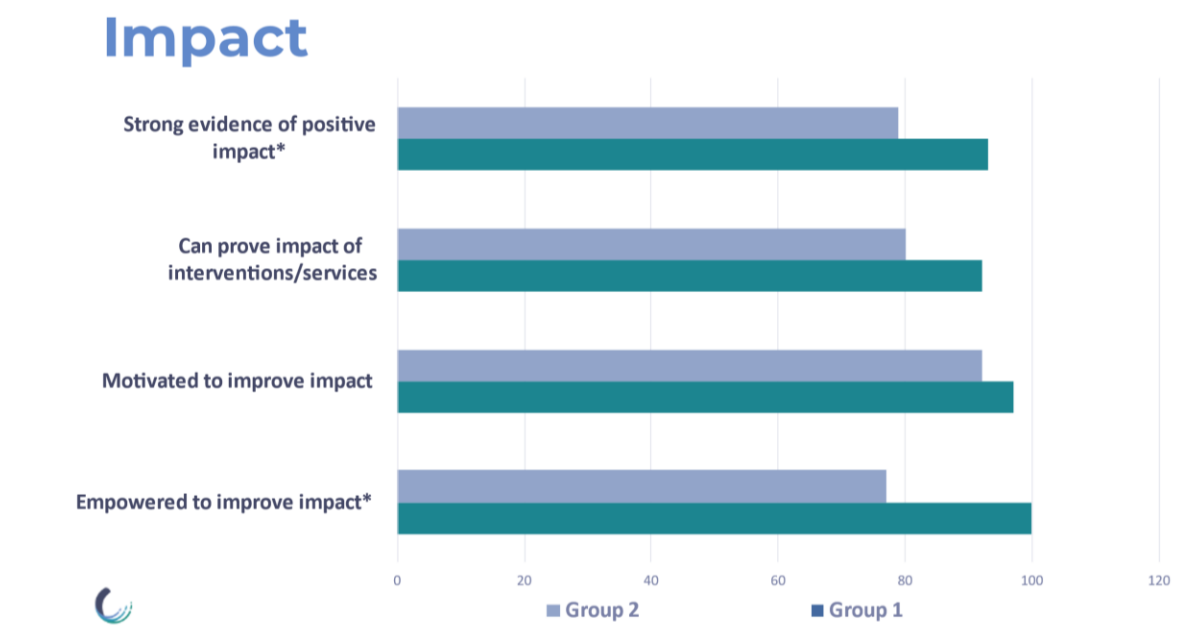
Evidence-based practice is predicated on the capacity to access and make sense of impact data and to apply the learning from this data to practice. Just as bad metrics feed a cycle of limited service leading to limited outcomes, so too does meaningful data feed quality service and stronger client outcomes.

Respondents who participated in the research project and used PRIME rated their access to evidence, their capacity to demonstrate their impact and their motivation and empowerment to improve their impact more positively than respondents who did not participate in the research. The difference between Groups 1 and 2 with respect to their access to strong evidence of impact and their empowerment to improve the impact of services on client outcomes was statistically significant.

It is noteworthy that Group 1 (respondents who participated in the research and used PRIME) demonstrated statistically significant positive differences between Time 1 (prior to their participation in the project/use of PRIME) and Time 2 (after the research) in their ratings with respect to:

- Having a system for collecting and reporting data that provides relevant and useful feedback; and
- Being closely connected and supported by the national and international professional career development community.

IMPACT OF THIS PROJECT ON SERVICE PROVIDERS

It is also noteworthy that, after having participated in the research project and using PRIME, 100% of Group 1 respondents agreed with the following 23 statements:

