

# Amadeusz: The Look at My Life Project

## YOF Year 1 Report



The Students  
Commission

*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*

The Students Commission of Canada

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## Executive Summary

*It has helped me get on track and be where I want to be. – TLMLP participant*

The purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of how young people are engaged in Amadeusz' The Look at My Life Project (TLMLP) funded by the Youth Opportunities Fund by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The quantitative and qualitative survey results are based on pre-program intake surveys and follow up time points. There were eight pre and eight second point follow-up surveys administered to participants at one of three remand centres.

### Quantitative and Qualitative Results of Stepping Up Outcomes

- The results suggest that young people feel very connected to TLMLP staff.
- Just over half of young people reported on intake that they have a consistent caring person in their life.
- There are resources in the jail that young adults can go to for support and they seem to be sharing their knowledge of these resources with others.
- Young adults indicate that the chances are high or very high that they will graduate from high school and go to college or university, suggesting that most young adults in the program are motivated and feel quite positive about their academic future.

### Additional highlights

- TLMLP is in high demand at the facilities they are currently running programming
  - There are almost 100 people on the wait list at one facility
  - Another facility has a wait list of approximately 30 people.
  - Almost 30 people are currently doing college courses
- Participants indicate they have something positive to focus on, mostly at the maximum security facility where this connection to positivity is increasingly meaningful
- Participants are learning they have transferable skills from activities that were less positive (i.e., financing and business management as a positive outcome from selling illicit substances)
- Outreach and awareness-raising is growing through media and academia

## Background

The Students Commission of Canada's (SCC) Sharing the Stories team began working collaboratively with Amadeusz' The Look at My Life Project (TLMLP) following the launch of the Youth Opportunities Fund by the Ontario Trillium Foundation in April of 2014.

TLMLP provides support and opportunities for young people on remand in the adult correctional system to obtain increase their educational attainment levels, including secondary and post-secondary education. They also provide connections to post-release supports. The team connects with young people through one-on-one support sessions, life skills programs, social development and mentoring.

Together, the teams from TLMLP and the SCC met in-person on multiple occasions to develop an evaluation plan for the program serving young people at three correctional facilities in the Greater Toronto Area. Due to confidentiality reasons, the sites will be identified here as Site 1, Site 2 and Site 3.

- 1) Site 1 is a medium and maximum correctional facility for females serving sentences of less than two years or who have been arrested and are remanded to custody awaiting a further court appearance.
- 2) Site 2 is a maximum-security correctional facility for adult males who are remanded to custody awaiting a further court appearance or serving a sentence less than 2 years.
- 3) Site 3 is a maximum-security correctional facility for adult males who are remanded to custody awaiting a further court appearance or serving a sentence less than 2 years.

Evaluation tools were approved by each facility and the team began administration of the evaluations in early 2015. However, due to lock-down protocol that took place at the Site 2 and Site 3, TLMLP team was only able to collect evaluations from Site 1 in the first year. The responses are from surveys administered at intake and one follow-up point, providing project baseline results. The following report reflects responses from those participants.

The Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) asked grantees to identify outcomes from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' *Stepping Up* Framework for Ontario young people. TLMLP chose the following outcomes:

1. Youth have at least one consistent, caring person in their lives
2. Youth know about and easily navigate resources and opportunities in their communities

## **Process**

TLMLP and The Students Commission teams worked together collaboratively to combine components of several Sharing the Stories tools with some custom questions to create a tool that specifically addresses the closed custody setting of TLMLP. Program participants have provided their feedback through a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions. Site 1 has completed first point and follow up surveys administered initially during the intake processes and at one follow up point. These rounds will create a baseline measure to track the progress of the project.

