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Life Domain Research Report Series: School and Employment

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**Long Term Community Adaptation of Children/Youth and
Families Participating in Residential and Intensive Family
Service Children's Mental Health Programs**

**Life Domain Research Report Series:
School and Employment**

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Introduction

Earlier research by the *Partnerships for Children and Families Project* on the daily living realities of youth and children involved with mental health services, particularly residential treatment, revealed the ongoing and pervasive nature of difficulties youth and children experienced in their academic functioning (Cameron, de Boer, Frensch, & Adams, 2003). As the education experience is such a large part of youth and children's lives, we sought to better document how children and youth were performing in school in the current study.

Data was collected about youth who had been involved with children's mental health residential treatment (RT) or intensive family service programs (IFS), designed as an alternative to residential treatment. Data was gathered about youth functioning at program entry, discharge and 12 to 18 months after leaving the program. Parent-reported measures were used to assess youth functioning prior to service involvement and at follow up. Discharge information was gathered from program records. Additionally, parents or guardians were asked a series of questions addressing school attendance and academic functioning. Youths' perceptions of their school involvements were obtained through individual qualitative interviews.

Both youth and parents or guardians were asked a series of questions addressing school attendance and academic functioning. Parents and guardians responded to questions about whether or not youth/children were in school, how youth/children got along with teachers, and how youth/children were coping with schoolwork. Youth in our study had the opportunity to speak freely about their school experiences by responding to open ended questions about "how school was going for them" and what they liked or disliked about school.

Participants

Participants were recruited from five children's mental health agencies in south western Ontario, Canada that offered both residential treatment and intensive family service programs. Three of these agencies served children aged 5 to 12 years at admission and their families. The remaining two agencies served youth aged 12 to 16 years and their families.

To maximize sample size, two panels of youth were recruited. In the first, all youth and their families entering residential treatment or the home-based programs in our five partner agencies within one year were invited to participate. In the second panel, all youth discharged from our partner agencies within the previous 12 to 18 months and their parents were invited to participate.

This strategy generated a sample of 106 parents or guardians and 33 youth from the residential treatment program and 104 parents or guardians and 35 youth from the intensive family service program. Within the RT sample group, only 48 respondents were parents. The remaining respondents were guardians from the Children's Aid Society (CAS). Respondents in the IFS sample consisted of 101 parents and 3 CAS guardians. Only youth 12 years and older were interviewed individually.

Interviews with caregivers and youth were mainly conducted in the families' homes; however, on a few occasions, participants chose to meet at another location such as at the university or local library. Participants received \$25.00 for their participation. All participants provided informed consent. Ethical approval was obtained from Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board, and the participating mental health agencies.

Description of Services

Residential treatment involved multi-disciplinary teams who created individual treatment plans for each child based on cognitive-behavioural, psycho educational, brief and solution-focussed models. RT environments were intended to be safe and structured. Children received individual counselling and were usually involved in family counselling. Children lived in residence five days a week and attended either their own community school or an on-site school. Children usually returned home on weekends; however, children referred by a child welfare agency may have remained in residential care on weekends. The expected length of stay was three to nine months.

Intensive-family service was the home-based alternative to residential treatment that was developed in response to the long waitlists for residential services. Originally intended for children and youth with difficulties of comparable severity to those accessing RT, in IFS programs children remained at home, and the family received a range of intensive, home-based services similar to those offered in residential care. The expected length of involvement ranged from three to nine months.

Measures

Clinical data were obtained using The Brief Child and Family Phone Interview, 3rd version (BCFPI-3) (Cunningham, Pettingill, & Boyle, 2002) and the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) (Hodges, 2000). These standardised measures were already in use by the participating agencies at intake and at discharge, and the BCFPI data was collected again at follow up. Using existing clinical data reduced the burden for clinicians and enhanced the cost efficiency of the research. Additional school and employment data was collected from parents and guardians.

Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale

The CAFAS was designed to assess impairments in day-to-day functioning secondary to behavioral, emotional, psychological, psychiatric, or substance use problems. Eight subscales assess functioning in various domains: role performance at school or work, home, community (reflects delinquent acts), behavior toward others, mood/emotions (primarily anxiety and depression), self-harm behavior, substance use and problems in thinking.

The CAFAS School/Work subscale assesses the severity of impairment in school or work related role performance. Subscale scores can range from 0 (*minimal or no impairment*) which suggest a youth is “reasonably comfortable and competent in relevant roles” to 30 (*severe disruption or incapacitation*) where a youth is “unable to meet minimum requirements for behaviour in the classroom” or has dropped out of school and holds no job. CAFAS has shown sensitivity to change, good concurrent-criterion validity and predictive validity, good discriminant validity and reliability, and has been widely used (Hodges, Doucette-Gates, & Kim, 2000; Hodges & Kim, 2000; Hodges & Wong, 1996).

The Brief Child and Family Phone Interview-3

The BCFPI-3 is an interview protocol that measures the severity of three externalizing problems (corresponding to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder), and three internalizing disorders (corresponding to separation anxiety disorder, anxiety and general mood and self-harm). It also provides descriptive measures of child functioning (social participation, quality of relationships, and school participation and achievement), and child functioning impacts on the family (social activities and comfort).

The questions used in this computerized instrument were taken from the Revised Ontario Child Health Study, and generate *t*-scores. A *t*-score greater than 70, a score higher than 98% of the general population, is indicative of a significant problem. Internal consistency scores range from .73 to .85, and content validity “was ensured by selecting items which map onto the descriptions of common clinical problems in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association IV” (Cunningham, et al., 2002, p. 77). The BCFPI School Participation and Achievement mental health subscale is comprised of three questions assessing trouble with attendance, grades, and relationships with teachers.

Parents or guardians were also asked whether or not the youth was in school at admission and at follow up. If the youth was not in school, the reasons for not being in school were obtained.

Qualitative Youth Interviews

A subset of youth in our sample who were age 12 or older participated in a semi-structured qualitative interview in which youth were asked to describe, in their own words, their functioning in several life domains including school and work, family, social connections and health. The school section of the interview explored attendance, type of school setting, academic performance, relationships with peers and teachers, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and overall feelings toward school.

Data Analysis

For the CAFAS, frequencies were generated to estimate prevalence of clinical severity, and the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was used to assess change over time. For the BCFPI-3, changes from admission to discharge and follow up were analyzed with Repeated Measures

Analysis of Variance. Differences between the RT and IFS groups at specific points in time were analyzed with *t*-tests.

Qualitative data were subjected to a thematic analysis. Transcripts of youth interviews were coded using the qualitative data analysis software package N-Vivo. Interview content was organized into four broad life domains (family, social connections and community conduct, health and well being, and school and employment). Through a process of reading the content of a particular life domain by the research team (3 individuals), descriptive codes emerged that were common among the experiences of youth.

Results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses were shared with service providers and program directors from the partner children's mental health agencies. Their feedback was incorporated into the final analyses and interpretations of study results.

Limitations of the Study

While the study sample likely represents experiences typical of many youth and families using these types of programs, the sample came from five agencies in south west Ontario. In areas with very different socio-economic or ethno cultural characteristics or with other service delivery models, the results might be quite different.

Also, the sample represents all of the youth and families we were able to contact who agreed to participate. Participation levels were very high (> 80%) for the youth and families entering the program during our recruitment year; however, since the mental health agencies had minimal contact with youth after they left their programs, we were only able to establish contact with about half of parents/guardians of children of these youth. Selecting a statistically representative sample was not possible. Sample recruitment strategies were also shaped by the limited number of youth and families participating in these programs at the partner agencies.

The study was not intended to be a formal evaluation of the participating programs. It also does not address the relative effectiveness of the two program approaches. The study's focus was on describing what happens over time to these youth and their families. For this purpose, despite the above limitations, the data was sufficient.

Results

This report summarizes youth school attendance and functioning as reported by parents or guardians, as well as youth's own descriptions of school experiences. Results are organized by timeframe: admission, discharge, and follow up. There is some variation in the data presented at each timeframe, as not all questions or measures were administered or available at all points in time. The information collected on school functioning at admission and discharge was collected retrospectively from paper files. As well, parents or guardians were asked to reflect back to the few weeks prior to youth entering services to answer certain questions. Youth spoke mostly about how they were doing in school presently (which we have labelled as follow up).

Within each section, results are further organized by program type. Where available, we present scores for the group of youth who received residential treatment separately from the scores for youth who received intensive family services. While the scores for these two groups of youth are presented side by side and comparisons are often made, this study is not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of residential treatment or intensive family services. Our intention is to provide a portrait of how children and youth are functioning in school prior to admission, immediately following discharge from treatment, and at follow up (presently).

Following our quantitative analysis of parent and guardian information on youth school attendance and functioning, we present youth perspectives on their school experiences. We conclude this report with some information on youth involvement in paid employment. If youth were reported to not attend school, we were interested in whether they participated in other productive activities, such as work.

School Functioning At Admission

In order to understand how youth who received residential treatment (RT youth) and youth who received intensive family services (IFS youth) were performing academically and whether they were attending school, we used data from the following questions and standardized measures:

- Was the youth attending school?
- What was youth's in-school status (i.e. full time, part time)?
- CAFAS School/Work Subscale
- BCFPI: School Participation and Achievement Impact Scale
- KINDL Quality of Life—School Subscale

(a) SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Parents and guardians were asked whether or not the youth of interest was attending school in the few months leading up to entry into either residential treatment services or intensive family services. If a youth was reported to be attending school, parents were also asked for their in school status (full time, part time, or other).

Results in Table 1 show that 95.2% of IFS youth were in school and 87.6% of RT youth were in school just prior to admission. A Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference between the two groups in the number of youth attending school at admission ($p=.051^*$). There were significantly more IFS youth in school at admission than RT youth.

Table 1: Attending School at Admission

	RT (N=105)	IFS (N=104)
Yes	92 (87.6%)	99 (95.2%)
No	13 (12.4%)	5 (4.8%)
Total	105	104
Missing	2	1
Chi-Square	Pearson= 3.807 df=1 $p=.051^*$	

Table 2 shows that most of the youth in school were reported to attend full time. However, fewer RT youth (78%) were reported to attend school full time than IFS youth (93.9%).