- I am clear about my scope of practice as a Career Development Practitioner.
- I have ready access to adequate resources, tools, and programs to support quality service delivery.
- I know the competencies/skills I need to have to deliver quality career services.
- I possess the competencies/skills I need in order to deliver quality career services.
- I have a strong regional network I can turn to locally for professional support, ideas, and resources.
- I see value in being a member of a professional association for Career Development Practitioners.
- I am closely connected to and supported by the national and international professional Career Development community.
- I have a strong sense of professional identity as a Career Development Practitioner.
- I am proud to call myself a Career Development Practitioner.
- I am interested in being certified as a Career Development Professional.
- I know how to apply the Ethical Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners in my day-to-day practice.
- My clients and I enjoy a strong and effective partnership in our work together.
- My clients are actively engaged in developing and implementing their action plan.
- My clients can readily see the progress they are making as they work with me.
- It is clear to me and my clients when and how action plans need adjusting along the way to maximize progress and positive outcomes.
- I regularly assess and record the progress my clients make as they work with me.
- The data I collect and report on is meaningful and accurately reflects the real progress and outcomes I see in my clients.
- My practice is informed by evidence/research.
- My practice is enhanced/strengthened by evidence/research.
- I can prove the impact(s) of specific interventions/services I deliver to clients.
- I feel motivated to improve the impact of our services on clients.
- I am empowered to improve the impact of our services on clients.

Respondents were asked to rate their service delivery model on a scale ranging from completely broken to perfect. After participating in the research project and using PRIME, a significantly higher percentage of Group 1 respondents felt their delivery system was strong or perfect as compared to Group 2 respondents (76.9% versus 35.3%). Conversely, a higher percentage of Group 2 respondents felt their delivery system needed improvement compared to Group 1 respondents (64.7% versus 23.1%). It is noteworthy that, for Group 1 respondents who participated in the research and used PRIME, the percentage who described their model as strong or perfect increased s ignificantly from 33.3% at Time 1 (before their participation in the project) to 76.9% at Time 2 (after their participation in the project). On the other hand, the percentage who felt the service system needed improvement dropped from 66.7% at Time 1 to 23.1% at Time 2.

Respondents were asked 5 open-ended questions regarding their service system. The following explores the main themes seen in their responses.

Strengths

Both Groups 1 and 2 identified similar strengths in their career service delivery syst em. A thematic analysis of responses points to an emphasis on the quality of staff, connections/networks amongst staff and program characteristics. Staff were described as dedicated, highly trained and results oriented. Respondents noted that the service system enabled them to network and collaborate with professional peers and they expressed pride in the accessibility and results-focus of their programming.

Challenges

The two most common challenges reported across both Groups 1 and 2 were the inadequacy of resources (human, financial, physical) and program-specific issues (such as an over-emphasis on reporting/administration, a mismatch between clients and programs and inappropriate staffing).

Missed Opportunities

Respondents across both Groups 1 and 2 most often reported missed opportunities related to partnerships/networking, training, and meeting clients needs. Many respondents felt that there were opportunities for collaboration and cross-pollination that could provide stronger services to clients. Respondents reinforced the need for training and ongoing professional development and a stronger linkage between client needs and programming.

Recommendations

Respondents across both Groups 1 and 2 recommended more staff training, more collaboration and systems-level enhancements (such as integration of new and emerging models and approaches, stronger dialogue with policy makers to ensure client/practice informed policy and decision making). With respect to training, a focus on career development theories, ethics, micro-credentialing and certification were emphasized.

