

The Students
Commission
of Canada

*Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement*



La commission
des élèves du
Canada

*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*

Amadeusz - Year 2 (2024-2025) Evaluation Report



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Amadeusz education program supports young people aged 18 to 35 who are incarcerated in working towards their educational goals. This program is focused on providing access to education for young people in remand facilities. The program emphasizes continuity of care as the educational support provided to participants follow them through transfers to different institutions and release to the community. Many of these young people were not provided the support that they needed within the traditional school system, and thus the program aims to be flexible in how they provide this support, reimagining education in the process.

The goal of this program is to provide young people who are incarcerated with the opportunity, resources, and support to complete their high school education and to explore, prepare for, and attend post-secondary schooling. Their mission is to ultimately create equal access to education and community support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of how the Amadeusz education program impacts the lives of participants and communities. For this evaluation, Amadeusz chose both quantitative (the *Academic Success: Before and After* survey) and qualitative evaluation methods (written responses to focus group questions).

The quantitative results showed that the program was successful in enhancing participants' academic confidence and performance. By the end of the program, participants reported significant increases in their self-assurance regarding their ability to graduate from high school and pursue further education. Additionally, participants' average grades improved significantly, underscoring the program's effectiveness in promoting academic success. Overall, the quantitative results indicate that the program successfully equipped youth with the necessary support, resources, and confidence that they needed to achieve their educational aspirations, paving the way for future opportunities and positive life changes.

The qualitative results highlighted how the program has not only helped individuals attain their educational goals but has also inspired a collective commitment to personal development and betterment, empowering participants to contribute positively to their communities. The program instilled hope, responsibility, and adaptability in participants, equipping them with essential life skills and the belief that they can achieve their goals. Many now approach life's challenges with a positive mindset and a commitment to continuous learning, ready to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Key characteristics contributing to the program's success include individualized support, a positive and motivating atmosphere, and a flexible curriculum. Participants highlighted the importance of strong relationships with instructors. The program has also empowered individuals to confront personal challenges, such as mental health and addiction, creating a pathway to a brighter future.



Overall, the program succeeded in providing young people who are incarcerated with the tools that they needed to finish their high school education and pursue post-secondary education.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The following illustrates the demographic distribution of the 40 Amadeusz participants who elected to respond to the survey.

Gender

Boy/Man 98 %
Prefer not to answer 2 %



How do you identify?

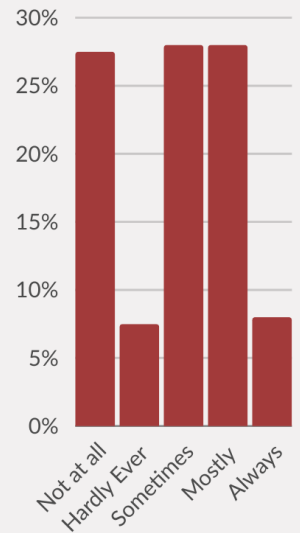
Black 45 %
Person of Color 22.5 %
White 15 %
Indigenous 5 %
Mixed / Bi-racial 5 %
Other (includes Latino and Asian) 15 %

Languages spoken at home

English 87.5 %
French 12.5 %
Spanish 5 %
Arabic 5 %
Tamil 5 %
Filipino / Tagalog 2.5 %
Patois 2.5 %
Somali 2.5 %
Urdu 2.5 %



Do you have enough money to meet your basic needs?



Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual 95 %
Asexual 2.5 %
Prefer not to answer 2.5 %