Table 2: In School Status at Admission

	RT (N=91)	IFS (N=98)
Full Time	71 (78%)	92 (93.9%)
Part Time	10 (11%)	3 (3.1%)
Other	10 (11%)	3 (3.1%)
Total	91	98
Missing	16	7

(b) CAFAS: SCHOOL/WORK SUBSCALE

The CAFAS School/Work Subscale assesses the severity of impairment in school or work related role performance. Scores could range from 0 (minimal or no impairment) which suggest a youth is “reasonably comfortable and competent in relevant roles” to 30 (severe disruption or incapacitation) where a youth is “unable to meet minimum requirements for behaviour in the classroom” or has dropped out of school and holds no job. Table 3 shows that RT youth had a mean score of 23.61 and IFS youth had a mean score of 18.93 on the CAFAS School/Work Subscale at admission. This difference was statistically significant ($p=.022^*$).

The mean score for both RT and IFS youth was higher than the 2006 Ontario average score on the CAFAS School/Work Subscale. The 2006 Ontario statistics were generated by The Hospital for Sick Children and can be found in their 2006 annual CAFAS report.¹ The size of the

¹ Ontario’s Children with Mental Health Needs 2006 Report. CAFAS in Ontario, SickKids.

Ontario sample was approximately 18,520 and included all children/youth ages 6 to 18 admitted to treatment in 2006 as well as all children/youth admitted to treatment after January 1, 2005 and either closed in 2006 or still active through 2006. From Table 3 we see that while 26.4% of IFS displayed severe impairment in school functioning at admission (which was similar to the provincial average); 50.6% of RT youth displayed severe school impairment.

Table 3: School/Work CAFAS Score at Admission

Statistics	RT (N=79)	IFS (N=91)	2006 Ontario (N=18,520)
Mean	22.15	17.14	14.49
Std. Dev.	9.56	10.25	
Frequencies			
0.00=	6 (7.6%)	14 (15.4%)	29.8%
10.00=	11 (13.9%)	22 (24.2%)	21.6%
20.00=	22 (27.8%)	31 (34.1%)	22.4%
30.00=	40 (50.6%)	24 (26.4%)	26.2%
Total=	79	91	
Missing=	28	14	
Mann-Whitney Test	U=2579.00 Z=-3.331 p=.001*		

(c) BCFPI: SCHOOL PARTICIPATION & ACHIEVEMENT

Parents/guardians were asked about youth attendance and grades. The BCFPI School Participation and Achievement scale is comprised of three questions assessing trouble with attendance, grades, and relationships with teachers. A higher score indicates greater problems in these areas. Table 4 shows that the mean or average score for RT youth was 77.57 and 72.77 for IFS youth at admission. Mean scores for both groups were above 70 (the clinical impairment cut off) indicating clinical levels of impairment in school participation and achievement. Even when taking the large standard deviation into account, both groups still show problem functioning greater than approximately 84% of the average youth population (percentage of population with scores less than 60).

A comparison between the average scores for the two groups showed no statistically significant difference between RT youth and IFS youth on the BCFPI School Participation and Achievement Subscale at admission (p=.082). This trend however was approaching statistical significance at the .05 level. A review of the response distribution for each question shows that a greater proportion of RT youth missed school as a result of their emotional and behavioural problems than IFS youth (p=.033*). While analyses of the remaining two school items were not statistically significant, there was a consistently greater proportion of RT youth that scored in the most problematic level of impairment in school attendance, grades, and relationships with teachers.

Table 4: BCFPI School Participation & Achievement Score at Admission

Statistics	RT (N=71)	IFS (N=80)
Mean	77.57	72.77
Std. Dev.	16.23	17.26
T-test	t=1.753 df=149 p=.082 (equal variances assumed)	
Frequencies for School Related Items		
How much has your child missed school as a result of these problems? Chi-Square Value=6.793 df=2 p=.033*	None=15 (20.3%) A Little=17 (23%) A Lot=42 (56.8%) Total=74 Missing=33	None=29 (35.8%) A Little=22 (27.2%) A Lot=30 (37%) Total=81 Missing=24
How much have your child's grades suffered as a result of these problems? Chi-Square Value=3.594 df=2 p=.166	None=21 (28.8%) A Little=13 (17.8%) A Lot=39 (53.4%) Total=73 Missing=34	None=26 (32.1%) A Little=23 (28.4%) A Lot=32 (39.5%) Total=81 Missing=24
How much trouble has your child had in getting along with his/her teachers as a result of these problems? Chi-Square Value=2.085 df=2 p=.353	None=11 (14.7%) A Little=22 (29.3%) A Lot=42 (56%) Total=75 Missing=32	None=19 (23.8%) A Little=22 (27.5%) A Lot=39 (48.8%) Total=80 Missing=25

(d) KINDL QUALITY OF LIFE: SCHOOL

Parents/guardians were asked to rate youth's school quality of life by responding to 4 questions assessing difficulty with schoolwork, enjoyment of schoolwork, fears about bad grades and anxiety about the future. In our analysis, the KINDL School Quality of Life subscale displayed poor reliability with an alpha of 0.440. We therefore looked at scores for the 4 individual items that make up this scale. Item responses could range from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time).

A closer look at the distribution of responses for each individual question found in Table 5 reveals that the majority of youth across both groups were reported to experience a diminished quality of life in school at admission. The distribution of responses for individual items that make up the KINDL Quality of Life-School subscale shows that one-half to two-thirds of all youth, regardless of program, were reported to experience school concerns.

More than 70% of RT youth 66% of IFS youth were rated by their parents to “never” or “seldom” cope well with schoolwork. Almost 66% of RT youth and 67% of IFS youth were reported to “never” or “seldom” enjoy the school lessons at admission. At the same time, 50.6% of RT youth and 51.5% of IFS youth were reported to “never” or “seldom” worry about their future. Furthermore, almost 73% of RT youth and 68% of IFS youth were reported to “never” or “seldom” fear receiving bad grades in school.

Table 5: KINDL Quality of Life: Individual Items for School Subscale Prior to Admission

During the past week, my child easily coped with schoolwork.		
Statistics	RT	IFS
Item Mean	2.01	2.23
Std. Dev.	.969	1.10
T-test	t= -1.452 df=185 p=.148 Equal variances assumed	
Item Frequencies		
Never=	31 (36.5%)	30 (29.4%)
Seldom=	30 (35.3%)	38 (37.3%)
Sometimes=	16 (18.8%)	17 (16.7%)
Often=	8 (9.4%)	14 (13.7%)
All the time=	0	3 (2.9%)
Total=	85	102
Missing=	22	3
During the past week, my child enjoyed the school lessons.		
Statistics	RT	IFS
Item Mean	2.05	2.09
Std. Dev.	1.07	1.02
T-test	t=-.254 df=185 p=.799 Equal variances assumed	
Item Frequencies		
Never=	35 (41.2%)	36 (35.3%)
Seldom=	21 (24.7%)	32 (31.4%)
Sometimes=	18 (21.2%)	23 (22.5%)
Often=	11 (12.9%)	10 (9.8%)
All the time=	0	1 (1.0%)
Total=	85	102
Missing=	22	3

During the past week, my child worried about his/her future.		
Statistics	RT	IFS
Item Mean	2.55	2.54
Std. Dev.	1.42	1.40
T-test	t= .036 df=182 p=.972 Equal variances assumed	
Item Frequencies		
Never=	30 (35.3%)	34 (34.3%)
Seldom=	13 (15.3%)	17 (17.2%)
Sometimes=	17 (20.0%)	19 (19.2%)
Often=	15 (17.6%)	18 (18.2%)
All the time=	10 (11.8%)	11 (11.1%)
Total=	85	99
Missing=	22	6
During the past week, my child was afraid of bad marks/grades.		
Statistics	RT	IFS
Item Mean	1.92	2.17
Std. Dev.	1.13	1.25
T-test	t= -1.410 df=184 p=.160 Equal variances assumed	
Item Frequencies		
Never=	42 (49.4%)	39 (38.6%)
Seldom=	20 (23.5%)	30 (29.7%)
Sometimes=	12 (14.1%)	14 (13.9%)
Often=	9 (10.6%)	11 (10.9%)
All the time=	2 (2.4%)	7 (6.9%)
Total=	85	101
Missing=	22	4

School Functioning At Discharge

Information was available at discharge on youth school performance from the CAFAS School/Work Subscale and the BCFPI School Participation and Achievement Subscale. However, not all youth had scores on these two subscales at discharge resulting in a smaller sample size for analysis.

(a) CAFAS: SCHOOL/WORK SUBSCALE

Table 6 shows that the mean score on the CAFAS School/Work subscale for RT youth was 14.42 and 10.60 for IFS youth. Both of these mean scores are lower than the mean scores at admission of 22.15 and 17.14 respectively. There was a statistically significant difference between mean scores for RT and IFS youth at discharge on this measure ($p=.021^*$).

Table 6: CAFAS School/Work Subscale Scores at Discharge

Statistics	RT (N=70)	IFS (N=83)
Mean	14.42	10.60
Std. Dev.	10.30	10.51
Frequencies		
0.00=	15 (21.4%)	33 (39.8%)
10.00=	22 (31.4%)	22 (26.5%)
20.00=	20 (28.6%)	18 (21.7%)
30.00=	13 (18.6%)	10 (12.0%)
Total=	70	83
Missing=	37	22
Mann-Whitney Test	U=2300.50 Z=-2.300 p=.021*	

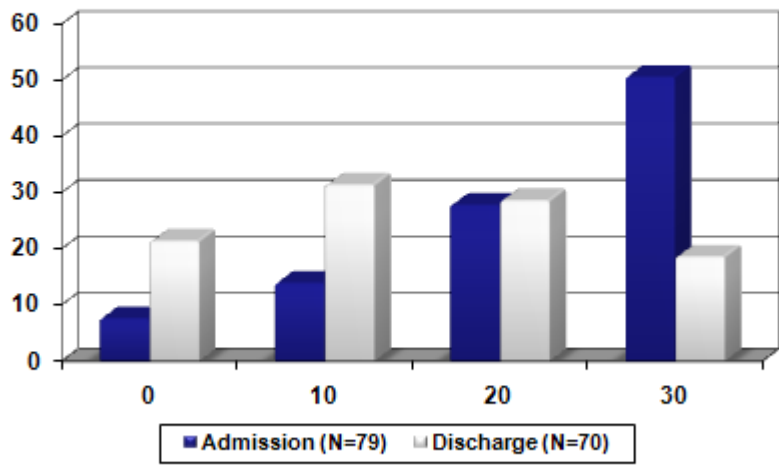
Looking at the patterns of change from admission to discharge for both groups, there was a movement toward less severe impairment in functioning on the CAFAS School/Work subscale for both RT and IFS youth. Table 7 shows that 56% of RT youth (38 out of 68 matched cases) had a reduction in severity of impairment scores from admission to discharge. Similarly, 46% (38 out of 83 matched cases) of IFS youth had lower scores at discharge indicating a reduction in impairment. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test revealed that the change in scores over time were significant for both groups ($p=.000^*$).