Reflections on the Being a Community-Based Researcher

At Time 2, respondents from Group 1 were asked a series of targeted questions about their participation in the research project and their use of PRIME. A strong majority of respondents reported that they:
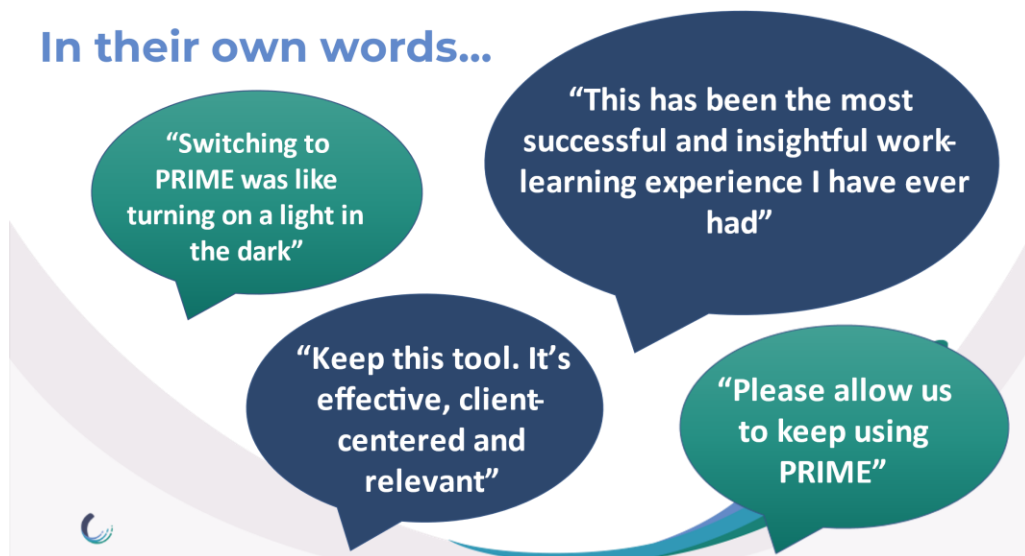
- Were adequately trained and well supported in using PRIME (84.6%)
- Have seen a positive impact on their clients as a result of using PRIME (84.6%)
- Have seen a positive impact of their practice as a result of using PRIME (92.3%)
- Have seen a positive impact on their organization as a result of using PRIME (76.9%)
- Want to keep using PRIME in their practice (instead of the tool they had been mandated to use) (92.3%)
- Would recommend that PRIME be implemented province-wide (84.6%)

What participating practitioners said about PRIME

More engagement, more discussion and better follow through	Instills hope for building a future story	Serves as a road map	Improved my techniques and client relationships
Improves accountability	Leads to better referrals and faster/better outcomes	Supports focus and motivation	Improves teamwork
Gives relevant, real-time information	Reflects the client's journey	Holistic, user-friendly	

After Time 2 of the survey, CCDF conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with members of Group 1 (who participated in the research and used PRIME) to supplement the survey results. Interview respondents included frontline practitioners and managers. The interviews are a rich source of qualitative data. Verbatim highlights from a few interviews are captured below:

In their own words...

"Switching to PRIME was like turning on a light in the dark"

"This has been the most successful and insightful work-learning experience I have ever had"

"Keep this tool. It's effective, client-centered and relevant"

"Please allow us to keep using PRIME"

Recommendations

This project provides strong evidence to inform policy and practice. It has tested an alternative approach to accountability that promotes quality service underpinned by meaningful data. In so doing, it has gathered data on the presenting strengths and needs and clients and the changes that occur in their employability by virtue of participation in career/employment services. This project has also explored several unintended outcomes, including the impact of participation by career development practitioners in community - based research on indicators of professionalism, ethical practice, client engagement, quality service, and evidence-based practice.

Career Development Policy Recommendations

- Adopt an accountability framework that reflects indicators of client change across the full range of Employability Dimensions – not limited to whether a client gets employed or into training.
- Ensure frontline career/employment service providers have access to effective tools and training to conduct consistent and rigorous employability assessments as the basis for informing goal setting, action planning and choosing appropriate interventions and to record the results.
- Ensure frontline career/employment service providers have access to a tracking tool that seamlessly integrates into the culture and day-to-day realities of practice, consistently records the results of employability assessments, and makes that data accessible and usable to clients, practitioners, managers, and service system planners.
- Make robust use of data that is collected and reported by engaging with frontline career/employment service providers to analyse findings and collaboratively explore their implications on programming/policy.
- Use the data provided in this report as a catalyst for discussions with frontline career/employment service providers and other key stakeholders. Explore together:
  - To what extent does the current constellation of services offered reflect the presenting strengths and needs of clients?
  - What emerge as best practices that may be contributing most directly to the positive changes in clients' employability indicators found in the data?
  - Are there areas of strength in the service delivery system that could be expanded?