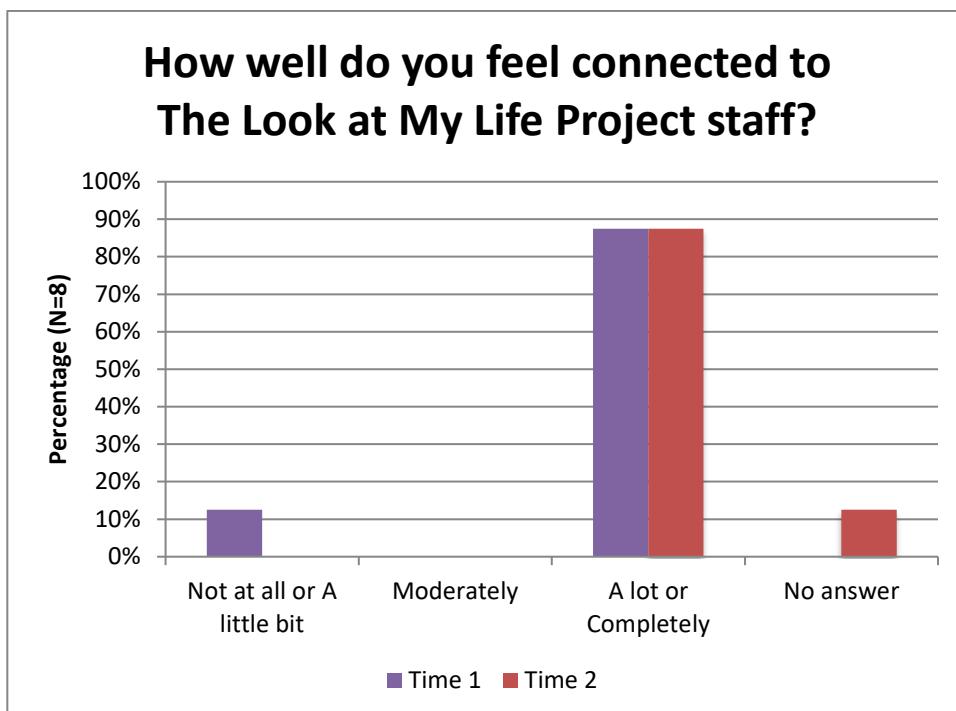
## YOF Outcomes for The Look at My Life Project

### Consistent Caring Person

TLMLP team chose to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions to examine the extent to which young adults in the program have consistent, caring people in their lives, both within the jail in TLMLP program and generally in their lives.

Within the jail, young adult participants seem to have a strong connection to TLMLP staff, with 7 out of 8 answering 'a lot' or 'completely' at both points in time when asked how connected they are. Generally speaking, 5 out of 8 participants at time 1 and 4 out of 8 at time 2 say that they have a consistent caring person in their lives. They described friends and family members including parents and children, many of whom were people they had known their whole lives.

When asked what they like most about the TLMLP, the majority of participants (11) identified that their teacher was supportive, caring and effective.