**Table 7: Change in CAFAS School/Work Scores over Time
(from Admission to Discharge)**

	RT	IFS
Reduction in Severity of Impairment	38 (55.8%)	38 (45.8%)
Increase in Severity of Impairment	7 (10.3%)	9 (10.8%)
No Change in Severity of Impairment	23 (33.9%)	36 (43.4%)
Total	68	83
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	Z= -4.511 p=.000*	Z= -4.535 p=.000*

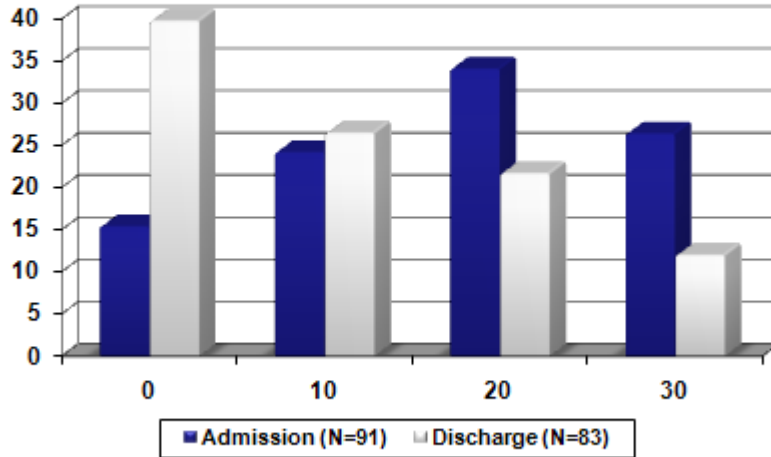
Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of scores on the CAFAS School/Work Subscale from admission and discharge for each group. Figure 1 shows that while the overall distribution moved to indicate improved school functioning at discharge, 47.2% of RT youth were still experiencing either moderate (score of 20) or severe (score of 30) impairment in school functioning at discharge.

Figure 1: Distribution of CAFAS School Subscale Scores for RT Youth



Similarly, Figure 2 shows IFS youth evidenced improved school functioning at discharge; however, 33.7% of IFS youth were still experiencing either moderate (score of 20) or severe (score of 30) impairment in school functioning at discharge.

Figure 2: Distribution of CAFAS School Subscale Scores for IFS Youth



School Functioning At Follow Up

(a) SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Parents and guardians were asked to indicate whether or not youth were in school at the time of our follow up. Table 8 shows that 85.7% of IFS youth and 76% of RT youth were reported to be in school at follow up. Unlike at admission, there was no statistically significant difference in the number of youth in school at follow up between the two groups. Most of the youth in school were reported to be in school “full time”.

Table 8: Attending School at Follow Up

	RT (N=104)	IFS (N=105)
Yes	79 (76%)	90 (85.7%)
No	25 (24%)	15 (14.3%)
Chi-Square	Pearson= 2.357 df=1 p=.125	

Figure 3 shows the proportion of RT youth and IFS youth in school at admission and follow up.

Figure 3: Percentage of Youth In School

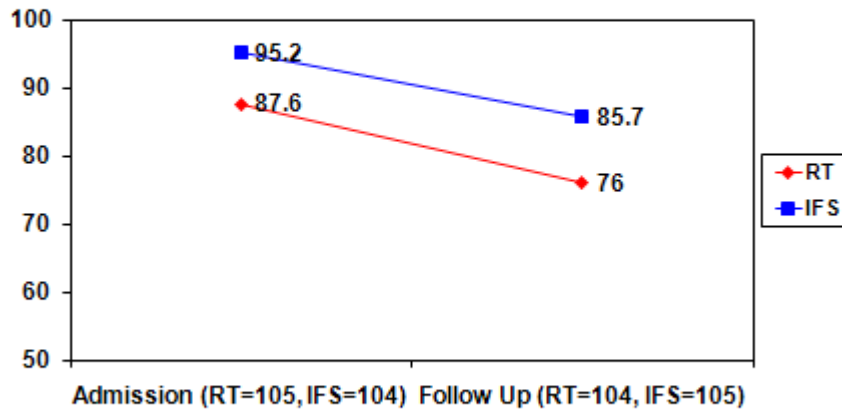


Table 9 shows the number of youth in each group who had a change in school attendance from admission to follow up. There were 22 RT youth who were attending school at admission and were no longer in school at follow up compared to 13 IFS youth. A non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test revealed a significant difference in school attendance from admission to follow up for both groups ($p=.056^*$ and $p=.012^*$).

Table 9: School Attendance from Admission to Follow Up

	RT	IFS
In school at admission/Not in school at follow up	22 (21.6%)	13 (12.5%)
Not in school at admission/In school at follow up	11 (10.8%)	3 (2.9%)
No change in school attendance from admission to follow up	69 (67.6%)	88 (84.6%)
Total	102	104
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	Z= -1.915 p=.056*	Z= -2.500 p=.012*

Further analyses revealed that much of the change in school attendance from admission to follow up was attributed to age. A logistic regression (not shown here) was conducted to examine the predictive power of age and program type (either RT or IFS) on school attendance at follow up. Results revealed program type did not contribute significantly to predicting school attendance at follow up.

As school attendance at follow up was related to age, we next looked at school attendance for younger (under 16) and older (16 and older) youth. The age of 16 was chosen as our cut off point for the two age groups as youth ages 16 or older are legally able to make the decision to leave school. Looking at the proportion of youth not in school at follow up by age revealed some striking differences. From Table 10 we see that only 8.9% of RT youth and 4.5% of IFS youth under 16 years old were not in school at follow up. Once youth are 16 or older, these percentages increased to 54.1% and 31.6% respectively. Across both younger and older age groups, there were more RT youth not in school than IFS youth; however, there was only a statistically significantly difference between the proportion of RT youth and IFS youth age 16 or older not in school at follow up ($p=.049^*$). Over half of RT youth age 16 or older were not in school at follow up in contrast to one-third of IFS youth age 16 or older.

Table 10: Proportions of Youth Not in School at Follow Up by Age (Younger vs. Older)

	Under 16 years old	16 years old and older
RT	6 out of 67 (8.9%)	20 out of 37 (54.1%)
IFS	3 out of 67 (4.5%)	12 out of 38 (31.6%)
Chi-Square	.532 df=1 p=.466	3.871 df=1 p=.049*

(b) REASONS FOR NOT BEING IN SCHOOL

We next looked at the reasons for youth not being in school regardless of age. It is interesting to note that 70.8% of the 24 RT youth reported to not be in school left school by their own choice (temporarily out, own choice *and* decided to leave school). In contrast, 53.4% of the 15 IFS youth were not in school as a result of suspensions or expulsions.

Table 11: Reasons for Not Being in School at Follow Up

	RT (N=24)	IFS (N=15)
Temporarily out, own choice	6 (25%)	1 (6.7%)
Temporarily suspended	2 (8.3%)	7 (46.7%)
Decided to leave school	11 (45.8%)	3 (20%)
Permanently expelled	2 (8.3%)	1 (6.7%)
Other	3 (12.5%)	3 (20%)
Missing	1	

Table 12 shows the reasons for not being in school for youth 16 years of age or older. Half of the RT youth not in school decided to leave school; whereas, 41.7% of the IFS youth not in school were temporarily suspended at the time of our interview.

Table 12: Reasons for Not Being in School (Age 16 years old or older)

	RT (N=18)	IFS (N=12)
Temporarily out, own choice	3 (16.7%)	1 (18.5%)
Temporarily suspended	1 (5.6%)	5 (41.7%)
Decided to leave school	9 (50.0%)	3 (25.0%)
Permanently expelled	2 (11.1%)	1 (8.3%)
Other	3 (16.7%)	2 (16.7%)

(c) BCFPI: SCHOOL PARTICIPATION & ACHIEVEMENT

Of the youth still in school at follow up, parents of many youth in both programs reported continuing problems with missing school and struggling with grades. While there were no statistically significant differences between groups or any significant change patterns over time, there were some concerning results about how youth in both groups were functioning in school at follow up.

Figure 4: Percentage of youth missing school “a lot”

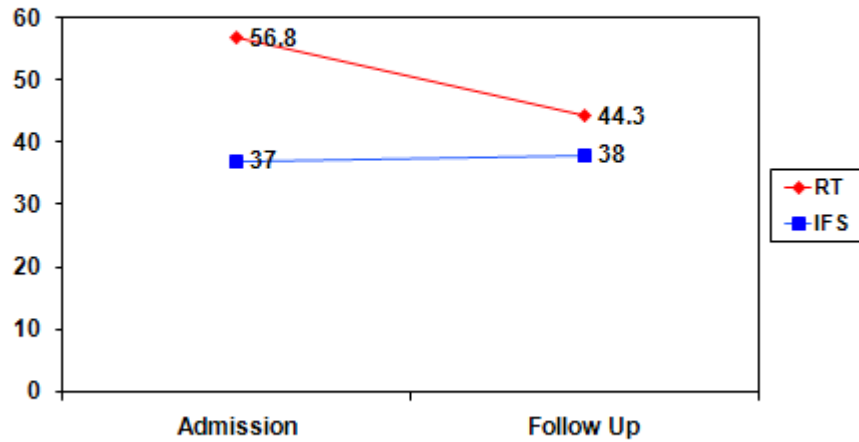


Figure 4 shows that from admission to follow up, approximately the same proportion of IFS youth was reported to miss school “a lot”. RT youth still in school, however, showed a slight decline in the proportion of youth reported to miss school “a lot”. Despite this improvement from admission to follow up, a greater proportion of RT youth than IFS youth were missing school “a lot” at both time periods.