- Given the learning and positive impacts of this project, make a commitment to continued funding for community-based research. Collaborate with frontline career/employment service providers and researchers to develop a robust research agenda that ensures that policy and programming continue to be informed by solid evidence.
- Support longitudinal research. This project afforded a robust data collection period and time for analysis, and assimilation and application of learning.
- Promote diverse and inclusive approaches to research. The "opt-in" approach of this project enabled agencies of various sizes, including those with limited resources, and organizations serving diverse populations to participate.
- Consider how to build on the momentum created via this project specifically. For example, might it be useful next step be to now drill down to identify the connection between specific interventions delivered and client outcomes?
- The Community Employment Collaboration was found to raise the bar amongst career/employment service providers and serve as a vehicle for bringing national/international profile and connection to Newfoundland/Labrador. Consider how this body can continue as a stable foundation for a strong and growing service ecosystem.

Career Development Practice Recommendations

- Take charge of your own data story. Do not wait for funders to mandate it. Whether in big or small ways, begin to collect data on metrics that matter.
- Collaborate within and/or across service agencies wherever possible in the collection and analysis of data to promote evidence-based practice at a larger systems level.
- Use client data within sessions to guide goal setting and action planning so that services are client driven.
- Analyse data trends and use these findings to inform intervention planning and program planning.
- Develop your own research agenda and share it with funders. What do you need to learn/understand more deeply to deliver the highest quality services?
- Work with funders to develop a plan (within and/or across agencies) to support ongoing professional development and growth through participation in community-based research and targeted professional development.
- Set the bar high. Frontline career/employment service providers have demonstrated a commitment to quality when the tools and training are in place to support it.

Broader Recommendations

While this research was conducted in partnership with the career development sector, much of the learning may be extrapolated to other sectors.

- The principles underpinning strong metrics, accountability and quality service that rose to the surface in this project apply to any human service.
- The process undertaken to develop PRIME could be applied in any sector wishing to track meaningful indicators of impact.
- The benefits of community-based research seen in this project are readily transferable to other sectors.

The model implemented by the Community Employment Collaboration to create and nurture a professional community of practice could be used across other sectors effectively and merits further study.

Conclusion

This project has been transformative in so many ways. We have presented herein quantitative and qualitative data analyses demonstrating the dramatic impacts of this project and the use of PRIME on clients served, on practitioners, their organizations and the broader service ecosystem in Newfoundland/Labrador. The cycle of impact can be summarized as follows:

Figure 28 - The Cycle of Strong Metrics to Strong Ecosystem
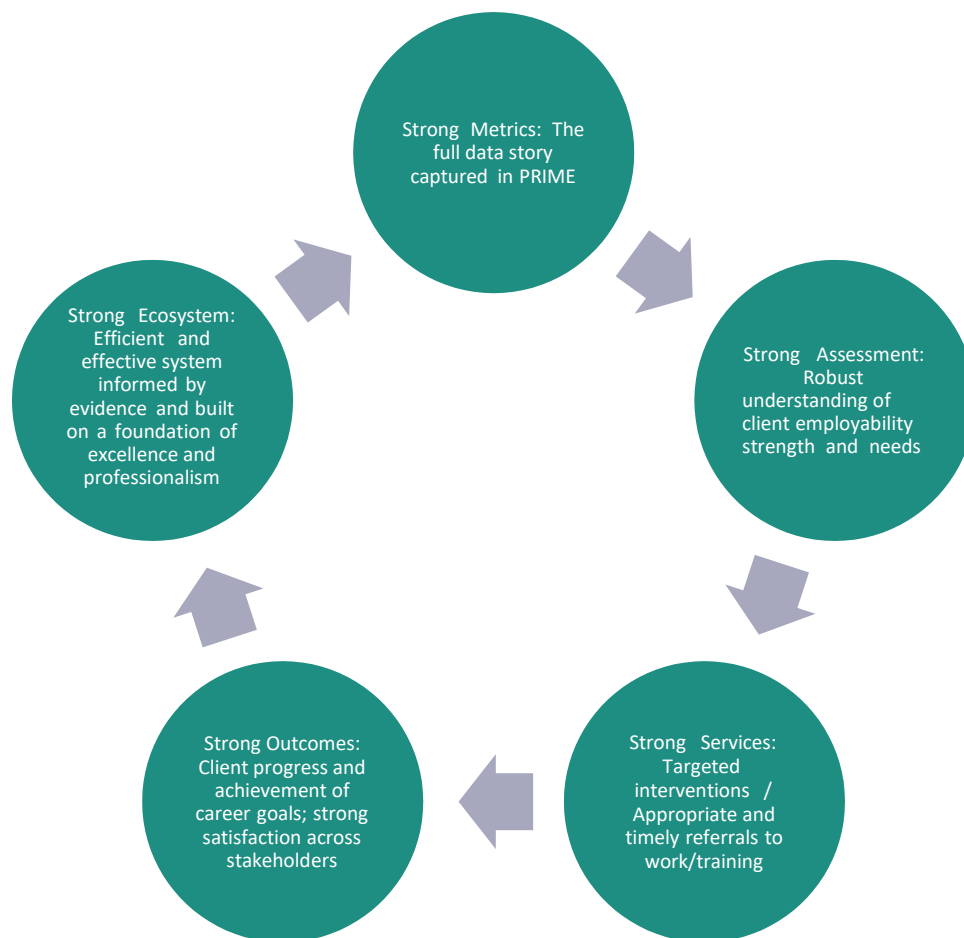
There is no evidence that frontline services are resistant to accountability and evaluation. When provided with appropriate training and tools to do so well, service providers jump at the opportunity to examine their practice, learn from evidence, strive for the highest degree of excellence, engage in continuous improvement, and embrace a culture of evaluation.