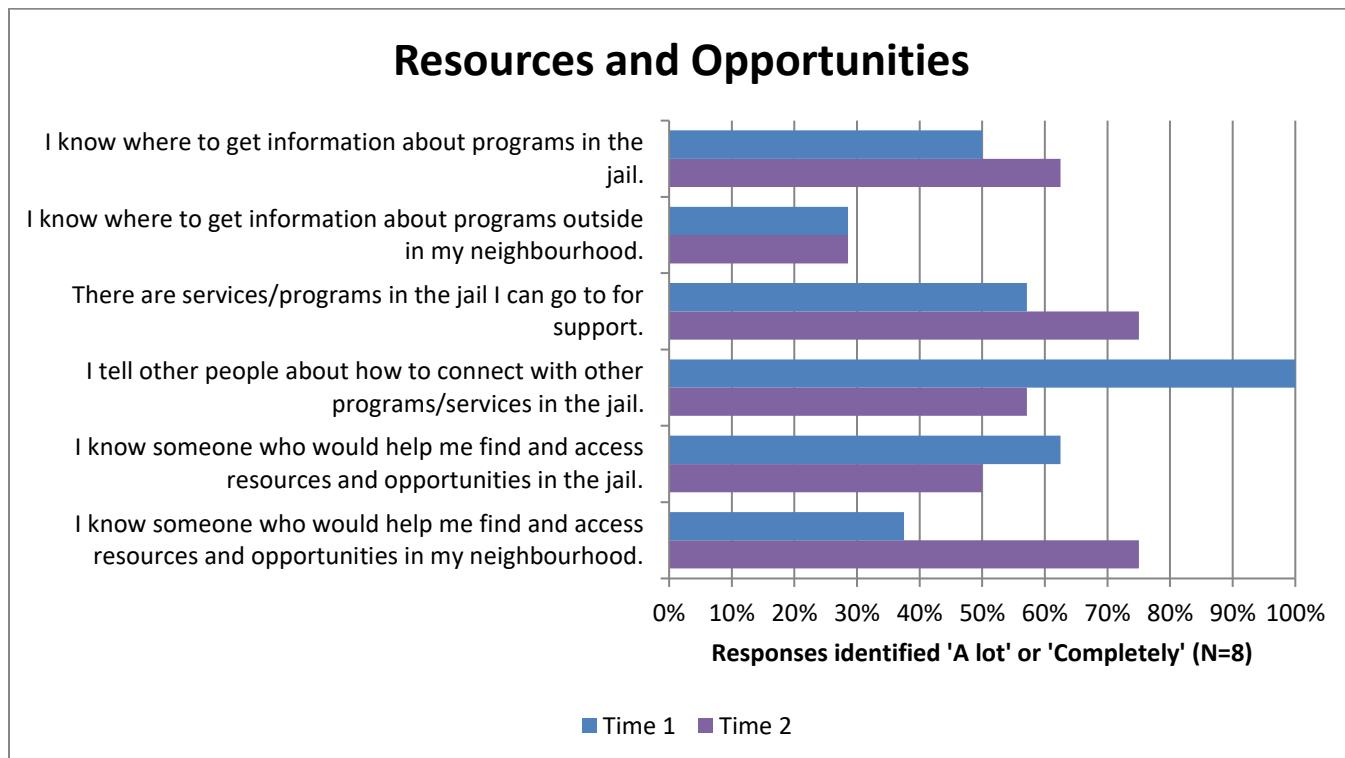


## Resources and Opportunities in the Community

The Resources and Opportunities tool was developed to examine the extent to which young people know about and easily navigate resources in their communities. Some of the questions from the tool were adjusted to specifically ask about accessing resources and opportunities in the jail, as this is the community the participants are currently a part of.

In the graph below, we have reported TLMLP scores for the first and second points in time. Overall, the results suggest that there are resources in the jail that young adults can go to for support and that they are sharing their knowledge of these resources with others. The lowest scoring item was related to accessing information about programs outside the jail. This is important to explore in order to ensure the participants are effectively prepared for accessing services upon their releases. A highlight from the data collection was that at the second point in time, twice the number of participants indicated they know someone who would help them find and access resources and opportunities in their communities. This is an important objective for TLMLP. Moving forward with data collection in year two, it is hypothesized that these reports by participants will improve as a result of their engagement in TLMLP.

*This has changed my life and really helped me get on track and put a secure future plan in place. – TLMLP participant*