Figure 5: Percentage of youth with grades suffering “a lot”

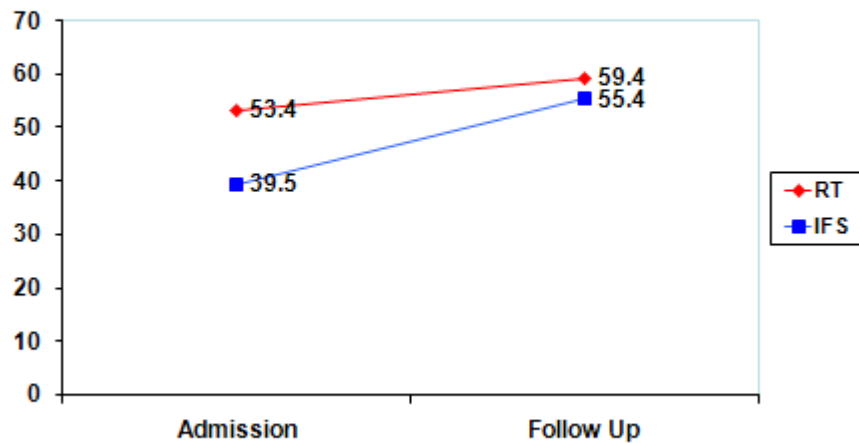


Figure 5 shows that at follow up, there was an increase in the proportion of both RT youth and IFS youth reported to have grades that were suffering “a lot” than at admission. This trend was not statistically significant over time for either group and there was no significant difference between groups; however, it raises some concerns about ongoing and perhaps increasing school difficulties for both groups at follow up.

Youth Perspectives on School Attendance and Performance

A number of questions were explored in the qualitative analysis of youth’s perspectives on school attendance and performance. Firstly we asked “Are youth in school?” and, if so, in what kind of school setting. If they were not in school, then we asked “What are the reasons?” Secondly, we wanted to explore “How are youth doing in school?”; that, is how are they achieving and how are they managing interpersonally, and what is the nature of their overall engagement including extra-curricular involvement. Thirdly, we asked “What are youth saying about school?”, in other words, what is their attitude toward school. In this area we explored overall feelings toward school, attitudes toward teachers and peers, and their future orientation when it comes to school.

There were a number of key differences between RT youth and IFS youth that would seem to be important in understanding what the school domain means for these two groups. The residential treatment group had relatively fewer youth in school and fewer youth in mainstream school settings. RT youth who were in school were more likely to be going on a part-time basis and/or be in modified school setting. RT youth reported more problems with suspensions and generally with discipline issues, particularly violence (verbal and physical) than IFS youth. IFS youth reported more positive school experiences and more positive work experiences than RT youth. IFS youth appeared to be more future-oriented when it came to school and work than RT youth.

(a) ARE YOUTH IN SCHOOL (ATTENDANCE)

Attending School:

Out of a total sample of 68 youth, 79% were attending school on a full-time basis in the community. Broken down by program, 86% of the IFS youth and 80% of the RT youth were attending school. Included are 6% of IFS youth and 9% of RT youth who were in special schools (Section23).

Of the total sample, 18% (14% of IFS youth and 21% of RT youth) were not in any sort of community school or vocational program (This included two RT youth who are currently in custody). Another 3% of the total sample was attending part-time independent or vocational programs in the community.

These numbers show that a relatively high percentage of both IFS youth (86%) and RT youth (80%) were attending school. However, considering the mean age for RT youth was 14.11 years and IFS youth was 13.66 years, these respective percentages of school attendance rates are likely much lower than attendance rates seen in the population at large.

Close to half of IFS and RT youth attending school reported using special programs and supports within community schools and included such things as special section schools, special education classrooms, educational assistants, IEPs (individual educational plans), tutors and behavioural support programs. Approximately one third of those youth attending full-time school talked about using special programs and supports. It seems likely that some others in the sample were receiving support though it may not have been specifically disclosed.

Not Attending School:

Approximately 14% of IFS youth and 21% of RT youth were not attending any school or vocational program in the community or in a treatment setting. While many of these youth reported dropping out of school by their own choice, some also stated that they were on the verge of being expelled at that time. A larger proportion of the youth not attending school reported that they had been expelled. Reasons for expulsion included truancy and verbal and physical conflict/violence. The following are a few examples of youth describing the circumstances that led to their expulsion from school:

I just kept skipping and they suspended me. They came to an expulsion, second time I got expelled—er, suspended, but then they put me in a 5-week program and um, that was to get back into (school) but I couldn't go to that one because I had too many appointments...[IFS-1]

The reason I left is because of all the stress. All the kids always pickin' on me, I'm a main center for bullies, so... Everybody likes to pick on me and stuff was just not going well, so, my anger would get the best of me so...[Q....?]
Basically, one kid said the wrong thing, I gave it—one time kicked a window in.[RT-1]

Instability. Yeah, just basically a lot of drama and crisis and I was just an emotional wreck so that prevented me from continuing to go to school because unfortunately I was in the mindframe that it didn't matter. But, I'm in this program now and I'm going back to school next semester.[RT-2]

Experiencing suspension and expulsion from school was mentioned not only by youth who had left school but also by some of the RT youth who were currently attending school. For example, the following youth returning from school suspension for violence (fighting) with another youth said:

Actually, I just got back into school on Monday. [Q. Yeah? And how long was your suspension?] Well, it was minimum 20 days, but they let me off with 10, because my vice-principal (name) defended for me and said, y’know, I’m a good kid. [RT-3]

Another youth reported interpersonal conflicts at school but was vague about the reasons for her ongoing suspensions: “...I got suspended.[...] I don’t want to talk about it—um, about 5 times this year”. [RT-4]. Approximately one fifth of youth reported interpersonal conflicts with teachers and peers that could potentially lead to similar consequences.

Truancy was also a concern for some of the youth who were attending school, though these youth also reported recent efforts to attend more regularly. Therefore, some of the youth attending school struggled with the same issues that caused their peers to leave school. However, more than half of youth attending school did not report struggling with these same issues to a degree where it affected their school attendance.

Comments clearly show that school attendance is a challenge for both the IFS sample and the RT sample of youth. Difficulties with truancy and with managing conflict stand out as the predominant issues affecting school attendance.

(b) HOW ARE YOUTH DOING IN SCHOOL (PERFORMANCE)

Youth Who were Doing Well:

Approximately 26% of youth from both groups appeared to be reasonably successful in school. More youth from the IFS group (37%) seemed to be doing well in school when compared to youth from the RT group (15%). Youth who were doing well reported that they enjoyed most aspects of school and were doing fairly well academically. The following quotes give some examples of the sort of success these youth reported:

Well, I’m actually really enjoying school, I really love to write, so I’ve been excelling in my English class and I actually got offered the chance to teach part of my poetry unit in my class, which I was really excited about, but something came up and I couldn’t do it. But the only subject that I really found myself falling behind in, is in music. [...] I like it just because I think that writing is putting your soul on paper for somebody else to see and I like that. I like being exposed to, like, the truth. [IFS-1]

English and advisor, because in English I get almost everything right, but I kind of like math because I’m not that good at it, but I like, almost understand it, so I like it, so I can learn more about it and advisor because we just talk and stuff... [IFS-2]

...okay, I can't really describe it, I'm not getting the best marks in school, but not the worst. I'm having fun going to school sometimes, I get to see my friends and hang out with people. I get most of my schoolwork done and get okay marks for it. I try, not that I can say my hardest, but I try pretty hard. I put in a pretty good effort.[IFS-3]

[Q.How do you feel about the grades you're getting in school?] Really great.[Q....What are your grades like?] Well, they're from a 60 to a 90 something. That's on my last report card. [IFS-4]

Because I got pretty good marks this year and I'm pretty caught up in everything. And I'm doing pretty good with everything. [IFS-5]

These youth talked primarily about academics as a measure of success, their enthusiasm for school was an important quality that came through in their dialogue. It is also relevant to report that most of these youth also talked about being engaged in school in a variety of ways including extra-curricular activities, social ties and strong relationships with their teachers.

Youth Who See Themselves as Improving:

There is a sub-set of youth (18%) who reported a fairly recent and significant improvement in their school achievement. These youth may not be as strong academically as the group who is "doing well", but according to their reports there is reason to be hopeful that they may do okay in the school system and continue toward graduation. The following quotes give a sense of the theme of youth who are striving to improve their academic success:

Um, because I think it's really improved from the past couple of years and I think I've really picked up, yeah, and I'm not like completely happy with it, because it's not like, y'know 80s or 90s or anything, but yeah. I'm pretty happy with it. [IFS-1]

It's been pretty good....And I've been concentrating on my work, on the board and what the teacher tells me to do and asks me to do. And my grades have been increasing from a few years ago.[IFS-2]

Well, it wasn't doing the greatest, but I'm picking up now, and like... family studies I have an 80 above average. In geography I just got a project back and I got the highest mark in the class so that was a big shocker for me. [IFS-3]

I don't know, it's just better, because like before, since I missed so much and it's kind of bad since I was really behind, but now since I'm going a lot more, it's getting a lot better because I don't have to worry about catching up and stuff, I'm having more fun.[IFS-4]

It's going good now, like, I have a lot of friends there. [...]And we're constantly joking around and we have different activities going on in school and I have great teachers this semester.[IFS-5]

Pretty good. Better than most years.[...][Q. What about it has been better?]
Well, everything really. My grades have gone up. There's a lot more to do.
[IFS-6]

I've made a lot of friends, made a lot of things, just happened, made a lot of things change, made my marks improve, with a lot of work, pulled it off. After everyone told me I wasn't going to be able to do it, I just... to look at them and laugh and be like, I made it. Nyah. I don't know what you guys were talking about and it felt really good.[RT-1]

There was an equal number of youth from each sample (6 youth in each group) who reported making school improvements. While some youth were doing surprisingly well despite challenges they have had, this was not a typical sample of youth. By mainstream standards, neither of these two groups, the "doing well" group and the "improving" group would seem to be strong examples of academic success.

Youth Who Were Struggling—Obstacles to School Success:

Clearly, for youth who have been in the mental health system, school success may be hampered by a variety of issues. Among the youth seen in our two samples, truancy, interpersonal difficulties, violence, and a simple lack of motivation often interfered with their ability to be successful in school. A variety of issues may underlie these challenges and several youth explicitly linked their behavioural difficulties to other problems in their lives such as learning disabilities, mental health issues, substance abuse and family problems, while many other simply stated the external difficulties they had.

