“More than a job, finally”

Lived Experiences of Build Up Saskatoon Participants

Sarah S. Mohammed
CCSC Research Assistant

Marc-André Pigeon
CCSC Director and Strategic Research Fellow

BUILD UP SASKATOON
Quint

JOHNSON SHOYAMA
Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
UREGINA USASK

ABSTRACT

While social enterprises aim to produce social outcomes through their work, there is little research to illustrate how they achieve these social outcomes. Using Quint's Build Up Saskatoon social enterprise as a case study, we interviewed crew members of the social enterprise about their experiences working at Build Up. From these interviews, we generated four major themes that illustrate the participants' socio-economic outcomes: Demolishing Old Structures, Occupational Foundations, Stable Framing, and Social Renovations. From these themes, we conclude that this social enterprise utilizes a multifaceted intervention model to address participants' barriers to employment. We discuss how Build Up's support enables crew members to imagine new possibilities for themselves that contribute to wider community wellness, as well as study limitations and broader implications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to extend our deepest gratitude for the tireless and patient support of our research partners Aaron Timoshyk, Build Up Saskatoon; Kristen Thoms and Len Usiskin, Quint; Tenille Thomson and Roy Lavallee, City of Saskatoon; and Darren Pringle, Saskatoon Police Service. Your guidance and support made this research possible. We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to the CCSC's Research and Communications Coordinator Stan Yu and Professional Research Associate Natalie Kallio for helping manage and coordinate the project; to Dr. Jen Budney; to Nora Russell for her expert editing support; and the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research for their timely transcription support. We also gratefully acknowledge this research was made possible because of funding from the Research Junction, a University of Saskatchewan and City of Saskatoon research collaboration. We also want to acknowledge Shaun Loney and Encompass Co-operative for initiating the conversation that ultimately led to this research. Your work reminds us that ideas are powerful. Finally, sincerest thanks to the Build Up participants who gave an interview for graciously sharing their stories with us.

Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
101 Diefenbaker Place
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon SK Canada S7N 5B8
Phone: (306) 966-8509/ Fax: (306) 966-8517
Email: coop.studies@usask.ca
Website: http://usaskstudies.coop

JOHNSON SHOYAMA
Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
UREGINA USASK

Project Funders

research JUNCTION
University of Saskatchewan
City of Saskatoon

Table of Contents

From the Crew's Perspective

For a ground level view of the impact of Quint's Build Up social enterprise on the community, we turned to the community members. The robust quantitative study captured Build Up's social outcomes and translated them into economic terms, providing a view of the social enterprise's impact and benefit to the city (Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives 2024). However, it provided little insight to the process by which Build Up achieves these outcomes and how they unfold in the lives of participants. The following qualitative analysis centres on the voices of Build Up participants and presents the program's social impact through their lived experiences with the social enterprise. Examining Build Up's economic and social outcomes, the analysis describes the multifaceted intervention approach the social enterprise uses to support the journeys of participants as they cultivate a career, develop stability, support their community, and improve their own well-being.

METHODS

Recruitment

We invited Build Up Saskatoon crew members to

participate via a poster hung in the Build Up workshop. Recruitment began on 20 April 2023 and we stopped taking new participants on 26 May 2023. Participants were eligible if they were a former or current employee of Build Up Saskatoon working in the crew.

Participant Demographics

The resulting sample (n=8) of participants closely represents the diversity of the total Build Up crew members across several demographics (see table 1). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 55 years, with an average age of 36.25 years (s=10.93). Of the eight participants, 62.5 percent (n=5) were Caucasian and 37.5 percent (n=3) were Indigenous (including one First Nations participant and two Métis participants). Caucasian participants were slightly overrepresented compared to the composition of the recruitment pool, which was 54 percent (n=7) Caucasian and 46 percent (n=6) Indigenous, although because an Indigenous crew member left Build Up before the end of our recruitment period, our chance of recruiting Indigenous participants was not consistent throughout. Across self-identified gender, sample composition was 75 percent (n=6) men and 25 percent (n=2) women (see table 2), which closely matches the recruitment pool, composed of 77 percent (n=10) men and 23 percent (n=3) women. All participants were current employees.

Data Generation Procedure

Our research team employed individual semi-structured interviews to generate data. We conducted in-person interviews at booked rooms in Station 20 West, deemed the most accessible and familiar location for crew members due to its housing the Quint Development office and its proximity to the Build Up workshop. Data are co-constructed through a relational interviewing approach that utilizes empathetic listening and empathetic responses to understand the participant's perspective and invite deep reflection on the topic (Josselson 2013). Before each interview, we reviewed the purpose of the study, confidentiality, risks, benefits, incentives, right to withdraw, and data management and storage, and obtained informed consent.

Interviews lasted no longer than one hour, ranging from twenty-eight to fifty-five minutes, and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. At the end of the interview, each participant received a copy of the consent form and a CAD$30 cash honorarium.

Table 1: Racial Distribution of Participants

Race	Population Count	Population %	Sample Count	Sample%
Caucasian	7	0.54	5	0.625
Indigenous (Métis, First Nations)	6	0.46	3	0.375
Total	13		8	

[1] *Here, "Indigenous" describes whether a person is "First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, and/or Inuk (Inuit)" (Statistics Canada 2021).*

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	Population Count	Population %	Sample Count	Sample%
Male	10	0.77	6	0.75
Female	3	0.23	2	0.25
Total	13		8	

We transcribed the audio file after each interview using Microsoft Word™ Transcription, and the researcher either cleaned it up themselves or used the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research's (CHASR) transcription services. We employed member-checking to confirm that the transcripts represented the participants' intended meanings (Braun and Clarke 2013) by sending each anonymized transcript to its corresponding participant with the option of providing feedback. After validation, we stored the audio files and transcripts on a password-protected, University of Saskatchewan-managed SharePoint drive accessible to only the researchers. In this report, we refer to each participant using a pseudonym.

Analysis

We analyzed the data generated from interviews using thematic analysis, which involved organizing codes into a logical system of themes (Braun and Clarke 2013). We began by re-reading interviews to familiarize ourselves with the data before coding (Braun and Clarke 2013). We conducted complete, latent coding by identifying all aspects of the transcripts that had potential relevance to the research question and by coding conceptually rather than semantically (Braun and Clarke 2013). When collating the codes, we additionally indicated next to each code—using a binary coding system—whether it reflected an experience the participant had before or after they joined Build Up.[2] This ensured we did not misattribute the role of Build Up in participants' lives when analyzing for economic and social outcomes. We then organized these codes into candidate themes according to patterns that recurred across the data (Braun and Clarke 2013). We reviewed these themes for relevance to the research question and for clear, logical relationships among them (Braun and Clarke 2013). After revising the candidate themes accordingly, we refined the themes for discretion through defining and naming, then reported our interpretive analysis detailing how the interview findings respond to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2013).

[2] Any codes referencing experiences predating Build Up (including those that began before joining Build Up and are ongoing) are indicated with a 0; any code referencing an experience after they joined Build Up or any discussions about Build Up specifically are indicated with a 1.

The overarching research question, once again, is:

- How can we determine the economic and social outcomes of Build Up Saskatoon?

Subquestions are as follows:

- How do the outcomes of Build Up Saskatoon translate in terms of economic value?
- How do the economic and social outcomes of Build Up Saskatoon take form through the lived experiences of participants?

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

Through thematic analysis, we generated four themes and subthemes (shown in figure 1):

1. Demolishing Old Structures
2. Occupational Foundations
    a. Qualifications
    b. Career Development
    c. Life Skills
    d. Value of Labour
3. Stable Framing
    a. Self-Reliance
    b. Security
4. Social Renovations
    a. Supporting a Family
    b. Community Service

Figure 1: Themes of Build Up Crew Experiences

These four themes detail the ways Build Up Saskatoon supports the efforts of crew members to become independent and fosters their shift into providers of care for themselves, their loved ones, and their communities.

1. DEMOLISHING OLD STRUCTURES

For crew members with criminal records, Build Up relieved the pressure to reoffend by providing a legal and sustainable alternative. In the past, these participants initially turned to crime for financial resources that were otherwise unavailable to them. However, by reducing the economic insecurity that contributes to reoffending (Henry 2018), Build Up helped crew members settle into a higher socioeconomic position than they had previously experienced. Thus, joining Build Up meant crew members no longer needed to participate in criminal systems for survival.

Peter was one such participant who had grown accustomed to repeating criminal offenses. Beginning to explain the criminal moral code that made his practices sustainable, Peter said, “See, I’m a different kind of guy. I’m an honest criminal…”—he trailed off, pausing in thought for a few seconds, before declaring, “You know what? I can’t even say I’m an honest *criminal.* I got a job. And I think it’s pretty cool.” Like Peter, other participants similarly found themselves confronting their separation from criminality and consciously deciding to tear down their past criminal relationships to better adjust to their new circumstances.

Image 1: Build Up participant demolishing worn concrete steps.

Before Build Up: Stuck in a Cycle

Although one 20-year-old participant had no previous interactions with police and another had a few encounters but no charges (i.e., never formally accused of committing a crime), the other six participants had been imprisoned in correctional facilities. Of those, only 1 had been in a provincial correctional centre (jail), while the other five had done time in both provincial and federal (i.e., penitentiary and prison) correctional centres. Following release from correctional facilities—where the criminal justice system was their main care provider—participants struggled to establish their own independent sources of income, as the stigma of a criminal record (and, for some, struggles with substance use) made it difficult or impracticable for them to attain and maintain the employment they needed.[3]

[3] The various barriers to employment are explored in more depth in the “Career Development” subtheme of the “Occupational Foundations” theme. The focus in this theme is the financial pressure to reoffend.

> *I've heard other guys that talked about like if when they left CORCAN[4], if they couldn't find a job right away, either like "man, I'm gonna have to get back into the gang life, I'm gonna have to start selling drugs again or whatever"* (Victor).

Notably, the conversation centred around their desire to not reoffend. It was understood that lacking a source of income only exacerbated the financial pressures participants faced, including those resulting from their offences, such as SGI fines[5] and lawyer fees. Peter echoed this throughout the sharing of his own extensive experience, saying, "Oh yeah. I got like 27 in jail. Yeah, so it's that not having a job is hand in hand with going to jail."

However, in addition to the financial pressures to reoffend, there were also environmental factors at play. The atmosphere of illegal activity that enveloped participants was difficult to ignore. Significantly, participants discussed how difficult it was to be released into another city or region, saying, "If they got you here, they kind of want to keep you here" (Victor). While this decision is often made to ensure the offender has a place to stay after release, or due to post-release monitoring and conditions (e.g., probation, parole, etc.), it simultaneously locates the offender in the same context they were in when they were arrested. Sebastian was frustrated that, despite his best effort, he could not maintain his sobriety after his first bit[6]: "I was doing good for so long. Then I end up getting back into using drugs." Being surrounded by the same factors and circumstances he attributed to his problematic substance use in the first place meant his change to sobriety was not contextually supported. Participants were also surrounded by tragedy in these contexts, shown time and time again that anyone's best efforts at change were destined to fail. Peter saw this after trying to establish a painting company with a friend; soon afterwards, his friend was arrested and Peter had to return to robbery for income. Raul realized he needed to get out of his hometown after hearing about the death of his friend:

> *You wouldn't want to cross paths with the guy. He was not a good … he was a bad person when he was younger. Yeah, but he got older and he had kids, and then he was actually being a counselor for the Friendship Centre in [hometown] when the police did that to him. […] A lot of people were starting to look at him more of as an elder and a person to go to than what he used to be before as when he was younger, which would have been a gangster kid or a ruffian that you, you know, would avoid, so. But then he got tased by the police.*

Despite his friend's attempt to make a positive change in the community and leave gang life behind, it followed him. Raul is still left to grieve, making the possibility of anyone turning a new leaf seem even more unrealistic.