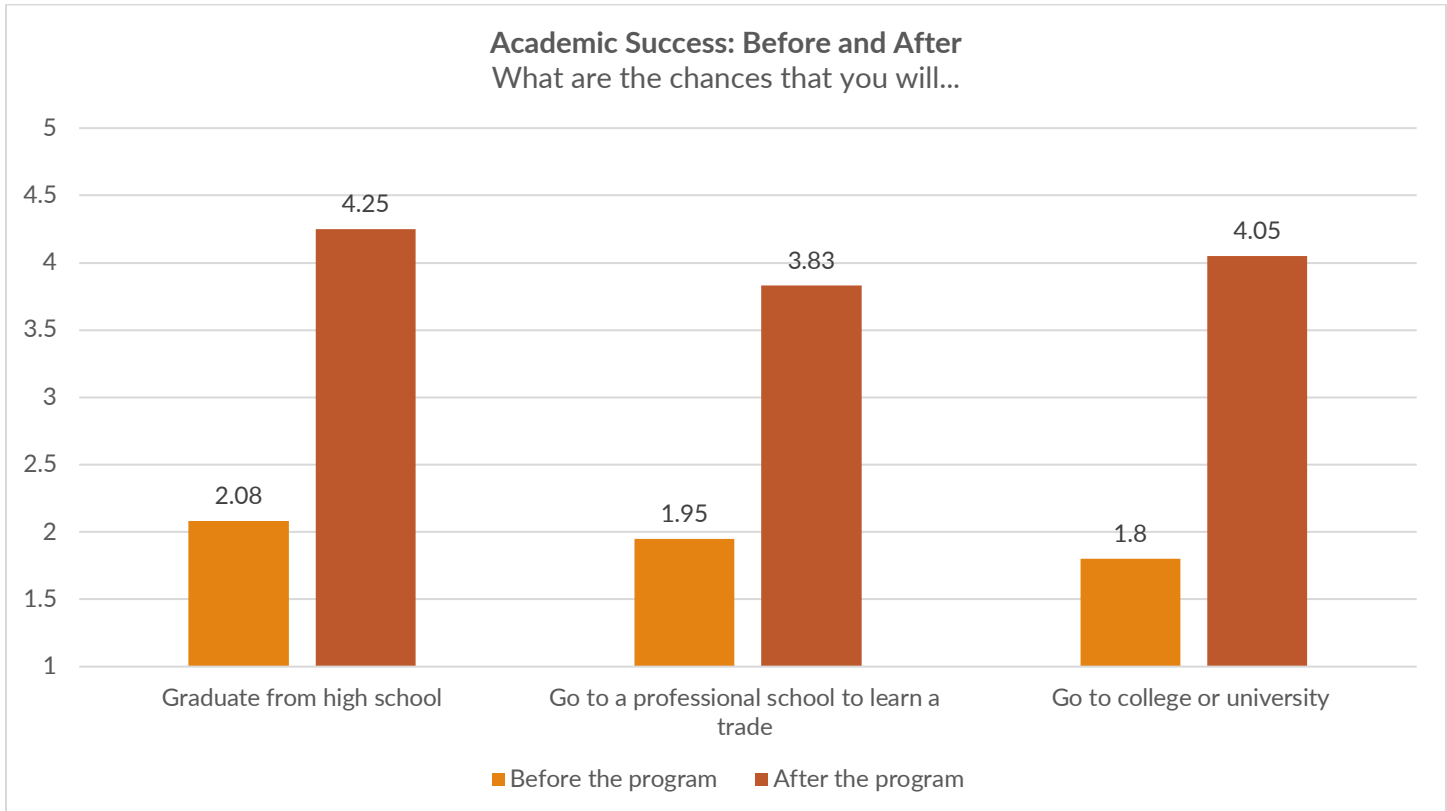
Cultural and Racial Groups

Caribbean 33 %
North American 27.5 %
South Asian 15 %
Central African 13 %
Western European 10 %
First Nations 8 %
East African 5 %
Southern African 5 %
Latin American 5 %
Eastern European 5 %
Chinese 2.5 %
Filipino 2.5 %
Metis 2.5 %
West Asian 2.5 %
Other (includes Trinidad, German, South American) 17.5 %



ACADEMIC SUCCESS: BEFORE AND AFTER

Amadeusz participants (N=40) filled out the *Academic Success: Before and After* questionnaire. For part of this module, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of them graduating from high school, going to trade school, and going to college or university on a 5-point scale ranging from *Very low* (1) to *Very high* (5) before the program versus after the program. The following graph illustrates the average ratings before and after the program:



- At the end of the program, participants felt much more confident in the likelihood of graduating from high school, going to a professional school, and going to college or university.
- The highest spike was found in participants' perceived likelihood of attending college or university. Roughly a quarter of the participants mentioned that they were taking college-level classes in the program via their written focus group responses (the themes of which are discussed below on p. 5). This suggests that the program motivated and supported participants in pursuing their post-secondary academic goals, inspiring them to create new opportunities for themselves and positively change their lives.
- Another part of this module asks participants to report on their average grade ranges (from *Below 50%* to *90%-100%*) before the program versus after the program. At the start of the program, participants indicated that their average grades were in the 60-69% range. By the program's conclusion, their average grades rose to the 85-89% range, highlighting the program's effectiveness in facilitating their academic success.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: FOCUS GROUP NARRATIVE

Amadeusz participants (n=40) wrote out their responses to focus group questions to share their experiences with the program. The following qualitative analysis includes a narrative of participants' experiences and direct quotes that support this narrative.

Program Initiators: How and why did you join the program?

Many individuals found themselves **seeking a fresh start** through Amadeusz while incarcerated. Some were introduced by supportive social workers or other individuals who are incarcerated, motivated by the desire to **complete their high school education and better themselves**. They shared stories of lost opportunities and the importance of **setting a positive example for their families**, especially for those with children. Others sought a way to occupy their time productively, realizing that **education could open doors to a brighter future**. With the encouragement of dedicated staff, they embraced this chance to **reinvent themselves**, focusing on achieving their diplomas and paving the way for further education and **personal growth**. Each participant's journey reflects a **shared commitment to transforming their lives and seizing the opportunity to learn and thrive**.

"I joined the program because I needed help and support with my education and re-inventing my life."

"I was talking to another inmate about how I didn't like wasting time while I was in jail and wanted to get employment helping others. He told me about this program and gave me the phone number to call. In essence I wanted a foot in the door to motivate me to further my education and stop criminal activity."

"I took the opportunity to join the program while incarcerated. I joined the program to finish my schooling and the Amadeusz is the only program here that provides school."

"I joined to better and change my life."

Program Sustainers: How has it been going with your involvement in the program?

Amadeusz participants experienced a **transformative journey filled with growth and achievement**. Many expressed their satisfaction, noting how the **support and respect from the Amadeusz staff have significantly enhanced their learning experience**. Graduating from high school and enrolling in college courses, such as business and marketing, has provided them with a **renewed sense of purpose and direction**. Participants highlighted the **development of new skills**, the joy of learning, and the motivation they received from their teachers, which fueled their determination to succeed. While some acknowledged the challenges of maintaining focus in a difficult environment, most shared a positive outlook, feeling **accomplished and eager to continue their educational pursuits**.

"Very good. I have a wonderful teacher's assistant who's very informative and helpful. I've learned a lot about myself and others that may be or have been in my situation in relations to

drug use. It has opened my mind to further my education, it gave me a foothold especially at my age, it's overwhelming to start a program from the beginning and now I wouldn't have to. That's half the battle."

"My involvement in the program has been going well. I have learned many new skills and have gained a lot of information to increase my knowledge."

"Amadeusz has been great for me both personally and academically. I have wonderful team members who do all they can to ensure I have what I need to succeed - and succeed I have! I've just completed a business program in college and have been able to do all the high school courses that are grade 12 university prerequisites."

"It is good. I really appreciate all the teachers helping me. They give me motivation to be a better person."

Program Qualities: What are the most important characteristics of the program that lead to positive outcomes?

Key characteristics include the **genuine care and motivation provided by teachers**, who consistently show up with a positive attitude and commitment to helping students succeed. This nurturing approach has encouraged participants to pursue their educational goals, **leading to achievements such as high school graduation and college enrollment**. The program also emphasizes **individualized support**, with staff members working closely with students to **enhance their communication and confidence skills**. Examples of success include the staff advocating for essential courses and providing moral support, which has **empowered participants to overcome challenges and engage meaningfully in their education**. The **flexibility** of the program, along with clear course outlines and **regular follow-ups**, allows students to take ownership of their learning, leading to **feelings of accomplishment and renewed hope for the future**.

"The Amadeusz staff are very helpful and positive people. They made it relatively easy to sign up and register for the program. This program can give youth and young adults that are facing difficulties with the justice system a second chance at a better life."

"The dedication of the staff has been made clear to me time and time again. For example, Centennial College was not offering all the courses I needed to graduate in a print-based correspondence medium, which is the ONLY way I can do them while in a provincial detention centre, so for 4 years my Amadeusz team advocated for the need to offer the few remaining courses in print, until Centennial did. Now I am a college graduate, thanks to them!"