Some youth talked about difficulty getting up in the morning and attending school:

Mainly, just getting up and going to it.[...] Um, I don't know, like, I'm not very good at getting up in the morning. It seems no matter how, like, early I get up... it takes me a while to get to sleep. And so uh, that's probably the biggest problem, actually, I'm usually a lot of times late for school because I have trouble getting up. [RT-1]

Well, I don't know, like, I'd sleep in, in the morning or stay up too late and wouldn't want to go in the morning and just didn't think that school was a good deal. My friends were skipping so I'd just leave with them... um, I really didn't do my homework like I should have.... I was failing all my tests and stuff. [IFS-1]

Yeah.... I was late quite a few times in the morning, I like to sleep in. [IFS-2]

Like I have, I don't really like mornings but... I don't like getting up. [IFS-3]

Some youth talked about a general lack of motivation or lack of interest in attending classes:

It's just kind of boring, I guess.[...]A. Um, I don't know, just being in class, listening. Just sort of sitting there not really doing anything except listening. Even though you know it's for the better of you, but...[IFS-4]

I don't know, just sitting in the class learning about the same thing every day, not really doing much exciting things, just sitting there, wasn't really listening anyway.[IFS-5]

I don't know. I want to pass, that's all, so that's why I didn't work.[RT-2]

Interpersonal conflict was a common reason for having difficulty in school. Over half the sample made some reference to interpersonal problems at school. Interpersonal problems ranged from minor issues such as being disruptive in class, to major issues involving violence. While interpersonal difficulties and conflict were common among both the IFS sample of youth and RT sample of youth, the problems seemed to be of different magnitudes. Most of the IFS youth reported relatively minor conflict and most of the RT youth talking about more severe conflict often involving violence. The following are a few examples of the type of minor interpersonal difficulties reported:

Well, it's not like I don't like the rules. I can't concentrate and I get distracted real easy, so I'm talking constantly in class ... rude to teachers and I don't get along with any of the teachers. [IFS-6]

I don't know, I sometimes get into trouble, like talk back to the teachers and stuff and complain. [IFS-7]

I don't get along well with the teachers.[...] It's just—I don't like to do the work they give me. [Q...?]Uh, they give me a detention...I don't go. Then I get suspended. [RT-3]

The following are some examples of more severe interpersonal difficulties:

Like I said, I kicked in the window once, which was last year, and this year it was just basically swearing. And storming around the school, I would never... physically hurt anybody, I would never threaten anybody, I may have threatened somebody once or twice, but I would never actually take any action so...[RT-4]

Well, for me, I have an issue with being told what to do or whatever or being pushed so I have like, bad anger issues, but I've been working on them, so it's not as bad as it used to be, but for me I don't like being told what to do by, like, people I don't

have to be listened to, or whatever. And I don't like being pushed around and I don't like being hit or anything, so if somebody hits me, I can defensive and fight back or I'll get all like... um, I don't know, what's a good word to describe, all up in their face and like, start talking back to them. Let them know I don't like it and they keep going and I usually push them back or whatever. [RT-5]

Many of these quotes suggested some difficulty dealing with authority figures. Difficulty dealing with other students was also a theme but to a lesser degree. Bullying was also an issue that existed for a sub-group of youth and is detailed further in the social relations life domain report. While these youth are not usually seen as having behavioural difficulties themselves, their poor peer relations can affect their happiness, safety and ultimately desire to attend school.

Clearly there were underlying issues for at least some of these youth that may explain their behaviour. Mental health issues such as depression, anger and anxiety are fairly common in this population and were explicitly disclosed by at least some of these youth. One of the youth that talked about having difficulty getting up in the morning previously mentioned that she missed a lot of school due to her mental health issues: "... last year I was just starting out in high school, because I was going to the hospital in the first semester in grade 9, so this year I'm kind of just into the routine and stuff." [IFS-20]

Learning disabilities was another theme that was evident by some of the special programs youth are in and by some of their comments:

Well, I just found it, it's a disability that I have....Learning and stuff. ... Sometimes I couldn't remember stuff. [...]. I go to school, I get stuck with homework, I can't really do it because I don't really understand most of it.[IFS-8]

A theme of having difficulty concentrating emerged in a number of quotes. For example:

I can't concentrate and I get distracted real easy, so I'm talking constantly in class ...[IFS-9]

What's tough about school is that you have to listen really carefully and you have to have a lot of patience.[IFS-10]

I know I can do better....Concentrating more, getting all my homework in, trying my best. [IFS-11]

I don't know, because I do understand things really easily. It's just like, I do have a lot of problems focusing and stuff so... like I'll be listening and then I'll just kind of daze off and then come back and be like, wait, what did we just do? So sometimes, it does tend to get a little bit overwhelming because I'll find myself dazed a lot and then I'll be like, hey, focus, and I'll try and focus and then I can't, and I'm like, argh. So...[IFS-12]

Trouble concentrating may be related to issues such as learning disabilities or other mental health issues. A low tolerance for frustration is suggested in this quote:

Teachers....They annoy me....Yeah, they don't help me much. And I get frustrated real easy, so... that's probably the only thing I don't like about it? [RT-6].

A history of substance abuse issues interfering with school was alluded to by two youth. In the following case, a youth talked about how quitting drugs, as well as changing his home environment by moving in with his dad, helped get him back on track:

...at the beginning of the semester I wasn't going to my classes or anything like that, um, or I'd just slack off and not do anything in class and now I', actually trying to get in there and they've been helping me catch up.[...]Um, it's just me comin here, because with my dad now it's a different environment, getting into a different program (AA), that really helped me get out now. [...] It's just like-I was into alcohol and drugs and I cannot-like, I couldn't just put it down....[IFS-13].

This example also illustrates that home environments can be problematic – the youth found it helpful to change his home environment by moving in with his dad. Family issues and home life may interfere with school attendance. The following are more explicit examples of youth who viewed family issues and personal issues as interfering with their ability to attend school:

“Um, because I had a lot of problems last year. Family problems and like, problems with friends and stuff and 3 really close to me died all within a month, so, um, I don't know, it was just like... awkward and like, a lot of things coming up and stuff so there was a lot of stress. I just didn't go to school because I was like, “No. No time for time.”[IFS-14]

(Q...can you tell me about how school is going for you right now, even though it's the summer) Yeah ah well last year it didn't go too well cause, well my dad kicked me out, then I was living with my boyfriend and he lived in [neighbourhood] and I was going to [high school far from neighbourhood] at the time. [IFS-15]

Clearly, one sees a group of youth with multiple challenges when it comes to school attendance and achievement. However, there is some reason for optimism based on youth who perceived themselves as improving and overcoming some of their difficulties. Most of these youth are discussed in the sub-group of youth who are now doing “okay” in school. However, there are also other youth who talked about overcoming fairly significant behavioural issues. The following are an assortment of quotes that illustrate this theme of improvements in relation to overcoming significant behavioural obstacles.

Well, I'm not getting into any fights, so people aren't getting hurt. And there's... teachers don't have to put up with me as much so they get a break.[...] Well, I don't fight anymore. I'm always paying attention in class. I like my teacher, finally. And I do my work, not refusing to do it. [IFS-15]

Yeah, I went from almost being expelled last year to ... being, I was in the office once for being late too many times for one class. [Q...What were you almost expelled for last year?] Fighting. Just... getting in trouble. Constantly getting suspended. 15-20 suspensions. [RT-7]

I haven't got sent in the hall for, like, the longest time....Because I learned strategies and stuff. [IFS-16]

Though there was a promising theme of improvements for some, there also was a large group of youth (56% of those currently attending school) who reported significant challenges at school, including truancy, violence and a variety of other behavioural issues. In addition, the group of youth who were not currently in school was primarily out for similar behavioural difficulties.

Special Programs and Supports:

As mentioned in the previous section, a number of youth received special supports within mainstream schools, attended special (section 21) schools, or attended alternative programs in the community. Across the two samples, eighteen youth, or 26% of those attending full-time school, talked about special programs, though the number of youth actually receiving in-school support may be higher. Of these 18 youth, 4 were in special (section 21) schools, while the other 14 were receiving special supports in mainstream schools which included special education classrooms, behavioural support programs and individualized academic programs (IEPs). Given that the issue of special school support was not explored across all youth interviews, there may in fact have been more youth in both RT and IFS groups who had received special school programs or supports.

Feedback about special programs varied greatly, with many youth finding the supports helpful, while some others had concerns about stigma or being separated from friends. The following youth talked about a special program making a significant difference in their schooling:

Well, I'm getting good grades....I could concentrate more, I couldn't hear myself in the other class....It's better for concentrating. I still get picked on, but by little kids and I try to make them stop, they get in trouble every day.[...] [Q. What makes it easier to concentrate?] Not as many kids and more teachers around me and beside me and talk to me. [IFS-1]

Well, ever since, um, I went through autism program, it's been better for me, I'm not getting suspended as much and I'm not getting in trouble all the time and I'm actually learning. [IFS-2]

Amazing, I went from doing completely terrible and going to (section 23 school) and they just completely changed my attitude and how I felt about school and I went to school this year and just flew through all my subjects and did really well in them and it changed me a lot. [RT-1]

Even small supports like having a tutor made a difference:

Yeah, she helps me out with a lot... like we have a map portfolio we're doing right now with graphs and stuff and there's some questions I didn't understand and she helped me do them. Now when I hand that in, it's not going to be incomplete, it's going to be complete, because now I understand it. [IFS-3]

Being able to work at your own pace was an important aspect of special programs for a number of youth.

It was a lot easier, because she just said teachers gave you stuff and you just worked on it and she gave you so many lessons and you did it at your own pace. [RT-2]

The idea that special programs carry some stigma for youth was identified as a concern for two youth. The following youth commented on how they felt about being in a special program:

I hate it. [Q....?] I don't know, I just do. [Q...] Well, it's just not normal school. And it's all, like, special education and stuff. [Q. So what you don't like about that?] Because I've never been called special ed. before. [IFS-4]

Yeah, I was in a special program, I didn't like that though, I didn't like that though, but whatever, I just... dealt with it.[Q....?] I didn't like being classified as special. [Q....?] Most kids put you down a lot. They know. Other kids know you're in the special section. It's very degrading, that's why I don't like it.[RT-3]

There was also some concern expressed about special schools or classrooms presenting an added challenge for youth who already have behavioural issues:

... some of them are like a barn kind of, y'know, matters what ones, like if it's in (school), or (name) Those one—(name) group home ones are pretty wild because you only have 5 kids and it's loud, like real loud. And there's always problems with the staff and kids. Most of the time, I didn't even go out because I had to deal with

stuff back at the group home, so then they stopped me from going, slowed me down a lot. So... they're a lot different though, they're easier, y'know, like, one-on-one, you don't just sit there.

[RT-5]

Our samples also included 3 youth in community (alternative to school) programs. Two of these programs were primarily vocational in nature, aimed at preparing youth for the workforce. One youth was in a part-time, academic, independent study program. The following describes an alternative vocational program in the community that seemed to be a good fit for this youth who was expelled from a high school.