---

[4] CORCAN is an agency of Correctional Service Canada that offers vocational training in manufacturing, construction, textiles, and other services to offenders incarcerated in Canadian correctional institutions.

[5] Saskatchewan Government Insurance, the provincial Crown corporation responsible for all driver licensing, insurance, and vehicle registration in Saskatchewan.

[6] Jail or prison sentence, or period of time served in a correctional centre.

For the six participants with criminal records, despite their concerted efforts, their environments thrust them into a cycle of committing crimes and doing time, as no other option for survival proved attainable. Ivan voiced his frustration with trying to leave his gang, saying, “It’s not an easy thing. It’s not easy and then, you know, you get into any kind of trouble and [the police] lump you right back into it and then you’re stuck trying to do it all over again.” Here, Ivan highlighted how the criminal justice system contributed to his own recidivism, as well as how repeated arrests impeded creating a life for himself outside of the criminal justice system or the gang’s operations.

With seemingly no feasible alternative to crime, some participants eventually accepted their return to crime as inevitable and molded their lives around this expectation. Ivan, for example, relocated to new cities several times to avoid “some charges [he] was running from,” which ultimately landed him back in prison. Peter, who had previously mentioned that he spent around twenty-seven years total in correctional facilities, at some point decided it was not worth the bother to invest in life outside, stating he “never had a bank account or no driver’s licence.” Rather, when he got out, he used the retainer he kept his lawyer on to withdraw and deposit funds, under the assumption he would need to keep his lawyer on call. Similarly, he understood that if he got pulled over while driving, he would be arrested whether he had a licence or not. Participants also had established “rules” (Ivan) and codes of moral conduct that made the continuation of their practices morally justifiable to themselves, such as not selling drugs to anyone underage (Ivan, Peter) and not selling any drugs cut with fentanyl (Peter). As the years passed, this cycle of perpetual recidivism became a maintained structure and supplied some consistency and predictability to an otherwise precarious mode of survival. Participants learned to accept themselves as criminals.

After Joining Build Up: A New Alternative

The cycle of crime-and-time was finally disrupted by the conditions that employment with Build Up created for the participants. Those who were previously entrenched in this cycle were able to disentangle themselves from it through Build Up’s support services, consistent and sufficient income, and a structured schedule, which cumulatively empowered participants to move beyond their criminal pasts.

Build Up’s support services were particularly good at helping participants with a criminal history to navigate the legal system. Raul had accumulated several parking tickets, and Build Up’s support worker set him up for success by helping him schedule his court dates and payments for his tickets. Raul recounts being told, “We’ll make sure that you’re ready to go do this when it’s the time to do this” and expressed surprise at receiving this kind of support, saying, “It’s not even that much [money], but they’re going to help me with that and even—so it’s amazing. Absolutely amazing.” While these bureaucratic processes may just be a nuisance for someone with the funds, stability, and time to deal with them, for people without these resources and with a criminal record, the layers of bureaucracy can be overwhelming, especially without an advocate. Cleo realized this when

Build Up's support worker accompanied her to obtain a criminal record check:

> *And then when I had to go for my criminal record checks, [Build Up's support worker] took me there, and here I was wanted and I didn't even know. And I was like, "Oh, God." […] I had dealt with everything already, these charges. That clerk or whatever here in Saskatoon didn't put it in the computer that I already dealt with them.*

Realizing the warrant for her arrest was based on charges she had already dealt with (i.e., the warrant should no longer have been in effect), the support worker presented her with options to deal with the input error, allowing her to choose her course of action. He then helped her navigate the steps towards getting a criminal record check that allowed her to work, which entailed recognizing the charge, turning herself in, and contacting Legal Aid to assist and confirm the error. The support worker's familiarity with the system and the hurdles that offenders face facilitated Cleo getting to work.

Criminal record checks were not the only form of paperwork participants needed. Build Up also helped crew members set up health cards, driver's licences and other forms of government ID, thus enfranchising them in government systems outside of criminal justice system. In addition, Build Up covered the expenses associated with obtaining these documents so crew members were not further burdened.

After obtaining these documents and having been part of Build Up for several weeks, Ivan, Victor, and Helene noticed a difference in the flow of their lives — since joining Build Up, they had not had any police interactions. Helene attributed this to her work schedule, saying, "I don't deal with cops anymore at all. [...] I only go to work and then I go back," and Ivan noted he no longer felt like a "target" for police. Peter, a man in his fifties who had spent most of his adult life in and out of prison, spoke in detail about this new chapter in his life:

> *You're going to jail and then everything that you've built up, you lose. So get used to it. You know what I mean? Then build it up again. Next time, better, better stuff, better people, better connections, better, whatever. And then ride that one 'til it pops, yeah. This ain't gonna pop.*

Peter spoke about repeatedly trying to construct a life for yourself outside "'til it pops" and identified something about his experience with Build Up that was different from his previous attempts. Helene specifically recognized the impact of the change in context from her reserve (i.e., First Nation) to Saskatoon. Describing her plans to talk with Build Up's support worker about housing options, she said:

> *I'm going to need a lot of support if I'm trying to stay out here, which I want to. Just to get away from the old areas and all the surrounding people. I don't want to be around any of that* (Helene).

Having recently achieved one year of sobriety, Helene decided moving was necessary for her own health, and emphasized that the support

from Build Up will contribute to her success building a life in a new area and forging new relationships.

For these six participants, Build Up interrupted their patterns of reoffending to survive, offering an alternative, preferable source of care that rendered prior criminal systems unnecessary. Additionally, participants pointed out the value of stable employment itself as a tool to decrease crime rates, praising Build Up for its capacity to create this change in the community. Victor cited his own conversations with people about those who are unhoused (or on the brink of being unhoused) after getting out of prison, saying that access to employment and housing assistance "just takes such a weight off your shoulder and puts you at way less of a risk to being going back to crime." Whereas Victor was surrounded by people with these same concerns, Ivan confronted them directly. Speaking about an old friend from his gang days, Ivan recalled:

> *The day after I got out, he called me up, ended up telling me that he had $13,000 for me. Try and get me to go back. I said no. It wasn't easy, but I said no. […] Hard to turn down offers, and if I had that kind of money I could have found my kids a house like [snaps] that, right? Yeah, but if I did that, that would be, you know, just one more step down that slippery, slippery slope.*

Ivan emphasized that the consistency and sufficiency of his Build Up paycheque meant he did not need to gain income through crime—another option was available to him. He elaborated that making this change was not easy, but still valuable: "It is the hardest thing I've ever, ever tried to do is what I'm trying to do right now, but it's, it's doable and it's, it's, it's worth it, right?" (Ivan)

Other participants echoed this sentiment, noting that "a lot of criminals out there have a hard time finding jobs" (Cleo), and anyone who turns to crime does so because "they don't have a job and they don't have the supports" (Sebastian). Raul was optimistic that programs like Build Up could "better the community, where people are taking care of each other instead of stabbing each other in the back." Of all the participants, Peter had the most concise and personal insights into the relationship between employment and crime. When asked how Build Up affected his life, Peter simply responded, "I stopped stealing stuff. […] Don't need to. No, I've got a job now."

2. OCCUPATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

The work the crew does and the skills they develop lie at the core of Build Up's model. The crew completes a variety of demolition, renovation, and remodeling services, including installing flooring; framing and drywall; interior and exterior finishing; minor electrical and plumbing repairs; general landscaping; building outdoor structures such as decks, fences, and sheds; general carpentry; and more (Build Up Saskatoon 2023). But this work does more than keep the crew members busy—it addresses the barriers between crew members and a career in the trades. The social enterprise tackles factors that prevent these disadvantaged people from accessing employment, such as unaffordable

certifications, hiring discrimination, and even low confidence, thus opening doors for crew members to establish a place for themselves in the workforce and sustain that path.

Image 2: Build Up participant training to work with concrete.

As opposed to simply giving people a job and expecting them to flourish despite their circumstances, Build Up sets the crew members up for long-term success by influencing their circumstances until they can take on the responsibility of caring for themselves. Raul conceptualized this model with an adage: "Instead of giving you the fish to eat, they want to teach you how to fish so that you can later on go out there and catch fish." Through this opportunity, participants developed a solid foundation on which to build their career upwards and advance their specialized skills. The dimensions of participant experiences acclimating to the workforce are captured by four subthemes: qualifications, career development, life skills, and the value of labour.

a. Qualifications

Although most participants[7] (all but Helene) held relevant work experience around construction or carpentry, all participants but one (Cleo) lacked the formal training and subsequent qualifications to grow a career from those experiences. Build Up addresses this issue by providing training that is both required and requested. Crew members complete baseline certifications in the first few weeks of joining, including:

- Safety Construction Orientation Training
- Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)
- First Aid

Programming also extends to additional courses requested by participants. So far, this has included:

- Construction Safety Training System
- Transportation of Dangerous Goods
- Fall arrest training
- Lift training, among others.

Additionally, Build Up is accredited for crew members to complete their apprenticeship hours in carpentry. Through training opportunities, skill development, and covering the costs of training and equipment, Build Up minimized the barriers between crew members and a trades education and qualifications.

[7] *We acknowledge the possibility that only those who already gravitate towards the trades have a positive experience with Build Up and, thus, were willing to talk with us. For this reason, it is possible that those who dislike the trades would not see the same effects from Build Up. Although our sample is largely representative of the cohort across race and gender, it does not capture every experience.*

Before Build Up: Training Is Out of Reach

The seven participants who did not have formal trades training before joining Build Up typically learned these skills from family members.[8] Like most participants, Victor said he "never had like any education, like training or anything" but got interested in construction work in his youth, saying, "Over the years I've kind of helped little odds and end jobs with my uncles who were in construction." Similarly, Ivan learned construction skills from his grandfather, who he admiringly referred to as a "master carpenter,"[9] and Camron learned basic car mechanics from his father. Helene also remembers seeing her family members doing construction work but she was not invited to learn the skills beyond just watching.

For these participants, these informally gained skills were enough to find work, and because their limited funds prevented access to formal training, they did what they could with what they had. The few times Peter got formal employment, he resorted to learning on the job: "So what I needed to learn instead of going to school or doing anything, getting a grant or whatever, I would just go work in the trade and then I would learn, yeah." Raul similarly learned on the job while working in construction, but recalls that his younger brother in the same field was making significantly more money than he was, which he attributed to the fact that his brother went to school and became certified. Raul noted this certification was not available to him as he was working all hours of the day to care for his children in his early adulthood and could not afford the tuition cost. Although she did not work in the trades, Helene also noticed that certification has increasingly become a necessity. When asked what qualifications she got for her prior teaching job, she said, "Nothing. I just got an interview and I did the interview and then I got hired. It was pretty easy back then. But now you need your [certifications]." Despite the desire of participants to work in the trades, their socioeconomic status barred them from the education necessary to move forward in the field.