"The student and staff working one on one is great, it helps me and I'm sure others build their communication and confidence skills."

"The most important characteristics would be teachers who like their jobs and are here to help the students. If my teacher is supportive of me and positive that make[s] me want to do good with my schoolwork."



Program Outcomes: What have you learned since joining the program? What skills have you gained?

Since joining the Amadeusz program, participants have gained invaluable skills that have profoundly impacted their lives. Many have discovered a **deeper understanding of themselves and others**, learning the importance of perseverance and self-reflection. For instance, several individuals emphasized that they could achieve their goals if they focus and work hard, reflecting **newfound confidence in their abilities**.

Practical skills, such as writing essays, managing time effectively, and even doing taxes, have been acquired, illustrating the program's comprehensive educational approach. Participants have also developed **better communication skills and a greater appreciation for education as a key to future opportunities**. Some have gained specific knowledge in subjects like business, math, biology, and the effects of drug use, while others expressed a **commitment to personal growth and responsibility**. Many shared that they learned to **navigate challenges and remain optimistic**, realizing that it's **never too late to pursue their dreams**. This transformative journey not only prepares them for academic success but also equips them with the **tools to build better futures**.

"I learned to be a better person."

"I learned that I'm capable of far more than I gave myself credit for in the past. I learned not to give up. I learned that there are good people out there who are willing to help you if you're willing to help yourself. I also learned a lot about business, math, physics, chemistry, biology, English, and communication."

"I've learned that I can achieve anything I put my mind to. I've learned that hard work and being consistent is what it takes to reach your full potential."

"Since joining the program, I have learned many things such as better communication skills, reading, writing, and learning to be more passionate in what I want to do."

Program Outcomes: What else have you gained in addition to skills and knowledge?

Since joining the Amadeusz program, participants have experienced significant personal growth and achievements that have enriched their lives. Many have gained a high school diploma, **which elevated their self-esteem and sense of worth**. The program has fostered **improved communication skills and time management abilities**, empowering individuals to **navigate their educational and personal challenges more effectively**. Others highlighted specific lessons, like **anger management**, that have helped them navigate challenges in the real world, fostering patience and **better relationships**.

The program also **sparked creativity**, with some participants learning to write books and even comics, while others have developed a **clearer understanding of their career aspirations**. The support from dedicated teachers has been instrumental, fostering **meaningful relationships** that provide motivation and guidance.

"I gained a wonderful healthy relationship with an amazing teacher. I gained confidence in myself. I have learned that I can accomplish what I set my mind to."

"I've gained a new confidence in myself and a high degree of appreciation for many things - from people to opportunities, books, education - and a joy for practicing that I never had before."



“Honestly my confidence is at an all-time high, I was very doubtful of myself.”

“An understanding of how to better cope with my experiences while adding to my list of resources to help myself or others (harm reduction, NA etc.)”

The Program’s Achievements

This year, the Amadeusz program has celebrated numerous achievements that highlight the transformative impact it has on participants. **Many individuals successfully graduated from high school, earning diplomas with impressive marks**, which has instilled a sense of pride and accomplishment. The program has facilitated the attainment of additional high school credits and provided access to more paper-based courses, **enabling incarcerated students to pursue college programs while inside.**

Beyond academic successes, the program has fostered a **collaborative learning environment** where participants support each other’s growth. Achievements also include personal victories, such as **overcoming challenges related to mental health and recognizing the value of education in breaking cycles of addiction.**

“That we become more educated through each other.”

“To help more incarcerated people achieve greatness”

“Getting more paper-based courses available for incarcerated students, enabling them to complete college programs from inside an institution. Having many students graduate high school”

“To get as many people to graduate and build a future for themself.”