You don't get credits, but you get paid for the time that you're there and basically you learn communication skills, life skills, social skills, um, reasons to y'know, actually take the initiative to get a job and reasons for some kids who want to go back to school.[RT-6]

Overall, youth talked about supports such as smaller class size, more help from teachers and working at their own pace as helpful. Being in classrooms where there was a lot of chaos, and being labelled as "special" were some of the downsides to special programs. Nonetheless, it would seem that alternative programs certainly have a strong role to play for these youth who have been involved with the mental health system.

Extra-Curricular Activities:

A minority of youth, 15%, across the samples talked about being involved in extra-curricular activities at school. Of the youth who talked about being involved in school activities, nine of these ten youth came from the IFS sample. These youth may be some of the same youth found among the two groups described as "doing well" and "improving." These youth specifically talked about their involvement in extra-curricular activities, in marked contrast to the rest of the sample. Some examples of enthusiasm for extra-curricular activities are demonstrated in the following comments:

I'm doing the leader-in-training, volunteering and that's like volunteering with kids and I like that and my teacher at my school, my gym teacher has asked me to be part of a leadership program at my school...[IFS-1]

I was on the cross-country team at the beginning of the year, the basketball, volleyball, and then I signed up for track and field in the summertime.[IFS-2]

...and drama I just like to act. I've been in plays before. [IFS-3]

Many youth who were faring well in their school environments appeared to be engaged in multiple facets of school life. However, the low overall involvement in extra-curricular

activities across the two samples suggested that most of the youth from the IFS sample, and all of the youth from the RT sample, were not highly engaged in school life in a broad sense.

Summary:

School achievement was varied among the youth interviewed for our study. There was a modest sized group of youth from the IFS sample and a smaller number of youth from the RT sample that appeared to be doing well, along mainstream standards. There was a second group of youth from both RT and IFS that was doing “fair” with some evidence of moving forward in a positive direction. There was a large group of youth who reported multiple obstacles and difficulties in their school life. Several of the youth, generally those from the “improving” group, framed their school difficulties as mostly in the past.

There were a variety of school supports utilized by youth and these supports generally seemed to be helpful given their school history and personal challenges. Overall, when we combined youth who were struggling in school and those who were not currently in school, we saw a large number of youth who at present faced significant obstacles to school success (about 62% of the entire sample). It must also be noted that the most of youth who were really struggling were RT youth.

(c) WHAT YOUTH SAY ABOUT SCHOOL (ATTITUDES)

The language youth used to talk about school revealed a great deal about their feelings, motivation, and various challenges associated with school. Again, we saw different groupings when it came to youth attitudes toward school. There are youth whose language suggested primarily positive feelings toward school, youth who exhibited mixed feelings toward school and youth who demonstrated very negative attitudes and feelings toward school. These attitudes generally corresponded with school success, though not always.

Overall Attitudes:

Generally, youth who did not have very favourable school experiences talked about school in ways that were very negative. Their comments communicated a “don’t care” attitude. Language communicating strong feelings such as “I hate school” was not uncommon among this sub-group. The following are examples of this:

I hated it....I couldn’t stand—well, I hate it, I didn’t like anything about it, I never went to school. [RT-1]

Everything. I hate—like, I just don’t like it, because people, it’s just a drama-fest going to school, I can’t stand it. [RT-2]

Some youth characterized school as “boring”, which in the following example the youth linked to skipping classes:

Pretty boring, I got in a trouble sometimes just basically skipping and hanging out with friends, stuff like that, so I just didn’t feel like going to class because I didn’t like school. It was boring. [IFS-1]

A general apathy or lack of interest was illustrated through comments such as:

I don’t know, just sitting in the class learning about the same thing every day, not really doing much exciting things, just sitting there, wasn’t really listening anyway [IFS-2]

I don’t like school....Homework....Projects. That’s what I hate. [RT-3]

The ways in which many of this sub-group of youth talked about school suggested that they “don’t care” a lot about school or see the value of an education. These were all youth whose stories suggested that they have not been successful in school environment.

A large segment of the sample had mixed commentary about school and most of the language these youth used was “unenthusiastic” but not negative. For example:

I have a lot of friends. It’s pretty easy and I dunno, I just... it’s not a problem.[IFS-3]

It’s alright. Uh... I dunno. Doing good so far.” [RT-4]

For these kids, the social aspect of school was positive but, based on other information, these youth had other school challenges and their overall attitude toward school seemed fair but lacking in enthusiasm. Another common theme that was communicated in this “mixed feelings” group was a sense that school was more work than they would like to be. For example youth said: “A little too much work” [IFS270] and “Just a little bit more (homework) than I would like it to be, but I’m trying to keep up with it, yeah.” [IFS266] Again, these comments suggested limited motivation on the part of these youth.

There was a segment of the sample, about 28%, that was quite enthusiastic about school. Here youth used words such as “really good” and “great” when asked how they felt about school. A few more detailed responses follow:

I like school. Even two days off is too much.”[IFS-4]

Well, I’m actually really enjoying school, I really love to write...[IFS-5]

It's pretty good, my teachers are nice, I have some pretty nice students, like classmates, this one guy, he really likes gym, I like him, because I have somebody to compete against...[RT-5].

Contrary to intuition, this more enthusiastic group was not comprised solely of youth who were excelling in mainstream school. A couple of the youth with positive attitudes were in section 23 schools and special programs generally reserved for youth with academic difficulties. By mainstream standards they may not be "successful"; however, they appeared to be relatively happy with their school experience.

Attitudes Toward Teachers:

There was a great deal said about teachers, what youth liked and did not like about particular teachers. Several themes emerged. There were youth who did not seem to get along with teachers in general and seemed to have some difficulty with their authority. There were youth who liked particular kinds of teachers, namely funny, nice teachers who tended to be more lenient, sometimes more understanding of these youth's particular issues and those who took the time to get to know students as individuals. Teachers who helped students because they genuinely cared, instead of helping as part of their job requirement, were viewed favourably by several youth. There were several youth who seemed to have generally strong relationships with teachers.

Youth who generally did not get along with teachers and principals said things such as:

The teacher, how she always gives me attitude and stuff. [IFS-1]

But I hate him. I hate my principal, I can't stand him. We don't like each other. [...]We've never gotten along, ever. Ever since the first day of grade 9. Because he called me stupid and I threw a textbook at him...[...] Because that's the only reason that is stopping me from going to school, is him.[RT-1]

It's just annoying and teachers are just annoying, so I don't like doing it...I don't know, they're just do-this, do-that, blah, blah, blah, and I just, I hate being told what to do. [RT-2]

Uh, some of them are kind of mouthy. Some of them pick on the kids, like not in here, but at community school, they always victimize the kids they get and embarrass them in front of the whole class. [RT-3]

Youth who liked particular types of teachers said things such as:

Not strict about certain things. Trying to help you, not watching for things to kick you out for. Um. Caring. [RT-4]

...the fact that I can actually joke around with teachers and they don't get mad at me [IFS-2]

(good teachers) They're easy to get along with, I don't get that much homework. They're really nice to you a lot of the time. It's nice, you can always come up and talk to them. [...] (bad teachers) They're always in a bad mood and just not pleasant to be around sometimes. Always get a lot of homework, always expect you to do things a certain way. They aren't that pleasant. [IFS-3]

...They're just... there's strict ones and weird ones. [Q. What did you like about that one teacher?]. He was cool, he knew how to, like, attach with the kids. He knew how to, like, I don't know, get along with the kids. He had that certain bond, he was an awesome teacher. [IFS-4]

(what makes a teacher nice and okay) Just um the nicest ones are there to like help you and not just because they have to be there. (So the ones who care kind of.) Yeah not the ones who are just there because that's their job. [RT-5]

Youth who generally got along with all teachers said things such as:

Um, I don't know, the socializing the teachers at (school) are usually pretty nice, pretty reasonable. Um, that's probably about it. [IFS-5]

They can help you with your work, they're like, always there. And they're like... they're pretty fair. Like if you're late for class, like a couple times, they won't say anything, but if you're constantly late... [IFS-6]

Um, my teachers are all generally very nice. And I don't know, but I kind of just like a challenge on certain things, except for music. I like to be challenged with harder things. [IFS-7]

I like my teachers. [...] She's nice, we go on great trips. [RT-5]

Well, the academics and stuff, like, the teachers are considered—most of the teachers are like, really good and like if you have a problem or something they're really good about helping you about it, or like, talking to you about stuff. They're just like, they're really good teachers, so it's easy to get along with your teachers. [IFS-8]

The first group of youth, presenting negative attitudes, clearly had some difficulty with teachers as authority figures. These examples came largely from the RT youth who struggled the most in school and other structured environments. The second group of youth had mixed relationships with teachers and seemed to require some extra support and understanding from teachers. They did well with certain teachers and not with others. The third group seemed to have quite strong relationship skills when it came to getting along with teachers.

An important theme that emerged in most of the comments about teachers was that of “respect” and how important it was to these youth that they perceived that they are respected. The idea of perceived respect or lack of respect came across not only when youth used the word “respect”, but also when they talked about teachers being “nice” or “fair” or “understanding”. However, some youth seemed to be highly sensitive to disrespect and perhaps assumed the worst of teachers, while others perceived teachers as liking them and having good intentions.

Attitudes toward Peers:

The themes of peers and the importance of friends at school were mentioned constantly by almost all the youth. The idea that the social aspect of school is important to kids was highlighted in the social connections domain as well. This theme will be briefly highlighted here by a few examples. The fact that friends are an important part of school life for many was clear and it was illustrated quite succinctly through some of the responses to the question “What do you like about school?”. Answers included such statements as: “Well, meeting new people for one thing and being there with your friends.” [IFS-1], “I met a lot of new people.” [IFS-2] I don’t know, my friends.” [IFS-3] and “Friends”[RT-1].

All but a few youth talked about friends at school as a desirable thing, even those who had difficulty making friends. For almost half, friends seemed to be the best thing about school. However, for several youth, the social aspect of school was troubling, while the academic side of school was not an issue. One youth said “It’s okay, except for some of my friends. They can kind of turn me off some days.” [IFS-4] and another said “A few problems with the kids, they bully me, but other than that, it’s more like, I think it’s great...” [IFS-5] However, in many cases where youth were bullied, they still expressed a desire to have more friends and better social relations. In only one case did a very socially discouraged youth (one who was also bullied) talk about having little desire to have friendships at school.