After Joining Build Up: Skills Acquisition

By investing in their workers, Build Up simultaneously maintained a highly skilled workforce while also helping crew members overcome barriers to a trades education. Build Up covered the cost for crew members to gain new skills. For example, participants talked about learning carpentry (Cleo, Peter); mixing concrete (Sebastian); operating a forklift, skid-steer loader, and telehandler (Cleo); painting and mudding (Helene); and being introduced to new tools (Camron). Helene was grateful for the opportunity:

> *Everything that I've been doing so far for the past almost two months since I've been there is new to me. I'm just learning everything. I had no training at all when I got there. It's a learning experience and I actually really enjoy it.*

Sebastian was similarly grateful for the opportunity, but included the caveat that some

[8] Cleo is the only participant who had formal trades training and was able to obtain certification in First Aid, fall arrest, H2S Alive (a course certified by Energy Safety Canada), and chainsaw use while in the penitentiary, in addition to having taken carpentry courses through the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), which is explained in more depth in the "Career Development" subtheme.

[9] Ivan also successfully obtained his GED (General Education Development) in prison, although this certification is not specific to the trades.

skill acquisition opportunities were limited by funding restrictions. His initial attempt at learning to work with concrete had been postponed by the staff not having enough supplies.

These skills were even beneficial to crew members with previous construction experience. Peter, for example, found himself able to communicate in a new way:

> *I didn't know 16-inch stud spacings or 12-inch stud spacings or what a pony wall was, or Jack stud or any of those things. I didn't know that, but now they're putting a name to the things I already knew. Now I know what to call it I can have a conversation with a carpenter.*

In addition to organizing safety training courses for which the crew members received certifications (Camron, Helene) and covering the costs of tools (Ivan), Build Up also covers the costs of courses required for crew members to have a wider set of job-related qualifications. Both Victor and Sebastian plan on becoming heavy equipment operators, which requires costly courses. However, because it would be useful for them both and would enable them to drive "the big, big equipment" on site, Build Up found grant money to cover the cost of the course for both participants: "The actual course is like four hundred bucks. Can't really afford that right now. Build Up, no problem, will cover it. You know, as long as you show the motivation" (Sebastian). And because Build Up is an accredited program, Cleo was able to count her work as hours towards her carpentry apprenticeship with SIIT, which Build Up also supported financially. Cleo looked forward to an increase in pay at the end of her apprenticeship, and Raul was equally glad to have the opportunity to get qualifications:

> *I'm very grateful that I found a company like this because they're giving me the opportunity to do the things that I haven't done without the paperwork and then to get the paperwork so that I can later on go out there and say, "Hey, look, I got my fancy paper that says I can do this."*

Like most participants, Raul was glad to develop the skills he entered the position with and to have formal recognition of the work he's done to develop those skills. Although this does not necessarily ensure loyalty to Build Up and, in fact, encourages crew members to advance their careers, it fulfills Build Up's social mission of contributing to a stronger, more diverse and inclusive local workforce (Build Up 2023). By supporting crew members' educational pursuits, Build Up helps them establish solid foundations towards a stable occupation in the trades.

b. Career Development

Through the training and qualifications that Build Up made accessible, participants forged a path towards a long-term career which, for many of them, previously seemed impossible. Despite many participants coming to Build Up with workforce skills, the prospect of obtaining and holding a job was barred by their criminal records and/or complicated by their gender.

Before Build Up: Take What You Can Get

While all participants were able to work with

the skills they had (both within and outside the trades), they found themselves unable to advance these skills into a career. Participants came into Build Up with a wide variety of experiences:

- working in construction through CORCAN (Cleo, Victor, Sebastian) and/or through employed work outside (Victor, Sebastian, Ivan, Raul)
- working in a woodshop (Camron)
- fixing cars (Peter, Camron)
- welding, waste management, and working with concrete (Peter)
- painting (Peter, Helene)
- working in sales (Raul)
- teaching (Helene)

All participants held these practical skills that would be useful to employers across various companies, but understood that their chances of obtaining a position were hampered by several factors.

The stigma of a criminal record was the most glaring concern for most participants, who were concerned their resumés would be automatically thrown out. Ivan experienced firsthand the difficulty of getting a foot in the door when he was calling potential employers from inside prison.[10] He talked about his persistence despite not being given a chance, and how many employers did not even pick up the phone, saying, “It was a lot harder yet. Most places don’t even answer jail calls. But I mean, I was still here on the phone. I was still working on it every single day, right?” (Ivan) Victor, on the other hand, “never got turned down” for a job, “but [he] got fired from a couple places before when they found out [about his criminal record].” After being fired from a meat processing plant for having a record, Victor began working at a restaurant, until management discovered his criminal record as well. The firings and his need to continue paying his bills thrust Victor into low-paying positions that would hire quickly and required no specialized training, which made him unable to put time into attaining qualifications or dedicating himself to single career path. The inability to build a career also affected Helene, who wanted to go into nursing, but gave up on those career ambitions entirely: “Now that I have this on my record, I was getting told that it would probably be hard to go for nursing” (Helene).

A lack of work history was also a concern for participants, including Sebastian, who had very little legal work experience, and Camron, who had only recently graduated high school yet needed a job that could feed his family. In addition to these concerns, Cleo faced employment barriers due to her identity as a Métis woman. After taking carpentry courses that required her to renovate a laundromat and house through SIIT in her hometown, she attempted to gain employment with a local construction company, but it fell through:

> *Yeah, they’re prejudiced against women working in carpentry over there. […] And when we renovated a house on reserve there, when I took that course, yeah, they didn’t want me to work with them after I was done that program because I was a woman. And all the guys that were*

[10] *With few exceptions (e.g., calls coming from a staff member’s phone), inmate telephone calls are not connected until first, the intended recipient is informed that the call is coming from inside a correctional facility and second, they agree to accept the call.*

> *in that program got a job with that. [...] There was a few guys that work there that were telling me that they don't hire women carpenters there and there was no women and there is still no women there whatsoever.*

Despite having the same qualifications and coming out of the same course as the men who were hired, Cleo was not employed, and therefore still has little work history. She does have experience working at CORCAN, but she was barred from working there after her second bit due to gender-based harassment. While her parole officer at CORCAN claims she was bullying a man, Cleo said there was more to the story:

> *I didn't like him, but I wasn't bullying because of that. I was bullying him because he kept trying to tell me what to do. And he didn't even know how to fucking nail in a nail with a hammer. [...] And he was like, "Sorry, I'm just so used to telling women what to do."*

Cleo's response to the sexism she experienced in the workplace excluded her from further work at CORCAN. She decided to settle down with her husband in Saskatoon for the job opportunities in the city, which informed her decision to begin with Build Up. Both Cleo and Helene had given up on finding work in their hometowns, feeling unsupported by the local organizations. Cleo tried to get a job with another construction company but was not eligible for employment since she is Métis and not a member of the First Nations band that runs the company in her hometown. Frustrated, Cleo declared, "I'm just brown for nothing." For Cleo, having the qualifications for a position did not translate into gaining employment.

Even if participants did have work experience, there was no guarantee that it would prepare them for a better position (i.e., a more specialized position that requires a more advanced skillset). Two participants who had some work history (Raul and Sebastian) felt they were not meeting their potential at their previous workplaces. By not having opportunities to develop their skills, they were rendered less competitive in the job market. Sebastian described being bogged down by the repetitive busy work he was given: "I'd master something like say, my cuts, like I'd start mastering my cuts. And then I became ready for the next thing, but it would just be 'stick with that. Stick with that.'" In contrast, Peter eventually stopped hoping for a career and gave up on formal employment. After many years of struggling to find a job, or keep a job for longer than a week, Peter had accepted self-employment, fixing up cars as his only option. Although at first, he found himself much happier in control of his own work and hours, the precarity of the work eventually set in:

> *When you work for yourself, you never stop working. You know what I mean? Like, you're always—any angle to make a buck, you have to go for it because the security of a of a paycheque at the end of two weeks or whatever isn't there.*

Although he did not have to deal with the stress of formal employment, the insecurity of not being sure of his next paycheque meant Peter's life was perpetually stressful. Yet, notably, this was still more stable and controllable than

being employed by a company that could fire him at any point.

After Joining Build Up: Stacking the Resumé

As a workplace that does not discriminate against people with criminal records or on the basis of gender or Indigenous status, Build Up functioned as the proving grounds for participants to exercise their skills, develop their occupational interests, and plan for long-term employment. For participants with a record, "the fact that they don't use a person's past against them" (Ivan) was the biggest appeal of working at Build Up. Cleo was also surprised and relieved that "they gave me a job with my criminal history." Peter similarly expressed relief that "you don't have to hide nothing there," and Victor was glad to have a job lined up after parole:

> *Literally, from the day your parole is over, you're out of [CORCAN]. You cannot stay there after that. So yeah, it was a bit of a concern getting a job and especially having a criminal record makes it harder. So having that option at Build Up, that took like a huge weight off my shoulder.*

With the burden of the criminal record lifted, participants no longer needed to develop back-up plans or constantly check for other quick-hiring, low-paying, precarious jobs. Instead, they could focus on building their resumés and continuing down a specific, specialized career path.

At some point after joining Build Up, participants developed long-term career ambitions and began planning how to achieve these goals. Such ambitions were previously considered out of reach, and participants noticed their newfound ability to invest in their future, saying that at Build Up, "You can get real money, you know? Enough money to have a career instead of just having a job, having a job, and having a job" (Raul). Some career plans were abstract, like those of Helene, a twenty-seven-year-old single mother of three who was considering either teaching or carpentry. She had, so far, spent her adulthood taking care of her young children but now feels capable of building a career that can support her family, and she's exploring her options. Other plans were more specific, such as Victor and Sebastian seeking to be heavy equipment operators, or Cleo working towards her journeyman in carpentry and aspiring to be a red seal carpenter. With such clear and specific goals, the path towards these careers can be co-constructed with Build Up to arrange support at every stage it is needed.

These long-term ambitions look different at different stages of life. Peter, age 55, and Camron, age 20, perceived alternate trajectories with Build Up. While Peter wanted to "do whatever I can for [Build Up] and stay as long as I can," Camron said he was still "kind of exploring" career options. Nonetheless, Build Up provided a valuable position for both participants. It offered Peter the chance to settle down and cultivate the stability to not reoffend, and Camron the wage[11] necessary to comfortably explore his preferred skills and choose a career path.