We have presented herein quantitative and qualitative data analyses demonstrating the dramatic impacts of this project on client progress and outcomes and on practitioners' professional identity, competence, ethical practice, accountability, quality service, perceived impact, client engagement and connection to a broader professional community of practice nationally and internationally.

The Final Tale of Transformation: The Art of the Possible

Service systems are overwhelmingly large and complex beasts and, accordingly, we sometimes erroneously assume they are immovable and unchangeable. Several "wicked problems" have plagued the Canadian public employment ecosystem for many years. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Clients present with multiple, complex strengths and needs, but these are not comprehensively or consistently assessed. As a result, the constellation of client needs is not understood and there is no data to guide and inform strategic service delivery planning.

- Metrics used for reporting and accountability (and often to determine funding levels) are typically limited to the woefully inadequate measures of whether a client becomes employed or is referred to training.

- When the only reliable data collection across Canadian jurisdictions are counts of employed/trained client, there is no basis for strategic planning or policy development.

- The full impact of services – how services address complex client needs and help to move people toward stronger community and labour market attachment – is not known. As a result, there is no strong evidence-based data to inform policy or practice and the entire ecosystem suffers.

- The limited data that exists is rarely readily available to inform client planning or frontline practice.

- Most data recording and reporting systems are widely despised by frontline practitioners as they do not reflect the realities of day-to-day practice and do not perceived to enhance or feed the quality of service delivery.

- Evaluation often focuses on deficits, while practice is typically grounded in strength-based theories and models.

- With some notable exceptions, including the Community Employment Collaboration that partnered in this research, career/employment services face chronic challenges in accessing training, professional development and evidence-based tools and resources.

- As a result, while the career/employment service delivery sector is keen to demonstrate its impact, the ecosystem across Canada lacks the common

framework, language, standards, supports and capacity needed to ensure rigorous employability assessment, responsive services, quality assurance and accountability.

These were the challenges that PRIME addresses. It provides career practitioners with a strength-based framework and support to engage clients in a robust assessment of the full range of client employability strengths and needs. It collects data consistently from intake to exit, reflecting client progress and enabling a full analysis of client change. Data is recorded seamlessly as part of regular service delivery and data is accessible and useful to all stakeholders, including clients, practitioners, managers, community service networks, researchers, funders, and policy makers. PRIME training provides essential, foundational competencies to deliver quality career/employment services and connects practitioners to a community of practice regionally, nationally, and internationally. And, because PRIME has been built with and for the frontlines, it is a tool that practitioners report liking and wanting to continue using.

This project has demonstrated the art of the possible. It has shown how clients, practitioners, their organizations, and a network of agencies have been transformed and offered a glimpse of how much larger and more complex service ecosystems *could* be transformed. The tools, training, and supports are developed, tested and ready for wider implementation. Moving from "problem to possible" is now within reach for any jurisdiction.