How Youth Talk About Being Out of School:

At the time of our interview, 14% of IFS youth and 21% of RT youth reported not being in school. Being out of school was not characterized as particularly appealing by most of the youth who had left school. “Boredom” was one characteristic in youth descriptions of being out of school:

Mmm, there’s really nothing to do. [...] Yeah. Just walk around all the time.”[IFS-1]

I don’t know, I sat at home... I don’t know, just sat there and watch TV all day. Some—go clean, then watch TV all day....It’s easy, but lazy. [RT-1]

Because I’m bored. It’s so boring, it’s just like, sitting here all day, and like, knowing that all my friends are in school, like, my boyfriend’s going back to school....[RT-2]

While several youth saw themselves as somehow better off not being in school, particularly when it came to being able to set their own routine, there was little to no description of what they enjoyed doing. The comments about being better off included such comments as:

I never really liked school, so I guess it's better for me now. [IFS-2]

I don't know. I'm learning more when I'm not in school, with my friends and stuff.
[RT-3]

One youth talked quite enthusiastically about liking the lack of structure and setting his own routine:

Fun!...Not having to learn all the time. Well, it's fun learning, but I get to work at my own pace, rather than the actual time set for...[...]. Well, I sorta have a routine, but it's not routine. Which is what I like. [RT-4]

However, there was little description of what youth were doing instead of school, with the exception of the two youth who had jobs. Half of the youth (6/12) expressed some desire to go return to school as they viewed their future success as dependent upon high school graduation. Some examples include:

Well, I'm thinking of actually going to class when I go back, because I want to be a writer when I get older....When I go back, I'm just going to try to go to class". [IFS-3]

I'm in this program now and I'm going back to school next semester.[RT-5]

I like work like...but I got to finish school in order to get a job but I like working better than school. (You want to work but you need school?) Yeah. [IFS-4]

Overall, it would appear that being out of school was not a very positive experience for most youth in this group who have left school.

Future Orientation:

While there seemed to be an overall lack of future orientation among the youth in our study, some were able to comment about school goals and a school future that included graduation and possibly post-secondary education. There was a significant difference between the way in which a number of IFS youth talked about their school future and the simple lack of discussion about an academic future seen among many youth within the RT sample.

Of the IFS youth, 63% talked about an academic future beyond the next six months and twelve had some goals around post-secondary education, either in a college or a trade program.

Of RT youth, 63% talked about academic goals and these included completing high school and going to college. A subtle difference was noted between IFS and RT youth's academic future orientation. Many IFS youth reported very specific post-secondary school plans, several hoped to attend university, and most were quite confident that they would experience future academic success. RT youth's future goals primarily involved attending trade or college programs and several of these youth expressed doubt about their chances for future success. Some of the future oriented comments about school and career included:

Well, like I said before, I want to be a writer or a chef, because I like to cook a lot, but I mean, like I really want to be a writer, I guess, because, like, all my life, people have been telling me that I have a big imagination and stuff like that, so I'm just like, alright, I'll just try something, write it on paper and when I wrote something for school, I got 2nd place for this writing thing and then I wanted to write ever since then.[...] [Q. Yeah. Are you hoping to graduate from high school?] One day, yeah. [IFS-1]

School is getting higher grades, getting through high school in at least applied courses and then I'm hoping to go off to college at least.[IFS-2]

Uh, probably going to college. [IFS-3]

Hope to get all my credits, pass high school, to do a little bit of college so I can get a good job. [Q. What kind of job would you want to have?] Be a vet. [RT-1]

Um, hope that I'll graduate....Yeah, I have all my credits, well, minus the ones I need to get la—next year, but I'm caught up with all my credits and stuff. [Q. So you hope to graduate next year?] Yup. [Q. Do you hope to go to university?] I think I'm going to go back for a victory lap and just take a couple courses that I didn't think to take in the first place. And I hope to either go to Western or—for like English and stuff or Sheridan for dance maybe. [IFS-4]

Hope to happen next year? I get a co-op I get a job at an auto mechanic place.[...]Being a class A mechanic and getting a job as an auto mechanic.[...]Doing all the best I can in all the subjects that are mandatory for that. [IFS-5]

Okay, I was saying that you can have a decent life without even a high school education, but you just need to be a good worker and I can't really see myself—that's kind of what made me realize, oh I need a grade 12. [IFS-6]

Um, well, I sort of have been thinking of becoming a therapist, because I'm really good with talking and sitting here listening to people and then I was thinking about a teacher, but I hear you have to go to university now for that and it's a lot of steps to becoming one so I'm not sure about that, because you get summers off and stuff and I don't want to be sitting in a desk, calling people and working on a computer all day, like my mom does. [IFS-7]

Well, I would like to be a writer when I'm older and I would like to attend Brown University. And... like, I would like to have a second, I would like to go to a college or a university because I feel that education is one of the most important things you can have because with education you can get a better job and I'd like... Because you always have to work hard to do your best and yeah. And that's hard to do, because some things I don't understand, but, I'm afraid to ask the questions, but I need the answers and stuff like that, so it can be hard for me to kind of like just be kind of asking questions more and finding out more and stuff like that.[IFS-8]

[Q. Are there tough things you have to face in the longer future?] Probably. Because after I get my apprenticeship I want to go to college, unless I'll have money issues too, but...[Q. So it might be tough financially.]Yeah.[IFS-9]

The fact that some youth were also able to comment on possible obstacles they may have to face illustrates that at least some youth are realistic about the challenges of reaching their goals. However, while there were some examples of goal-focused youth among IFS youth, when we examined the entire group of youth interviewed, there appeared to be a lack of future orientation around school.

Summary of Attitudes toward School:

Attitudes toward school varied greatly among youth. About one third of the youth spoke about school in very negative ways, a little more than a third spoke about school in a mixed way, and less than a third spoke about school in very positive terms. Only 15% of RT youth spoke positively about school and thus 85% of RT youth fell almost exclusively into the first two categories (negative and mixed). There was a more balanced distribution of attitudes among IFS youth than RT youth. Attitudes toward teachers varied similarly. Attitudes toward peers were more positive overall with some negative feelings stemming from being bullied or from conflicted relationships with friends and peers.

Youth who were not attending school did not have very positive things to say about their experiences though there were some who said they enjoyed having their own routines and learning on their own. Overall, youth were not very future oriented when it came to their education, however, 63% of IFS youth and 30% RT youth talked about future school goals.

Youth Employment

The next section of this report summarizes youth involvement in employment and volunteer activities. We first present numerical information obtained from parents and guardians about whether youth had a job and if they were working part time or full time (if not in school). We then summarize youth perspectives of their involvement in work and volunteer activities.

(a) AT ADMISSION

Parents and guardians were asked whether or not the youth was employed in a paying job in the few months leading up to admission to services. If a youth was said to be employed, parents/guardians were also asked if the work was part time or full time. There were very few youth employed at the time of admission to treatment. Of the youth who were employed, no one was working full time. This is likely a result of the younger ages of the youth at the time of admission. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant difference between RT and IFS youth employment at admission. Table 13 shows the distribution of youth employment at admission.

Table 13: Youth Involvement in Paid Employment at Admission

	RT (N=107)	IFS (N=105)
Employed	6 (5.7%)	5 (4.8%)
Not Employed	99 (94.3%)	100 (95.2%)

(b) AT FOLLOW UP

There were more youth employed in paying jobs at follow up. There were more IFS youth with jobs than RT youth. In fact 20% of all IFS youth had a job with most IFS youth being employed part time (18 out of 21). A Chi-Square revealed a significant difference in the number of RT and IFS youth with jobs ($p=.018^*$). Table 14 shows the distribution of youth employment at follow up.

Table 14: Youth Involvement in Paid Employment at Follow Up

	RT (N=107)	IFS (N=105)
Employed	9 (8.6%)	21 (20%)
Not Employed	96 (91.4%)	84 (80%)
Chi Square:	5.60 df=1 $p=.018^*$	

Table 15 shows that of the IFS youth who were employed, 86% were working in part time positions. Similarly, over half of the RT youth who were employed were working part time.

Table 15: Employment Status of Youth with Paying Jobs at Follow Up

	RT (N=9)	IFS (N=21)
Part Time	5	18
Full time	4	2

We also looked at the number of youth in both groups who were not in school at follow up *and* did not have a job. Table 16 shows that the majority of youth not in school were also unemployed despite the fact that most of these youth were old enough to be involved in paid employment. Eighteen of the 25 RT youth not in school and 12 of the 15 IFS youth not in school were age 16 or older.

Table 16: Involvement in Paid Employment by Youth Not in School at Follow Up

	RT (N=25)	IFS (N=15)
Employed	5 (25%)	2 (13%)
Unemployed	20 (75%)	13 (87%)

Youth Perspectives on Employment and Volunteer Experiences

Notably, 35% of the youth interviewed were employed in paid work at the time of our interview. These were mostly youth in school with a part time job. None of the youth were employed full-time. Of the youth who were not in any school or vocational program, less than a third of these youth had any employment. The other two thirds were out of school and out of work. Using the limited information we had on employment and volunteer experience, we explored youth work experiences, feelings about work or volunteering, and future goals.

Description of Work Experiences:

Three youth who were out of school were working in a part-time capacity though both expressed a desire to work more hours. One of these youth worked in a clothing store, one had casual work laying carpet, and the other was engaged in casual work as a “referee”. The youth working at the clothing store expressed frustration that she was not scheduled to work more hours:

I work at (name), so it’s just clothes.[Q. Okay, how often do you work?] Hardly ever... Well, it depends. Like, this week, I only worked two times a week [...] And

because it's just not fair. It's not fair to me, it's not fair to anyone, because, honestly, how am I supposed to... like if I was living on my own, how am I supposed to afford anything with just two shifts a week? Like, that's stupid. [RT-1]

This was a youth who had been out of school for some time, had had several work experiences and found it difficult to “make a living” through work.

There were a variety of part-time jobs described by students and for the most part, these jobs seemed to suit the needs of these students whose aim was usually only to earn spending money. Two youth worked at a fast food restaurant, one unloaded trucks for one seven hour shift a week, one did occasional maintenance work for his grandfather, one did casual labour cutting steel, one worked in an office environment, two worked in landscaping or lawn care, two babysat, one took care of neighbors' dogs, one worked as a librarian, another as a cashier and one as a youth group counsellor. Two youth currently in jail talked about the “illegal work” they did selling drugs or stealing cars. Both of these youth talked about making relatively large sums of money from their criminal activities (e.g. \$600/week). In contrast, legal paid work ranged from below minimum wage to about \$10 an hour.

Feelings About Work:

About half the youth expressed a desire to have a job (usually part-time because of school) and several stated that they were looking for work. It should be noted that a few of the younger youth (ages 12-14) would not likely be considering work yet due to their age. In general, finding paid work seemed to be desirable to many youth.