Notably, Build Up's support for career development is not contingent on crew members

[11] *Build Up's entry wage is $16.89/hour, discussed more in the subtheme "The Value of Labour."*

staying with the program. As a social enterprise, Build Up aims to produce social change. Supporting crew members to develop a career outside of Build Up aligns with their goal to decrease poverty while incorporating more skilled employees into the local workforce. Crew members are thus supported regardless of their intentions to leave or stay with Build Up: "I think his words were 'We're a step. If you can step off to something better, don't feel obligated to stay.' But I like it" (Peter). This support even includes encouraging participants to develop their resumés by "documenting everywhere I go and what I do" for community service "because I can, you know, put that on resumés" (Ivan). Having received formal training in carpentry years prior to joining Build Up, Cleo was hyper-aware of how her skills compared with the rest of the crew members and detailed some conflict with a supervisor around this discrepancy:

> *Yeah, I know stuff that they're doing. And then there's the lead hand. She's, like, trying to tell me what to do, and I already know how to do it, but she makes me do it her way, yeah. […] I feel like I know more, a lot more, than some of them do.*

Although Cleo was aware that her skills were beyond those of her peers, she conceptualized Build Up as a stepping stone towards her career goals. Although she was frustrated and felt as if she was not learning much, she understood that the program helped her get the training, hours, and experience she needed to be a professional in her field. Keeping an open mind about his career options, Raul also saw the training as an asset to ensure he did not have to work a minimum wage job again, saying, "I got these skills now and if I wanted to go venture out into the world, I could get a better job somewhere else. Working minimum wage, I don't know how anybody, anybody, can survive." Although the participants enjoyed their work at Build Up and were committed to their jobs, they also conceptualized this as an opportunity to progress beyond the scope of the workshop. The context of support and encouragement gave them the forward momentum to envision a career for themselves and, for some, this was the first time they were motivated to begin that path.

c. Life Skills

Beyond the technical skills taught through Build Up's sponsored training opportunities, participants were also learning so-called "soft" skills such as leadership, teamwork, conflict management, effective communications, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence (Parlamis and Monnot 2018, 225)—skills Raul aptly described as "life skills."

The Build Up workshop functioned as a space to practice and master what we (following Raul) will refer to as the life skills they required to succeed in the workplace and to minimize everyday distress. Although in many cases the participants did not need (or recognize the need for) these skills before joining Build Up, the workshop fostered a new work context where they could be fine-tuned and later applied in other workplaces.

Before Build Up: Unsure Footing

Before coming to Build Up, some participants were already working on these life skills — for example, beginning to overcome problematic substance use. Sebastian, Raul, and Helene all talked about "getting clean" and had been sober for at least one year by the time they were employed at Build Up. Sebastian further discussed working through his underlying trauma to prevent relapse; we interviewed him near the four-year mark of his sobriety.

However, managing mental health is typically not a linear process. For some participants, their attempts at sobriety could not hold up to the grief and loss they experienced. Two participants (Peter and Ivan) talked about[12] their substance abuse being rooted in the loss of a child: "We lost a boy and things fell apart. She went to booze, and I went to drugs" (Peter). The participants discussed working through these addictions by learning to cope with grief. While in federal prison, Ivan found working through his grief also helped him manage his anger. Having grown up in a town where violence was an everyday encounter, Raul was similarly surrounded by death, saying, "There's a good 3/4 of my friends who I grew up with who just are no longer here, and it really saddens me." Although he was not actively struggling with his substance use at the time of interview, he noted that at times, when dealing with the stress of his surroundings, he faced the temptation to drink.

Some participants also expressed self-doubt and uncertainty about their ability to perform their jobs. For example, Sebastian was worried about getting hired since he had been caught up in "criminal behaviour for a long time," meaning he had little above-board work experience and "low confidence." Notably, this self-doubt prior to being at Build Up was not universal across the participants. Both Peter (age 55) and Camron (age 20) expressed pride in the skills they had before joining Build Up. However, while Peter grounded his confidence in his many years of self-employed work, Camron was less confident he would be able to monetize the skills he brought to the table and found more value in the stable employment and work experience Build Up offered.

After Joining Build Up: Competent and Confident

After joining Build Up, crew members were able to continue building these life skills to address their issues with substance use, grief, trauma, and self-doubt, while also building new life skills that helped them excel in the workplace. Participants with a history of problematic substance use continued to develop the skills they needed for the sobriety they sought to maintain, but further extended those skills to other aspects of their lives. In this vein, restraint and patience were of particular importance to participants. Ivan and Helene were both glad to have Build Up to preoccupy them and distract from temptation, saying the work "keeps me busy and keeps my mind busy" (Helene). Sebastian exercised patience regarding his progress starting a new life:

[12] *We recognize that although two participants discussed substance abuse as a response to trauma, it is possible other participants also used drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma but did not want to discuss it during the interview. We did not prompt this topic in interviews.*

> *And just like slowly. Slowly though. It can't all happen at once. Like before when I was on drugs everything was like "I want it now. I want everything and I want it right now," you know? […] I've forgotten those old traits and I've built new traits where it's patience and work hard.*

Sebastian valued exercising patience to grow his new life of sobriety and not reoffending. Peter, similarly, decided to exercise restraint when it came to driving:

> *I don't have a driver's licence. And now I want my driver's licence. So I'm not driving, otherwise I'd be out [snaps] like this already. You know, I got. I got a [motor]bike. I'm just not riding it. I'm not driving because I want my driver's licence. And if they catch me [hand gesture to indicate "it's over"].*

Peter went on to explain that if he was caught driving without a licence again, he would have to do more prison time, and he had to wait a certain amount of time before he was eligible to get a licence. His decision to abstain from driving reflected his dedication to staying out of prison and building a new life.

Grief still plagued the participants as many continued to lose family members and friends, but Build Up offered them space for healing through paid bereavement leave. Attending funerals allowed crew members the space to grieve with their loved ones and reconnect with their families, which was especially important to those for whom imprisonment (and separation that comes with it) had strained their family relationships. When his stepmother and friend died on the same day, Ivan found himself reconnecting with his sister: "Ended up talking to my sister for the first time in like seven years that night." Having stayed up late rebuilding his relationship with his sister, Ivan "texted one of the bosses and asked if I could come in late. They ended up giving me the day off and they paid me for the for the day, gave me some like health and wellness thingmajigger." Similarly, Peter needed a day off to bury his nephew, and Cleo had to leave to attend the funeral of her older brother. In all cases, participants were given the day off to be part of the grieving process alongside supportive family without needing to worry about lost income.

In addition to learning healthy coping skills, participants also developed a sense of their own competence through their work at Build Up. A series of small successes and management's affirmation of their proficiency helped crew members build confidence in their own abilities. Sebastian, for example, gained an initial boost of confidence when he was hired, but as he continued proving his capability, he felt the management recognized his work:

> *The supervisor said, "Do you know how to dry wall? Do you know how to tape and mud?" And I said, "Yeah, I've, I've done it for the last couple of months." "Well, you're going to be our lead guy on that". [...] So they kind of like put me in a position where I felt good about it and I was confident where I could actually do what he wanted me to do. […] I'm really proud of — like, I hate to say it, but like I am proud of myself. I'm so proud of myself.*

Sebastian's newfound sense of pride and confidence contrasts with his insecurity about his work before he joined Build Up. Unimpeded by self-doubt and with a solid understanding of what he knows and does well, Sebastian could more accurately assess the gaps in his knowledge, which gave him a solid foundation upon which to learn and enrich his skills. Victor, similarly, felt encouraged by the environment at Build Up, and Ivan pointed out that this encouraging atmosphere is likely novel to many crew members: "The work they try to do [at Build Up] is very influential to people that have never had anybody believe in them" (Ivan).

While developing existing skills around managing mental health and acquiring self-confidence is helpful, Build Up also required crew members to generate new skills that could be applicable to any workplace, thus helping them to develop expertise for organizations beyond Build Up. Raul, for example, spoke proudly of his leadership in the workshop, understanding his role as teaching others while also being willing to learn from peers. Several participants (Raul, Sebastian, and Ivan) also began learning to trust other people through their collaborative work and with help from management. Ivan identified the strangeness he felt accepting non-transactional help from Build Up staff: "It's still kind of strange to accept because they don't, like they don't owe me anything, right? They don't have to do what I tell them to do." The strange feeling he identifies speaks to the shift in circumstance he's experienced, wherein receiving support no longer depends on his sacrifice. Ivan's process of adapting to a new life also included trying "to empathize with others now, right? Whereas before, if you weren't me or mine, then I couldn't give two shits, right?" He also had to adjust to not being the boss and making his own hours. Although Camron never had gang experience, he also found himself adjusting to the schedule demands of the workplace but was determined to acclimate, saying, "It's going to be stressful but, just cause it's brand new, it's something I'm not used to, but I am going to get used to it and it's going to get easier." Camron's adjustment to being in the workforce reflects the sentiments of many participants looking to leave behind the harshness to which they had grown accustomed.

d. The Value of Labour

In addition to promoting skill development and long-term career preparation, Build Up encourages a change in the attitudes of crew members towards work by showing them that their labour is valued and respected, thus giving them a sense of agency over their own labour. Juxtaposed against their previous places of employment, where they felt frustrated and minimized, the encouraging environment at Build Up helped crew members enjoy their work,[13] serving to build their intrinsic motivation to integrate into the workforce.

Before Build Up: Unappreciated

Participants discussed previous workplaces undervaluing their work in terms of pay and respect. In former minimum-wage jobs,

[13] *It is important to note that in every interview, the interviewer made clear that she was not affiliated with Build Up and participants' statements would have no bearing on their employment, relationship with management, or her opinion of them. Nevertheless, participants each made a point that they had "nothing really bad to say about them though" (Cleo).*

Sebastian, Raul, and Camron realized how limiting minimum wage is,[14] explaining "you can only get so far" (Camron) on it, and a person would require "two jobs that are minimum wage in order to be able to pay your rent, right? And what about: Do you eat? Do you have a phone?" (Raul) Although one might suspect being self-employed gives you the satisfaction of setting your own wages and hours, Peter found he was more likely to be extorted for his labour when he worked as a self-employed mechanic:

> *People are funny […] they can make you think that they're doing you a favour by you working your ass off for them. They'll extort that and they'll [say], "Well, I gave you a job when you didn't have a job." Or "I give you a job when you need money," and blah blah blah.*

To maintain his relationships and keep repeat business, Peter had to undervalue his own labour, which made it harder for him to stay afloat without stealing. It also sent him the message that the people paying him did not respect him as a worker, which was a trend among participants.

In their previous jobs, Raul and Sebastian said they felt as if they were spinning their wheels doing busy work that did not require much skill, such as cleaning up dust and replacing lightbulbs. With no evidence of the impact of their work, their labour felt hollow and pointless. When Raul voiced to management that he was "just tiring himself out for nothing," and e suggested a more efficient way to complete the job, he was ignored. Sebastian was frustrated that he could not advance to a higher skilled position at CORCAN, even after being promised it: "I tried so hard, I did everything [the manager] told me and he just… I don't think he had any faith in me." He reconciled this conflict by minimizing his expectations, conceptualizing his previous workplace as "just a cheque," not anything more than a means for survival.