The Program’s Impact on Communities

The Amadeusz program has the potential to create a profound impact on both individuals and the wider community by providing crucial educational opportunities to individuals who are incarcerated. By enabling many who had previously dropped out of school to earn their diplomas, the program **fosters hope and motivation for a brighter future.** Graduates often return to their communities as **positive role models**, inspiring others to pursue education and **creating a ripple effect of ambition.** The program not only equips participants with knowledge but also instills a **sense of self-worth and purpose**, empowering them to support and guide their peers. Additionally, the skills gained position graduates for **better employment opportunities**, allowing them to **contribute positively to their communities and break cycles of poverty and crime.**

“I’m a big believer in education being key to improving one’s options in life, so by giving incarcerated people the opportunity to get an education - be it completing high school or beginning/graduating from a college program, I believe Amadeusz is helping individuals change the course of their lives - which means they can do more for their families and communities.”

“It will make a big impact for me and the community because I plan on becoming a business owner some day and applying for a manager job when I go home instead of selling drugs to survive.”



“The program helped inmates really want to change and choose a better path.”

“By giving me the skills and resources to better myself and improve my life helps by showing others I can do it they can do it like a chain reaction, but I think a big part of it is the fact that I/we know that people out there care enough to help and try to understand the problem and support us best they can. Definitely helping one person (me) will have a chain reaction to better the community, one person at a time.”

Lessons Learned and Feedback to Improve Programming

Key suggestions include **hiring more staff to reduce wait times and enhance individual support, increasing funding for better accessibility, and improving the application process**. Participants highlighted the positive impact of the instructors’ personalities and emphasized the importance of consistency, organization, and life skills in the curriculum. Some recommended **expanding the curriculum** to include more tests and personalized study sessions to strengthen learning outcomes. Overall, while many feel the program is effective, there’s a consensus that **additional resources and accessibility** could further enhance its impact.

“Hiring more case works would allow the wait list to be shorter.”

“Well, it took me a whole year after I signed up with Amadeusz to start my schooling and I graduated within a couple months after receiving my work. If they could make the application process faster, I think that would be a great improvement.”

“I believe that 1-on-1 study sessions are very helpful because it gives the coordinator a better idea where a person’s strengths and weaknesses lie in order for them to better assist.”

“We need classes and tutoring. Leaving inmates to their own devices with schoolwork isn’t enough.”

“I think there should be more “peer” support. Also, the programs need to be reviewed because I did find a few errors.”

Is there anything else you think is important and would like to share?

The following highlights some final quotes from participants:

“For anybody who had a hard up bringing that may have made you feel hopeless or lost at some point, take the opportunities [you’re] given. When something good comes your way, grab it and hold on to it. [There are] people who don’t get these chances so take advantage of them. Adversity isn’t forever.”

“I feel I’ve been very lucky to be part of the Amadeusz program. The staff have helped me look at myself in a new light, to be confident and proud, as well as learn what it is to be grateful for people just being themselves.”

“I would like to share my content and satisfaction with the Addictions Counselling Program.”

“Without this program, I would probably be lost.”

“I think this is an amazing program and I really thank everyone for it, I’m so grateful and the teachers are amazing.”



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Amadeusz program has had a profound impact on participants, fostering personal growth, academic achievement, and a renewed sense of purpose. Many individuals joined the program while incarcerated, motivated by a desire to remain productive, pursue a fresh start, achieve the completion of their high school education, and set a positive example for their families. This initiative has provided a supportive environment where participants can continue gaining valuable life skills and pursue their educational goals.

Participants reported transformative experiences, with significant improvements in self-confidence and academic performance. Many graduated from high school and enrolled in college courses with high grades, gaining essential skills and knowledge that extend beyond academics. The nurturing support from dedicated staff has played a crucial role, enabling participants to develop better communication skills, time management, and practical competencies like writing and critical thinking. The program has also empowered individuals to confront personal challenges, such as mental health and addiction, creating a pathway to a brighter future.

Moreover, the Amadeusz program's impact extends to the broader community. By equipping participants with the skills necessary for successful reintegration, it fosters hope and ambition, encouraging graduates to serve as role models. This creates a ripple effect, inspiring others to pursue education and break cycles of poverty and crime. Therefore, the program's characteristics not only enrich the lives of individuals but also contribute to building a more educated and resilient community.

While the program has achieved significant successes, participants provided valuable feedback for improvement, including the need for additional staff and resources, streamlined application processes, and expanded curriculum options.

Overall, the Amadeusz program stands out as a vital initiative that transforms lives, instills hope, and promotes positive change within communities.



AMADEUSZ