The two youth who were out of school and working part-time seemed somewhat frustrated because they were not able to work enough:

It's good, it's \$7.90, so I guess it's better than—but when I don't get any hours, it's retarded.[...] And because it's just not fair. It's not fair to me, it's not fair to anyone, because, honestly, how am I supposed to... like if I was living on my own, how am I supposed to afford anything with just two shifts a week? Like, that's stupid.[RT-2]

Have one (a part-time job), trying to keep one, but won't be able to keep it because I don't have transportation to and from London so...[RT-3]

The youth who were out of school and out of work had little to say about their work goals. Though five stated they were looking for work, they had little concrete to say about their work prospects. Two youth seemed more interested in getting back into school.

Those who were working and in school had a variety of mostly positive things to say about the jobs they had. This youth who worked for his grandfather seemed to derive some very positive feelings from getting a job done efficiently:

So, I helped him out with that and I sweep, sweep, sweep, sweep, beat him all the way to the bottom, I took the elevator up, sweep, sweep, sweep, and I make it to the bottom and I beat him because he'd only finish the other first step and I beat him to other step. I sweep it so fast... [...] and how much does he pay you? Uh, not too much. [Q. Not enough?] No, it's pretty good. [RT-4]

Another youth described enjoying a very positive relationship with his employer who seems to act as a supportive mentor to him.

Uh I learn stuff that's not only to do my jobs, uh like I learn how to do stuff that's out of, like say when my boss drives me home, I learn different ah things like cooking, he taught me how to, he taught me a few things about cooking. Or just how to clean up certain things that's, not included in the job or it's, it's hard to say with my boss because he's older. But and we also talk about the world pollution and I like those conversations with him. And he's a veteran so we talk about, I, we, I've asked him in the past what he did and we had a good conversation about him on an air, aircraft carrier. [RT-5]

Youth also expressed some satisfaction with the money they made even though it was not a lot. The following two youth expressed satisfaction both with the work and the money:

It's a pretty good job... Yeah. [Q. Pretty good money too. Is it hard work?] Not really, once you get used to it...The first couple of weeks, yeah, just got really sore...[IFS-1]

I like doing it because it's lifting a lot of stuff... Yeah, like I like lifting the steel because it gets you built. So that's why I like doing it. [...] [Q. Is there other stuff you like about work?] You make a lot of money....10 bucks an hour.... Um, and I get to learn new stuff, I don't know.[...] No, actually, I'd rather work than going to school. I'm a working guy, so...[RT-5]

For some youth, there were some unsatisfying aspects of part-time, unskilled jobs. For example:

Um, I don't know, it gets kind of boring, because there are so many of us and we're standing there all the time.[RT-6]

I had a job with the city...But I just quit that....Uh, parking attendant down at the city, at the [place name]... It was just always out during the wintertime and that, just kind of crappy, so...[IFS-2]

Because I quit....I was getting bored and it was too hard...I didn't want to spend 2 hours down here sorting flyers.[RT-7]

Sometimes part-time jobs conflicted with school as this youth described in contrasting her new job to her old one:

I really like it, because before, as I said, it was the beginning of the year, again, I used to have a job at (fast food restaurant) and then they didn't care much about school or anything, neither did I. They were constantly scheduling me to close every night during the week, so I was working full-time there plus school, so I really like the fact how I can work, get some money that I can spend going out bowling or something like that, and buying different things that I'm going to need. And then without having trouble with school, working late, or anything like that.[IFS-3]

This youth went from full-time to part-time work and seemed much happier with her choice given her school goals.

Where youth talked about relationships at work they were generally quite positive. For example:

At work, I know my friend (name) works there from my school, then I met really nice people, like they were extremely nice there, of what I got from them. Like, they're like, they help me out a lot, it's not an environment where you're afraid to go to work or anything, you don't know what they're going to say or do, it's one of those places where you know you can go there and have fun.[IFS-4]

Um, just because the people I work with are really easily to work with and stuff and like, um, I don't really have any problems with anyone. And like, everyone in our team works really well together and we always get stuff done and whatnot. [IFS-5].

The two youth who disclosed illegal work talked about their work fairly optimistically saying it was "easy money". One youth described the work as "I dunno, I just stand around all day. It's illegal, but I don't have to do nothin' [...] We make lots of money." [RT -8] The illegal work that was described by both youth included drug dealing and stealing cars. Neither youth acknowledged the risks or potential downside to this kind of work.

Youth likely experienced a variety a barriers to employment, however, one barrier that was mentioned several times was the instability of living situations in some of the youth's lives.

...once I move to my own place, then I know that my life will somewhat be stable, like I'm not going to be worrying like when are they going to move me, I'm not going to be stressed out in the house because I'm getting disrespected and just stuff like that, so uh, once I move, which will be shortly, I will certainly have a job. [RT-9]

Um, I was going to get a job for landscaping, I was going—I didn't have money, but—and then I moved down here and I couldn't get the job.[RT-10]

Unstable living situations were not uncommon among our two samples as a whole. In summary, finding suitable employment seemed to be desired by many youth but also challenging.

Volunteering:

Unpaid work or volunteering is one way that youth can gain useful skills and also participate in their community. While the percentage of youth engaged in volunteer activities in our study was relatively low (18%), there were some examples of youth who took the initiative to volunteer in their community. While some youth volunteered because it was requirement for their high school education, others appeared to volunteer simply out of a desire to help others.

Settings in which youth talked about volunteering included food banks, animal shelters, stables, babysitting, dog shows, multiple sclerosis, Tourette's Chapter, school breakfasts, music programs and social committees, social or recreational youth groups, and summer camps. The following is an example of one youth's very positive attitude to volunteering and what it could add to her life:

... I'm applying for a summer camp to be a leader in training..., so that will be in the summer time, but I'm not old enough to have a job, otherwise I'd work. [...] Yeah, it's volunteer work, but I won't be using it towards my hours or anything, it's fun and something to do.

[IFS-1]

Youth who volunteered all spoke positively about their experiences. However, youth that had not volunteered but stated that they needed to for their community hours for high school were less positive about volunteering. For example:

No, not right now, but I have to, because I have 40 hours of volunteer work for high school, so that's going to be a tough one. [IFS-2]

Yeah, that's going to bug me, I don't know what I'm going to do for that, volunteer.

[IFS-3]

It seems that volunteering can be a positive experience and a source of work experience for the youth who try it.

Future Orientation:

Youth who had school aspirations were discussed in the previous section, however, in addition several youth had specific job aspirations that demonstrated some future orientation when it came to career and work.

I don't know, I'm 14 right now and I can start apprenticeship as a mechanic and either when I'm in 15 or 16, preferably they want me to start when I'm 16, but I don't know if I can wait that long. [RT-1]

Like I prefer, I'd love to work in a diner, I mean, not as a career, but for now. I like the environment and stuff....Well, I mean, I'm a people person, I guess it's just like,

easy going and not a lot of pressure and I don't know, I'm good at it and I like it.
[RT-2]

Uh, me getting a good job, that's about it right now. At the moment, yeah, just getting a good job.[Q. And what's a good job for you?] A job that I... it's not paying a lot, just a job that's paying a lot that I like to do, so... I wouldn't want to take a crappy job that I don't know how to do or don't like what to do and get paid \$1,000 a week for it. [IFS-1]

I want to either be a mechanic or an electrician...Because you do stuff with your hands and stuff. [IFS-2]

[Q. What do you enjoy about your cooking course?] I just like it and I want to get an apprenticeship....Become, like, a chef to a restaurant or a hotel and I eventually want to own my own restaurant. [IFS-3].

When we combine youth with job related goals and youth who expressed future aspirations around education, we see 69% of all youth interviewed with some future aspirations in the domains of education and work. More specifically, 80% of IFS youth and 56% of RT youth expressed education and work aspirations.

Overall Comments on School Functioning and Youth Employment

An overall review of the data on school attendance and performance for RT and IFS youth at admission, discharge, and follow up revealed some interesting trends:

- Both groups improved on CAFAS-assessed school functioning from admission to discharge. At admission, 50.6% of RT youth and 26.4% of IFS youth were experiencing the severest level of school impairment. At discharge the proportion of youth experiencing severe impairment in school functioning dropped to 18.6% for RT youth and 12.0% for IFS youth.
- There appeared to be some gains made in school functioning at discharge from residential treatment and intensive family services, however, these gains were not strongly maintained at follow up. While change patterns for each group were in the same overall direction to one another, it is important to note that RT youth were reported to consistently fare worse than IFS youth on all measures of school functioning. This was also noted in our analysis of youth interviews. The majority of RT youth interviewed had continued school challenges or were not in school at all.
- Overall, information from youth perspectives suggest that the IFS sample was faring better than the RT sample in the domain of school and work. Among IFS youth

interviewed there was a sizeable group (about one-third) who were doing relatively well in school. A much smaller proportion of RT youth described themselves as doing well in school.

- The number of youth in school dropped for both groups over time. This was largely explained by the increasing age of youth at follow up. However, very few youth were old enough to have successfully graduated from high school (with the exception of one 17 year old youth who had already completed high school ahead of his same-aged classmates). There were 15 IFS youth not in school at follow up and only 3 of these youth were age 18 or older. Of the 25 RT youth not in school at follow up, 9 youth were age 18 or older.
- There was little change from admission to follow up in the proportions of youth missing school and reporting suffering grades across both groups (none of the trends were statistically significant). Interestingly, in our parent-reported data there was an increasing trend from admission to follow up in the proportion of youth reported to have grades that were suffering as a result of their emotional and behavioural problems. More of the youth who were still in school at follow up were reporting difficulty with grades than those in school at admission.

Parent and youth-reported data on involvement in paid employment and volunteer activities showed that only a small proportion of youth in our study were employed in some capacity. Other notable findings included:

- Among youth who had work or volunteer experiences, the most successful were those who worked part-time while in school or volunteered and did not depend on work for a livelihood. In both the parent-reported data and youth interviews, these were youth mainly from the IFS group.
- The majority of youth who were not in school were also unemployed despite being old enough to work. This raises questions about the ways in which youth can stay involved in educational and/or employment environments that afford them the opportunity to engage in productive activities.
- Examples of paid employment among youth interviewed illustrated that well paid and full-time employment was difficult for these youth to obtain and that part-time, low paid employment appeared to be satisfying for students but not for youth who were out of school and trying to support themselves.
- Volunteer experiences were rewarding for the small number of youth who sought and found volunteer experience. A small group of youth talked about job aspirations they had for the long-term future.

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