After Joining Build Up: Meaningful Productivity

Peter also expected the Build Up position to be "just a cheque," but found it was much more. When asked why Build Up initially caught his interest, he said he "didn't really pay much attention to what it is, Build Up. I just seen an opportunity for a job. Yeah, it's been more than a job finally." Although he did not delve into what he meant by "more than a job," Peter's subtle use of "finally" indicates he has waited a long time for this kind of work. It is possible that he was referring to the kind of pay he received. Peter, Sebastian, Camron, and Raul all cited the wage Build Up offers as a major reason they decided to join. Build Up's entry wage is $16.89 per hour ($35,131.20 per year, based on a forty-hour work week), which is the most recently calculated living wage for Saskatoon (Living Wage Canada 2022) — almost 30 percent higher than the current Saskatchewan minimum wage. However, depending on tenure, responsibility, or skill growth, crew members can make as much as $25.95 ($53,976 per year) as a senior lead hand. Combined with the chance of raises and benefits, Build Up's living wage was a tangible reflection of how highly management valued their work. For Cleo, this pay also signified equality as a woman on the worksite. When asked if her life has

[14] *At the time of interviews, the Saskatchewan minimum wage was $13.00 per hour (Government of Canada 2022). Because participants are speaking about past experiences, the wage they are discussing may be lower.*

changed since joining Build Up, Cleo said her "life has been better" because she and her husband (who also works in construction) "are actually caught up on bills. Yeah, 'cause well, we both get paid the same amount." For a woman who has experienced pay inequity and lost job opportunities because of her gender, the Build Up wage affirms that her work holds equal value to that of the men in her field.

The living wage materially attested to the high value of their work, but only illustrated one part of why participants felt their labour was appreciated at Build Up. Rather, participants eagerly described how their day-to-day operations at the workshop or worksite were punctuated with expressions of appreciation from management and from each other. Beyond the wage, for example, Build Up management provided material care for crew members by ensuring their basic needs were being met. When crew members were unable to eat before work, Build Up management paid attention: "They'll see that you're famished. They'll be like, you look starving. Like, 'What's wrong?' It's like, 'Oh yeah, I'm hungry.' They'll go buy you McDonald's" (Raul). Likewise, when a crew member suddenly found themselves without transportation, a support worker offered to pick them up (Victor). While such accommodations may be unsurprising for those who have worked in professional industries for some time, these acts of kindness were "unbelievable" (Raul) to the participants, who had never experienced a work environment like this before. This type of amenity was new to Peter, who was glad to have luxuries such as a lunch break and clocking out: "I like to be able to just go to work, then go away from work."

In contrast to the voicelessness they felt at their previous jobs, participants recalled Build Up management taking their ideas and contributions seriously. This appreciation partly looked like positive feedback, such as telling crew members that they've done a good job and "appreciation for the small things" (Sebastian), but more broadly, it was Build Up management taking feedback from crew members and listening to their ideas about how to proceed at the worksite. Raul, for example, found that management "want us to talk back," thus giving him permission to show engagement rather than simply take orders. He was grateful to have more agency in the operations of his workplace, saying, "I really appreciate that you can actually have your voice heard." In contrast to working in prison, Peter similarly found Build Up's management approach humanizing: "You're not just a number. Like, they pay attention"—which Sebastian experienced firsthand, recalling an empowering interaction with a support worker after returning from a week of sick leave:

> *On the Monday, following Monday, he pulled me aside and said, he's like, "You know, your presence here [...] is needed by a lot of these guys. […] The energy was kind of down when you were gone," and he's like, "I just want you to know you're, you're you're an important part of this this team. And your presence? [If] you're here, [then] everyone else can be here. Everyone's gonna be happy." I didn't think I had that much freaking power.*

Considering Sebastian realizing his impact on the team, it is clear that "more than a job" (Peter)

referred to participants feeling that their value came from "more" than just the labour they produced.

The respect management held for the group was also reflected in the crew members' relationships with each other. Despite sometimes unpleasant and stressful environments, the participants described the relationships among crew members as mutually respectful (Ivan, Sebastian, Raul, Peter), collaborative (Raul), and friendly (Cleo, Sebastian, Camron, Victor). Camron, for example, described the unhygienic conditions of a building they were renovating but noted that, "Even there, as sketchy and as crappy as that place is, I'm having fun there with the group." These positive relationships may be due to Build Up's overtly frank hiring practices; there was no pressure for anyone to hide their employment barriers. While crew members did not all detail their pasts and personal lives (Helene), there was a shared understanding that a criminal record, poverty, or disabilities did not signify inferiority, which made for a non-hierarchical environment where "nobody's better than you. Nobody is worse than you. It's pretty good. They make it feel pretty comfortable" (Peter). Cleo was even comfortable making a joke about gang affiliation in the workshop:

> *I can joke around with everybody there. [...] Like [staff manager]. Because I had this bandana, that one day […] I was joking around with him. And he's like, I said, "You know who I'm down with?" He looked at my bandana and he said, "Who?" I said, "With Jesus!" [laughs] He shook his head.*

These positive social workplace relationships, the care and appreciation they receive from management, and the living wage all combine to build esteem among crew members. The space affirms that their labour is valuable, which may contrast to what they have been told in the past. By seeing their work valued and their voices respected, they build the intrinsic motivation to continue this path into the workforce.

3. STABLE FRAMING

To give a building its shape and ensure its structural integrity, workers construct the framing. This involves putting up and fitting together pieces of lumber to create a network of studs and supports that ensure the building can bear its own weight and withstand weather patterns. Much like the buildings they work on, the crew members at Build Up use the tools and resources from the social enterprise to construct stability in their own lives.

With their lives marked by the precarity inherent in impoverished conditions, each participant recalled needing outside supports to weather everyday storms such as the need for money, food, and housing. While some (re)turned to criminal activity for these resources (as detailed in the "Demolishing Old Structures" theme), the current theme focuses on the legal/legitimate supports Build Up participants received from local organizations and government programs. These forms of support (e.g., food banks, social assistance payments) were typically not created with the intention that people would rely on them permanently so they did not supply participants with dependable, consistent stability.

While these resources kept them above water during times of extreme hardship, they ultimately sent participants back to their original precarious circumstances. Although participants drive to become stable cannot be confidently attributed to Build Up,[15] the wage and support services that Build Up offered "basically provided [them] with a runway" (Raul) to build momentum and establish consistent, strong structures to support themselves independently of community organizations and government programs. Having developed consistent, stable structures to support themselves, participants were now challenged with adjusting to peace of mind, as Peter described: "I have a hard time with it, but I can actually put my feet up and watch TV for an hour." We generated two subthemes to describe how participants developed stable framing: building self-reliance and recognizing the effect of security.

a. Self-Reliance

Part of living a stable life for participants meant being self-sufficient, thus having control of their own care. This subtheme therefore describes the transition from reliance on government assistance and community organizations to supply their resources (i.e., food, shelter, and funds) to participants financing themselves through their own labour and income.

Before Build Up: Surviving, Precariously

Due to low income and criminal pasts, finding and keeping housing proved to be a challenge for participants. Sebastian, for example, was able to rent an apartment before joining Build Up, but struggled to continue making rent on one minimum-wage paycheque: "I'm single and I have my own apartment and with all the bills that come with it, it's, it's tough. [When] I was making minimum wage, like 75 percent of my cheque was going to bills." Raul, in a similar

Image 3: Build Up participant putting up rafters in garage.

[15] *The desire to lead a more predictable life and participants' active steps towards that goal cannot be attributed to Build Up in these findings, as the various participants started this process at different points of their lives—some before joining Build Up and some afterward.*

situation, pointed out how close he was to losing his housing, worried if he missed "two months' worth of an extra $200 or $300, in those two months," he would be "living on the street just like that, right?" Participants with records struggled to even get considered for independent housing. Ivan "lost more than a couple of housing opportunities" because the landlord evaluating his application Googled his name and saw his charges.[16]

With the help of a local housing support organization, Ivan eventually found a rental after joining Build Up, but the search lasted six months. Sebastian also found housing, but the landlord was hesitant, saying they would "give [him] a chance." In contrast, Victor had a rental lined up when he got out of custody, but he was concerned his criminal record would block him from the employment he needed to maintain the housing.

Community-based residential facilities, known as halfway houses, provided temporary housing for participants immediately following their incarceration, which gave them time to look for their own place. Peter, Cleo, and Helene seemed to find the halfway houses helpful; Cleo moved into her husband's apartment right afterward and Peter was glad that instead of paying rent, he could pay off some fines. Sebastian, however, described his experience at the halfway house as "brutal" and indicated he did not feel safe. At the time of our interview, Helene was still living in the halfway house but was actively apartment searching.

Some participants also received assistance from government programs and community organizations but found it to be insufficient.[17] Peter and Raul received the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) a few years prior; Raul also received Employment Insurance (EI) after leaving his previous place of employment, but was disappointed to find it could not cover rent for a one-bedroom apartment. Having grown up food insecure, Raul was similarly unimpressed with the amount of food offered by a local food bank, finding that "for somebody who was relying on the food bank to be their main thing to feed their family, they don't have a chance in hell. They don't have a chance." Helene received help from Legal Aid Saskatchewan, as well as one Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS) payment before she was taken to a correctional facility, which made her ineligible to continue receiving the payments. She was also not eligible for support from the Indigenous organizations in her hometown; since she moved as a child when her parents separated, her hometown is not the reserve for which she holds band membership.

In contrast to other participants who received some funds from government programs as adults, Camron received government support as a minor. Although the interview did not clarify the exact type of assistance, he described either the disabled contributor's child benefit or the surviving child's benefit of the Canada Pension

[16] While in this case the landlord did their own research, "access to inexpensive criminal record checks" is one of the services the Saskatchewan Landlords Association offers its members (2023).

[17] Several participants expressed shame or hesitance to talk about receiving government assistance, indicating the stigma of welfare might have prevented some participants from discussing it. The number of participants receiving government assistance may thus be underrepresented in this data. Nonetheless, the significance of this analysis lies in how those who did receive government assistance engaged with the funds.

Plan (Government of Canada 2023), which he received until he graduated high school. This means his family's income was impacted by either death or disability, and he was raised in a household with limited income. Likely unable to turn to his parents for financial support, he is further incentivized to build a career in which he can support both himself *and* his family.

After Joining Build Up: Towards Control

Although participants had not become fully self-sufficient at the time of our interviews, the need to survive was no longer underlying their approach to government or community support. Based on our interviews, it cannot be said that participants immediately stopped requiring outside support after joining Build Up. In fact, housing needs remained varied across interviews, and several participants still received support from local organizations. However, the data does show a shift in how participants engaged with outside support after joining Build Up—specifically, the way they approached housing and the kinds of support from government and community they utilized.

For the youngest participant, 20-year-old Camron, being with Build Up produced a dramatic change in his housing situation. Camron said he plans on leaving the nest of his parents' home because his family (which includes his young daughter and partner) now has a stable income:

> *Before [I was] with Build Up, I was been living with my parents and we've been living with my parents and we've been want—needing to find a place. To get out. Because my parents couldn't afford the place anymore. And well, technically, I still need, I need to grow up and move out on my own anyways.*

This compelled Camron to enter the workforce so his parents could downsize and he could find more suitable housing to raise his daughter. Being with Build Up facilitated his independence. Raul gained independence through his housing in a different way—he no longer needed to visit food banks. Rather, he acquired housing with gardening space where he and his family grow vegetables due to the high cost of produce in grocery stores.

Camron and Raul, however, were exceptions. For most participants, access to housing did not change dramatically after joining Build Up. However, participants' plans around housing access were informed by the stable income and employment that Build Up offers. Cleo, for example, explained that she and her husband were considering moving into a Quint[18] property when their lease expires, but does not yet know if she will even need to utilize Quint's affordable housing program. At the time of interview, Helene was also searching for housing as she was about to leave the halfway house. Having moved around between Saskatoon and various reserves as a child after her parents' separation, she decided to settle in Saskatoon with her three children. Having stable employment that paid a living wage in the area informed her decision.

[18] *Build Up's parent organization.*

She was struggling to find an affordable apartment in a safe area for her children, but support workers at the halfway house were helping her search.

While participants no longer required government assistance with finances, they did utilize services from local organizations that helped them on their path towards independence. Ivan, for example, no longer needed SIS: "My [community organization] worker, she had me apply for SIS before I even got out, but like I said, I was working six days after I got out, so I didn't, I didn't need it or want it." Participants' income came from their own employment, so the role of community organizations changed to supporting that employment rather than simply helping them stay afloat. Two Indigenous participants received support from the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT): for Cleo, they arranged a carpentry apprenticeship and provided both Cleo and Sebastian with tools and steel-toed work boots. Cleo also used Legal Aid, but not for criminal problems. Rather, Legal Aid helped her address a clerk's input error that left a criminal charge on her record despite her having dealt with it in the past.

The role of community resources has changed dramatically in the lives of crew members, revealing that Build Up's employment has helped to put them on a path towards self-reliance. Not needing to obtain income, food, or shelter from government or the community, participants used these resources to better support themselves until they they no longer need such support.

b. Security

In addition to changing their relationship with government and community resources, participants found increased stability in their newfound sense of security. This subtheme is characterized by a departure from the ever-present sense of uncertainty in the past lives of participants. Through their work with Build Up, crew members discovered a sense of relaxation and consistency that enabled them to carve out plans for the future. This subtheme is structured differently from others in this report because crew members associated these feelings of security with experiences only after they joined Build Up.

Participants took notice of the comfort associated with Build Up's employment. Some participants grounded this comfort in the material stability of their income, such as Victor, who stopped worrying about losing his job because of his record, or Camron, who described comfortably covering his living expenses, saying, "I'm comfortable. I've got what I need. I've got what I want. I'm happy. I'm happy with them." Others located this comfort in their bodies by describing the medical care ensured through Build Up. Over his lifetime, for example, Peter had only received medical care while he was in prison; he did not have a health card until he worked with Build Up. When asked what the card meant to him, he responded, "Security! I fall down in a parking lot and bump my head somewhere, I got a health card!" Cleo's peace of mind came through health insurance. She explained she was going to pick up her medication later that day: "I'm on pills for because I have ADD, like, I lose concentration

right away, so I have to take meds for it. And those cost 270 bucks." Cleo further clarified that she pays $270 every month for her medication, but "after three months of being with Build Up, you get that Blue Cross coverage." With that coverage, she will only pay $27 per month for her medication.

Raul recognized that although he experiences safety and peace of mind with Build Up, he is still surrounded by precarity and not everyone has had his opportunities. Referring to a former co-worker, Raul recounted:

> *He's living in a tent in the back alley right now. In, in the hood, here in alphabet soup.[19] And when I was getting out of the vehicle, I looked at this tent, and I go, "Whoever's living there, I feel so bad for them. That's sad." And then I found out later that's my friend who got laid off at the same time as I did […] and that could have been me if, you know, if things didn't go the different direction.*

With a consistent flow of resources and a sense of control over their lives, participants began striving towards a "normal" life (Ivan, Sebastian, Peter, Raul). When asked what that life looked like, Raul evoked imagery of white picket fences, saying his goal was to "retire with the wife and grow beautiful gardens every year." Sebastian conceptualized normal in terms of his relationships and health, saying, "It's just staying clean, staying sober, and having a, like, really good group of, like, friends and family." Notably, this conceptualization of normalcy was associated with being a "stiff" and having a job (Peter), possibly because for many crew members, Build Up was their first chance to hold consistent employment. Peter enjoyed the daily structure, saying, "Some of us aren't used to being told what we're going to do today. But they […] make it sound like it's normal. It *is* normal." He later added, "I got no problem getting up at six and jumping on my bike and riding to the shop. Yeah, I actually enjoy it. I look forward to it." Like other participants, Peter was surprised to find that it was possible for him to not live in a constant state of crisis, but to navigate every day from a space of safety. He started to see the appeal.

4. SOCIAL RENOVATIONS

Build Up's impact on participants had repercussions for people around them as well. Now entrenched in consistent, safe social structures, and having the capacity to support themselves, participants began paying it forward. By extending this capacity to their families and community, participants reproduced the supportive climate of Build Up well beyond the workshop. This theme shows that while undergoing overt training in construction skills, participants were implicitly learning to become agents of change and implementing Build Up's empowerment strategies — providing resources, paying attention to peoples' needs, minimizing stress, and ensuring agency — to support their families and their neighbourhoods. Participants thus took on the challenge of helping to restore the capacities of people in their own social

[19] *The streets in the core West Side neighbourhood of Saskatoon are avenues named by letters of the alphabet, so the area is often referred to as "alphabet city" or, here, "alphabet soup."*

contexts and assisting them to find ways to live on their own terms. They effected change in two spheres outlined in the subthemes: family and the broader community.

a. Supporting a Family

Through their work at Build Up, participants were better equipped to take care of their family members and set their children on a less precarious path. While they certainly wanted to provide resources for their families before they joined Build Up, it was their stability and employment that enabled participants to fulfill these intentions. Helene expressed her relief at being able to more reliably care for her children, saying, “It actually feels good to be working again after so many years of not working, because I was a single mother and still am.” We also found the men and women of the crew discussed family differently. Men tended to conceptualize family in terms of the time spent with members of both immediate and extended family, while women focused more on time spent with their children and grandchildren. Nonetheless, the intention to take care of their family members and raise their children to become happy, healthy, and independent adults resonated across genders.

Before Build Up: Reaching through the Distance

Maintaining strong family care systems was important to participants even before joining Build Up, but this was complicated by long and sudden prison stints. Raul is the exception, as he was never incarcerated, yet he also experienced distance from family later in life. He began acting as breadwinner at a young age, working full time to help feed his siblings, then to provide for his own children. Because Saskatoon is not his hometown, Raul tries to stay in touch with his extended family but has trouble arranging visits because transportation is prohibitively expensive. For crew members who were formerly incarcerated, however, separation defines their family relationships.

Being in a correctional facility separated participants from their families and allowed only limited contact, which strained family relationships and left crew members grieving for their loved ones. Ivan attempted to maintain his social connections from the inside by making phone calls and staying in touch with his family. He also used his time in prison to dedicate himself to being a better father, saying, “In order for my daughters to find something better in a man, I had to show them a better man.”

Image 4: Build Up crew painting a mural with First Nations University for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Rebuilding his social networks served a dual purpose. It created a social support system for himself and also provided a positive atmosphere for his daughters in hopes that they would not get into abusive relationships later in life. Raul also wanted his daughters to grow up safely and have healthy relationships. When asked what his ideal future included, the first thing he said was, "Watch my girls graduate." To Raul, seeing his daughters complete their education would contribute to their financial security and their independence.

Helene and Cleo were not originally from Saskatoon, however, and the conditions of their parole meant they could not leave the city to see family even beyond their sentence. Helene's children stayed safely with her mother in her hometown, but she still grieved, saying:

> *I've been away from my kids since September last year because I've been incarcerated. [...] That was the first time I ever went to jail. It was the first time I ever had to be away from my kids this long. It was torture.*

Helene stays in touch with her children over the phone but is anticipating how this fracture will worsen over time. She regrets how the lack of openness between herself and her children increases the emotional distance between them, but there are "so many questions that you can't answer because it's just too hard." Cleo's children are grown, but because they live outside of the city, she can only see them (and, by extension, her grandchildren) when they come to Saskatoon—a four-and-a-half-hour journey. Participants coming out of prison needed to build social supports to flourish outside the workplace, but found it complicated by the conditions of their parole and challenges they faced building stability.

After Joining Build Up: Reunited and Rebuilding

Build Up facilitated crew members attempting to maintain and nourish family relationships through several accommodations to spend time with family and through the stability participants cultivated with Build Up's support. Management at Build Up ensured that crew members did not have to sacrifice their relationships for work, inviting them to take opportunities to rebuild family relationships with family and allowing them to take a day off. The day that Ivan got custody of his daughters, for example, he said he was willing to go in to work, but management gave him the day off to spend with his children. Ivan appreciated the opportunity, as he was trying to "make amends for some of the hardship that [he] caused" his loved ones.

Similarly, Cleo needed to leave work when her family travelled to Saskatoon with her baby granddaughter soon after a family health crisis. Cleo's daughter-in-law suffered a stroke while pregnant, leaving the baby in precarious health:

> *She keeps having to go for brain surgery again. And [the staff manager] is, like, really understanding about that and shit. I could have been fired already anywhere else but. […] She's only, she's just three or four months [old as of] a couple days ago, and she's been through three brain surgeries already. […] Yeah, she's real strong, that one.*

Cleo was permitted time away from work to spend precious time with her newborn granddaughter, and it is no small feat for her family to travel to Saskatoon. More broadly, however, by being with her family during this crisis, Cleo can fulfill her role as a mother to her son and daughter-in-law, helping to alleviate their stress, and, as a grandmother, she can take on some care duties for their daughter. Since she was absent from family activities while she was in prison, Cleo's participation now helps her rebuild her relationships, integrating her into her family's social support system, thus bolstering both her family's and her own coping resources. Not having to be at work meant she and her family could be there for each other.

In addition to enabling quality family time, Build Up helped participants provide safe housing for their families through income and skills acquisition. While learning construction, Helene kept her mother in mind, saying:

> *I really want to fix up my mom's house because back in her reserve, like the band is kind of all over the place, I guess. She barely gets help for her place […] I just don't like it. Now that I'm actually learning how to do carpentry work, I can go home and actually renovate her place myself because I'm learning a lot there and I'm actually enjoying it.*

Helene plans to use her new carpentry skills to make sure her mother's house is safe and structurally sound. Ivan took care of his mother's housing as well, although he had purchased the house years ago through money he made while he was with the gang. Now that he has left his criminal affiliations behind, he cannot afford his mother's mortgage, so he is bringing his mother and daughter to live with him in Saskatoon: "I can provide for my family now. As soon as I've got my daughter and my mother here, then that cuts off paying for an entire 'nother house in an entire 'nother city." By bringing his mother to Saskatoon, Ivan will have more income to provide for his family and will ensure that his daughter is receiving care from a safe adult. He can also pay more attention to what his family needs by keeping them close.

Safe housing held a different meaning for Camron, who needed to find a space that was toddler-friendly. With himself, his partner, his toddler, and his parents all living at his parents' house, he and his partner found it difficult to keep their child out of trouble:

> *The terrible twos don't start at two. It starts whenever they start walking. [...] And with with me living at my parents' for however long... Our place, my parents' place aren't—isn't child friendly whatsoever. So we're constantly saying, "no [baby], no [baby], no [baby]," we're constantly harassing her to keep, keep her away from things. [...] We needed to move out so she can do her thing without being—without having someone on her ass about everything all the time.*

Camron needed his daughter to have the agency to explore the world as any toddler would, but also needed to give her a safe environment to do so. Through the income he gained at Build Up, Camron was able to secure housing for himself

and his family to live independently. Although he initially described “leaving the nest” as a major factor in his decision to work for Build Up, his work there eventually allowed him to give his partner and daughter a safe place to live. These examples of participants providing both financial and social support for their families highlight how the individual stability of crew members diffused into the lives of their loved ones.

b. Community Service

With the peace of mind that their families were receiving consistent support, participants were driven to go out and make a positive impact in their community. At the time of the interviews, most crew members did not have a lot of spare time to dedicate to community service outside of their work hours. Yet, they were starting to conceptualize their role within the community in a new way—from being a passive resident who is acted upon by outside forces to being an agent of change with the capacity to make a positive impact. Through their renovation work with Build Up, and through the community service activities that Build Up supported, participants were recognized for pouring their labour into their communities. Raul felt his work was meaningful because of the response of tenants:

> *I’m getting that extra sensation that I’m helping these people, whereas when I was doing construction [at a previous workplace], I was helping an organization, but I wasn’t helping a person, and [with] this one that I can actually see on their faces, you know?*

He directly saw the impact of his actions. After receiving support from Build Up, the participants paid it forward beyond the workshop and into their communities.

The kinds of community service activities participants described here (including cleaning up the environment and disempowering criminal systems) began specifically after they joined Build Up, meaning that, as with the “Security” subtheme, this subtheme is not structured in a before and after comparison.

The prospect of improving their community’s cleanliness and safety was a major motivator for participants to continue their renovation work with Build Up. Considering the state of some worksites, participants saw how important their services were. Several participants (Raul, Cleo, and Camron) described a worksite where someone threw a Molotov cocktail at an apartment door inside the building, igniting the area and burning a large section of the building. Cleo was shocked that the “whole third floor [was] on fire and there’s people still living in there,” but the tenants had nowhere else to go. Raul contextualized the renovations in terms of community health. Renovations for this particular building included cleaning up the interior, which people had been using as a bathroom, according to Raul and Cleo. The clean-up also required them to safely dispose of used needles (Raul, Cleo). With these health hazards gone, Raul suggested that safer, cleaner environments would reduce stress and alcohol abuse.

Discussing this renovation project, Cleo and Raul both concluded with a sentiment of hope based on their improvements to the space,

saying, “It’s starting to look really good in there” (Cleo) and “we *are* getting it better” (Raul). Raul seemed further determined to make a difference, identifying the building as part of his community: “I want my community to be nice. […] I want it to look good. No matter what it looks like right now, it can be fixed.” He was struck by the gratitude of the tenants as well: “A lot of tenants will see us there and they look actually very grateful to see us, and they’re very welcoming and they’re very [like] ‘thank you, thank you so much!’” Participants garnered encouragement and appreciation from the community, in addition to the encouragement they received from Build Up. Peter noticed that after spending time working with Build Up, his own behaviours and attitudes about the neighbourhood changed: “I went to pick garbage up in the back alley the other day on a Saturday. I’d never do that before.” The change in Peter’s attitude may have arisen from his own sense of agency working at Build Up, or possibly from receiving praise from the community for his work. Although he was unsure of what caused the change in behaviour, he seemed interested in doing community service work again.

Beyond their effect on the physical environment, participants were also conscious of how their actions helped shape the social environment of their communities. Sebastian recognized that his position with Build Up reduced his negative impact on the community, saying, “I actually I earned this money, you know? Like, I appreciate it. This is good, earned money, you know? I didn’t ruin anybody’s lives for this money.” The quote highlights the shift in how he views his relationship with the surrounding community; rather than someone subjected to the pitfalls of his surroundings, he is positively impacting his community through his actions. No longer exploiting others through criminal activity, he contributes to a community with less suffering and more health and well-being.

Putting their insider knowledge of criminal operations to good use, participants (Ivan, Sebastian) also found opportunities to weaken these operations by discouraging youth recruitment. Peter praised Build Up for supporting youth employment, while, through other organizations, Sebastian and Ivan visited youth centres and high schools to help them “not make some of the same mistakes” (Ivan) they did by vulnerably describing their experiences with gangs and prison. Ivan additionally worked with a local organization to paint over gang tags in a community north of the city. Build Up supported these efforts by giving the participants time off to present and participate. Through community organizations, these participants put their time and energy into disempowering the criminal systems in which they themselves were previously entangled. Ivan saw Build Up’s potential to serve the same function, commenting, “I think with proper funding, they [Build Up] could do, you know, a lot of really good things within the community.”

"Building Up" Through Social Enterprise

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

From the interview data, we generated four themes that show the economic implications of Build Up for the participants, as well as how these implications translate to the participants' social lives. Participants who had criminal pasts dissolved their criminal connections in favour of the legal and sustainable path Build Up offers. Beyond simple employment, Build Up provides participants with a living wage and training opportunities, helping them overcome the poverty-associated barriers to qualifications and long-term career development, such as not being able to afford proper training and lacking opportunities for upward career mobility. The Build Up workshop also provides more implicit learning opportunities for participants to develop the soft skills necessary to comfortably navigate the workplace, and to develop a sense of self-worth and confidence in their accomplishments. Combined, these factors help participants build solid foundations. No longer needing survival assistance from community organizations or government programs, participants live on the stable income that comes from their own work and experience a sense of security and self-sufficiency as a result. With their own capacity to care for themselves, participants pay it forward by caring for their families and starting to create change in their communities.

The Innovative Social Enterprise Strategy of "Building Up"

Cumulatively, the generated themes illustrate how Build Up's many forms of support (including the living wage, training, connection to resources, time off for personal and professional advancement, and overarching attention to health and well-being) shift participants into an economic position that requires new modes of sociality. Build Up Saskatoon disrupts existing systems of care using multifaceted interventions of short-term assistance that address immediate needs alongside long-term support for the career trajectories and overall stability of participants. Crew members thus shift out of economic precarity—wherein social behaviours are oriented around survival—into financial stability, wherein social behaviours are more preoccupied with self-determined life trajectory. The social enterprise creates the conditions for crew members to successfully reposition themselves from receiving care (from the government, community organizations, and organized crime) to supporting themselves and exerting agency over the course of their own lives. Participants further transition into providers of care to their families and their community.

Thus, this social enterprise offers an innovative, alternative response to poverty. Welfare systems (including government assistance programs and existing nonprofits) and the criminal system

(including the criminal justice system and organized crime) both respond to the symptoms of poverty such as food insecurity, poor health, lack of shelter, and lack of income. Through resource assistance, these structures provide temporary relief to people facing a multitude of intersecting needs, such as income via crime, financial support via welfare cheques, shelter via a jail cell, or food via community redistribution. However, by not intervening in the root causes of poverty, these forms of care ultimately create conditions under which the effects of poverty are sustained rather than overcome. They allow people to quiet the severity of their needs, but cannot quash the needs themselves.

The social enterprise model disrupts this type of care. Rather than community benefit organizations being funded according to attendance and participation, social enterprises ask purchasers to invest in the long-term savings associated with the outcomes they produce (Loney 2018). Social enterprises recognize the financial returns that nonprofits generate and sell them as products by way of social impact. For example, Aki Energy is a First Nations–managed renewable energy social enterprise in Manitoba that installed geothermal energy in on-reserve homes, producing a $14 million reduction in net energy bills over twenty years and a reduction in carbon emissions worth millions (Loney 2018). Similarly, Building Up is a social enterprise contractor in Toronto that, like Build Up in Saskatoon, hires people with barriers to employment. It was found that more than 80 percent of people who start working at Building Up move on to a job in the trades, which translates into a ripple effect of savings, as described by social entrepreneur Shaun Loney:

> *Each year avoided in prison saves governments between $50,000 and $100,000 or more depending on how it's measured. […] Then, there are the benefits to their children, who are kept out of care, whose lives have greater stability and because of that stay in school longer. Add in reduced crime rates, the avoided policing and diverted court costs. And if these new workers are doing water or energy retrofits, let's not forget the savings from the utility bill reductions, associated carbon emissions reductions, increased individual purchasing power, and expanded taxpayer bases... including most/all of these real things, it wouldn't surprise me if the rate of return was approaching 100 percent (2018, 83).*

The themes generated in the present study illustrate how the social enterprise model operates through Build Up Saskatoon to disrupt the cycle of poverty that crew members face. The intervention provides participants with the means to stave off the immediate harmful effects of poverty, while also building their capacity to leave behind the care structures associated with it. Participants with a criminal record, for example, had less incentive to reoffend because their immediate need for income was being met by Build Up's wage. Simultaneously, they acquired skills and training to continue building an upwardly mobile career and the "life skills" to handle the demands of the workplace, thus ensuring that they can maintain a consistent income outside of crime even after they move on

from Build Up. Participants described many accumulated instances where Build Up management expressed patience and appreciation, meeting their short-term needs for affirmation and acceptance towards the long-term goal of personal growth. This multilayered intervention approach serves to not only diminish the symptoms of poverty that participants face, but to simultaneously facilitate their transition towards a new economic position wherein they no longer face these symptoms and can go on to help those who do. The social enterprise model facilitates this transition through its structure and orientation towards creating long-term social impact with material implications.

Broader Implications for Saskatoon

The present study focuses on Build Up's direct economic implications for the social lives of participants. However, these effects have implications for the wider community, which may include residents of West Side core neighbourhoods, workers in the local third sector, and even the city as a whole. The findings of this study overlap in many ways with the projected impacts listed in the 2018 "What We Heard Report" on barriers and opportunities for Indigenous Procurement in Saskatoon. These included short-term outcomes such as building capacity through employment skills training; medium outcomes such as increasing income sources; and a number of long-term outcomes: greater stability; greater self-worth; and less strain on social assistance, justice, and healthcare systems (City of Saskatoon 2018). With this in mind, the present findings indicate several potential outcomes of Build Up's continued work as a social enterprise.

Reduced Crime Rates

Based on Build Up's proven ability to offer participants with criminal connections an alternative, sufficient source of income, the city may expect a reduction in crimes committed, police interactions, and incarcerations. Considering participants with gang connections, Build Up may further serve to disempower organized crime by drawing members or potential members away and by supporting former gang members' efforts to disempower criminal structures. Both cases may lead to a reduction in expenses associated with policing, incarceration, and other criminal justice system costs.

Relief for Government Assistance Programs and Emergency Support

While participants maintained a connection with community supports throughout the process, the transition to self-sufficiency for participants meant reduced need for emergency supports, such as shelters and food banks. This reduction in demand for such services translates into reduced pressure on these organizations, and coincides with reduced need for support from municipal, provincial, and federal assistance programs.

Stronger Trades Workforce

Build Up is structured to be a step towards a career in the trades, rather than an end point for crew members. Because of this configuration, this social enterprise prepares people with an interest in trades work to be qualified, competent workers elsewhere in the field. Build Up also

construction work in the past and/or partially learned skills from family members. Although they often did this work out of necessity, without proper safety training they were at risk of injury. The widespread availability of cheap, uncertified construction or carpentry labour suppresses the wages of certified trades people over time. By bringing these people into the fold of specialized trades workers, Build Up also supports those already in the trades and strengthens the workforce as a whole.

Increase in Community Well-Being

Saskatoon—particularly West Side neighbourhoods, where most of Build Up's projects are concentrated—will be positively impacted. Build Up's construction and renovation projects in the core areas. Aiming to revitalize and enhance the physical environment, Build Up projects may foster more connected neighbourhoods and contribute to more vibrant, safe communities with a higher quality of life. As reported by crew members, over time these cleaner and safer surroundings may result in a reduction in stress for residents.

Safety for Future Generations

As a disruption to the cycle of poverty, Build Up has implications for the children of participants as well. Through Build Up's support, crew members can support their families and ensure their children's safety. As they build careers, they may also help their children avoid poverty as they enter adulthood. Additionally, some participants give presentations to dissuade youth from getting involved in criminal activity. This may help keep youth safe from gang violence and also decrease recruitment potential for organized crime, potentially decreasing its power long-term.

Limitations

Using ample, rich interview data, this study investigated the interplay between Build Up's economic and social outcomes on participants. Despite its strengths in terms of depth and specificity, the study carries some limitations.

First, although the demographic representation of the sample represents the demographic representation of the Build Up population, we acknowledge the possibility of self-selection bias influencing the kind of impressions that were reported in the interviews—that is, participants with a more positive opinion of Build Up may have been more likely to be interviewed, so our data may not fully capture any frustrations or negative experiences participants may have had with the program. Second, this study cannot speak to Build Up's causal effects on participants' lives beyond their self-reports. The analysis incorporates meta-interpretation of the participants' own views and attributions of Build Up's impact. We recognize Build Up as an social enterprise that supports the desires and intrinsic motivation of participants to improve their own well-being. Despite these limitations, the study provides solid insights into Build Up's capacity to support the transition of crew members into qualified, self-sufficient workers.

Through the Lens

From the Crew's Perspective

This report centres on the voices of Build Up participants and presents Build Up's social impact through their lived experiences. But through a collaboration with Quint and multidisciplinary Métis artist Marcel Petit, the crew also shared Build Up's impact through their eyes.

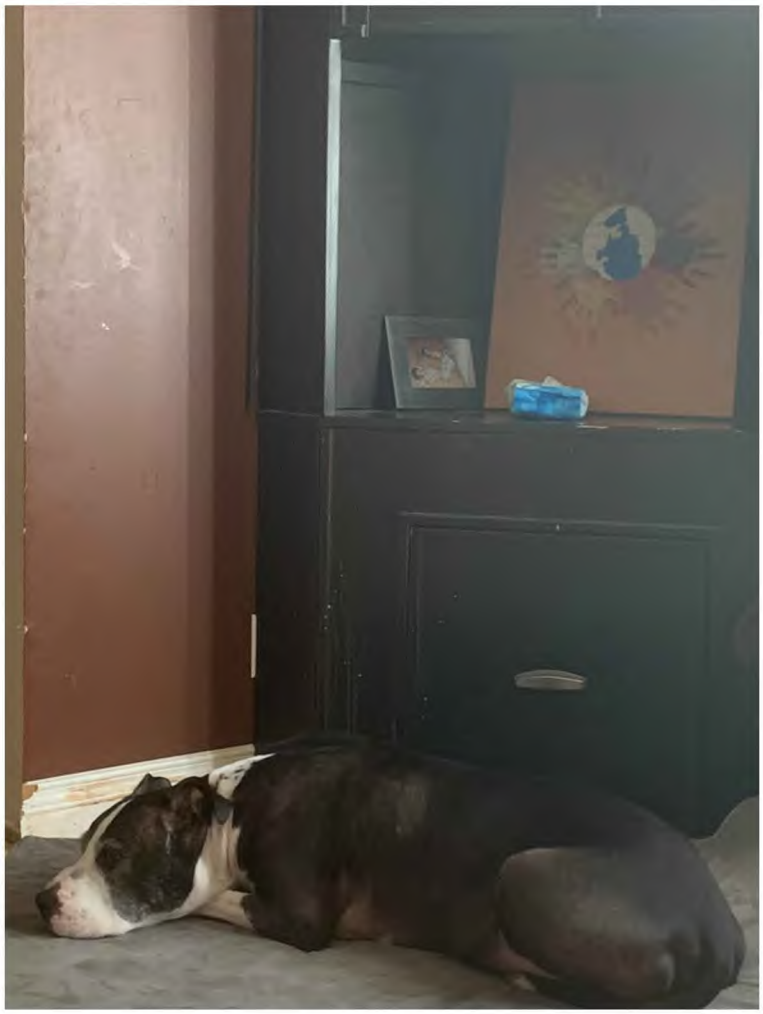
On January 19, 2024, Petit facilitated a photography workshop, open to all current members of the Build Up crew. The photos here —taken, titled, and captioned by workshop participants—visually capture how they see the impact of this social enterprise on their lives.

An Inuit legend says the northern lights, also called aksarnirq, are believed to be souls of the dead. Sometimes spirits carry torches to guide those still in this world.
Brie Townsend

Of note, workshop participants may or may not have also participated in the research interviews and the photos were not analyzed or included in the findings in this report. The photographers have generously granted the CCSC permission to reproduce their works for this project.

The road to my recovery
Lacey Bird

Edmonton Lights, Nicole Wolfe



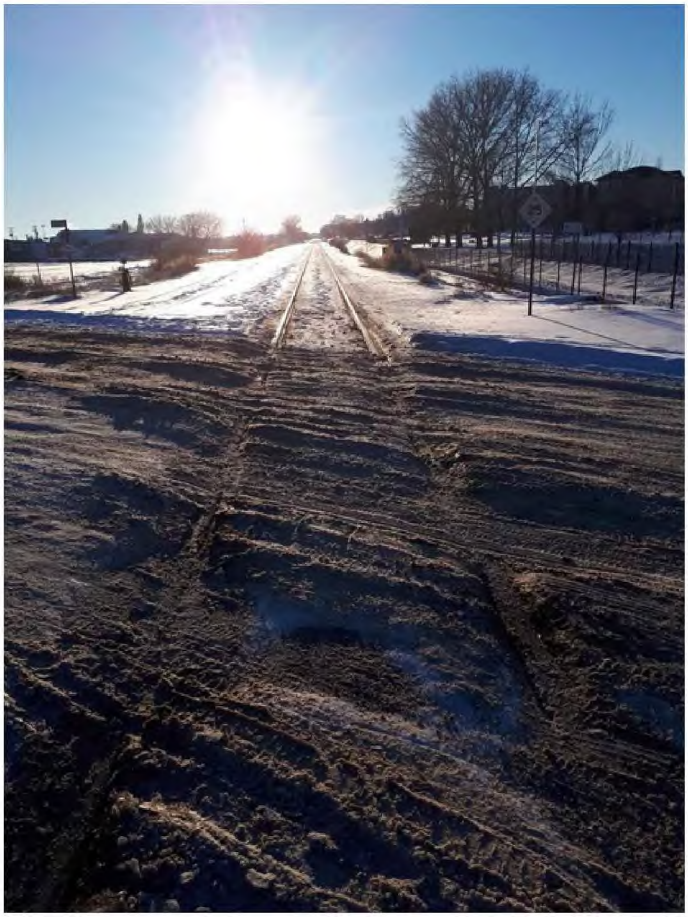
This signifies home for me. Like where I'm meant to be at if that makes sense.
Callen Morris

During my time at Build Up, I have acquired the tools necessary to have a constructive future.
James McKnight

staying on track
Ethan Beatty

Rising to the occasion
Justin Ford

Wheels stop turning
Robert Grant



Build Up Saskatoon: giving the less experienced a chance to change their lives around
Bradley Primeau

Special thanks to all the Build Up crew members who participated in the workshop and gave the CCSC permission to share their art with us for this report, to Marcel Petit for sharing his expertise, and Quint and the Build Up team for facilitating and supporting this initiative.

Snowy Boots
Warren Prosper

REFERENCES

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2013. Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners. SAGE. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256089360_Successful_Qualitative_Research_A_Practical_Guide_for_Beginners

Build Up Saskatoon. 2023. “Our Services.” https://buildupsaskatoon.ca/services/

Pigeon, M. A., and Yu, S. (2024). "Working it Out: Estimating the Social Value of Build Up Saskatoon." Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives. https://www.usaskstudies.coop/research/special-projects/build-up-saskatoon-research.php.

City of Saskatoon Communications & Public Engagement. 2018. “Indigenous Procurement Workshop: What We Heard Report.” https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/what_we_heard_-indigenous_procurement_workshop.pdf

Government of Canada. 2023, 9 March. “Benefits for children under 25.” https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-childrens-benefit.html

Government of Canada. 2022, 12 September. “Current and Forthcoming General Minimum Wage Rates in Canada.” https://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt1.aspx

Henry, R. 2018. Building Healthier Communities: Final Report on Community Recommendations for the Development of the Saskatchewan Prevention/Intervention Street Gang Strategy. National Gang Center, US Department of Justice. https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/library/publications/building-healthier-communities-final-report-community-recommendations

Josselson, R. 2013. Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach. Guilford Press.

Living Wage Canada. 2022, 14 November. “Rates.” https://www.livingwage.ca/rates

Loney, S. 2018. The Beautiful Bailout: How a social innovation scale-up will solve government's priciest problems. Friesens.

Parlamis, J., and M.J. Monnot. 2019. “Getting to the CORE: Putting an End to the Term ‘Soft Skills.’” Journal of Management Inquiry 28 (2): 225–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492618818023

Saskatchewan Landlords Association. 2023. “Tenant Screening Saskatchewan: Credit Checks and Criminal Checks for Tenants.” https://saskatchewanlandlords.ca/2013/11/03/449/

Statistics Canada. 2021, 1 April. Indigenous group of person. https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?unction=DECI&Id=1324435

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CO-OPERATIVES

ABOUT

The Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives (CCSC) is an interdisciplinary research and teaching centre located on the University of Saskatchewan campus. Established in 1984, the CCSC is supported financially by major co-operatives and credit unions from across Canada and the University of Saskatchewan. Our goal is to provide practitioners and policymakers with information and conceptual tools to understand co-operatives and to develop them as solutions to the complex challenges facing communities worldwide.

We are formally affiliated with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. The connection strengthens the capacity of everyone involved to develop research and new course offerings dedicated to solving social and economic problems. Our most recent collaborative work has resulted in a new Graduate Certificate in the Social Economy, Co-operatives, and Nonprofit Sector.

OUR FUNDERS

The CCSC and the University of Saskatchewan acknowledge with gratitude the support and commitment of the Centre's funders.

These organizations provide the CCSC with resources and leadership, helping us to develop the knowledge needed to construct co-operative solutions to the increasingly complex challenges facing global communities.

Our co-op and credit union sector partners have contributed nearly $12 million to co-operative teaching, research, and outreach since the CCSC opened its doors in 1984.

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY

Community Partner

Project Funders

JOHNSON SHOYAMA
Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives
101 Diefenbaker Place, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK, S7N 5B8
(306) 966-8509 | coop.studies@usask.ca | www.usaskstudies.coop