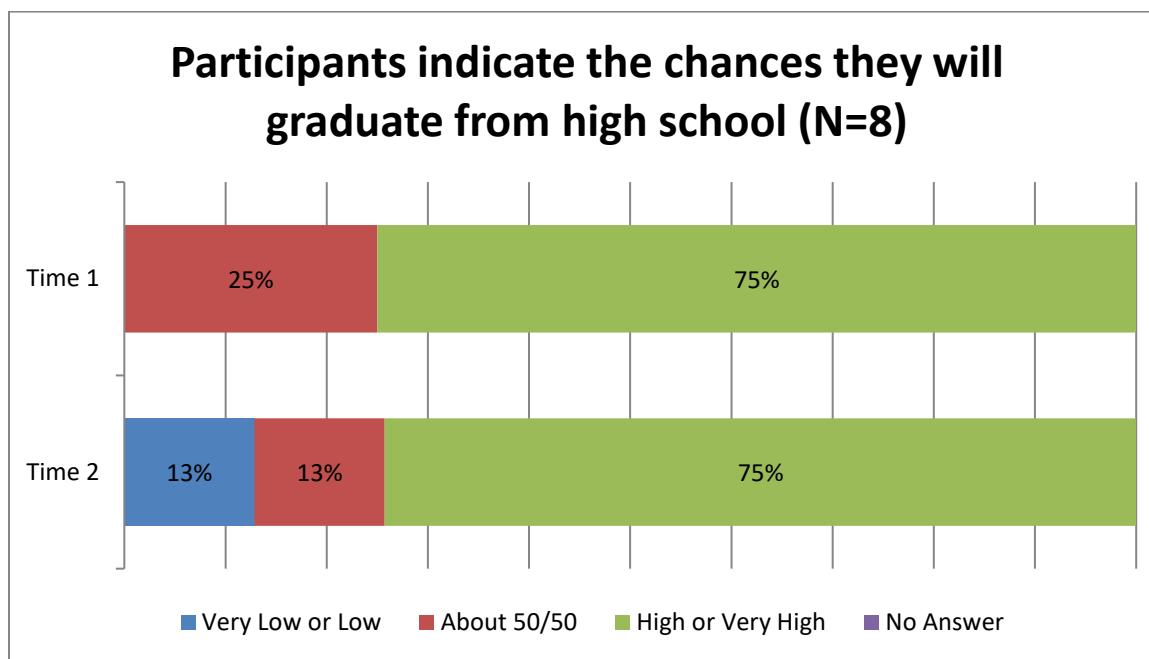


## Other Outcomes and Questions for The Look at My Life Project

### Academic Success

This tool was developed to examine academic goals and outcomes. TLMLP chose to use a select number of these questions to provide a picture of how participants feel about their future in terms of academics.

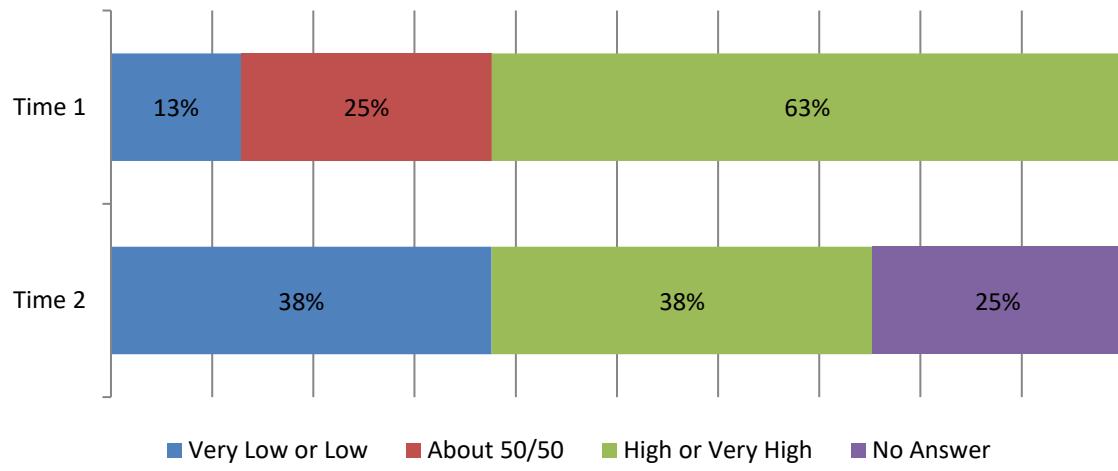
Participants were asked to “Think about how you see your future. What are the chances you will: 1. Graduate from high school; 2. Go to school to learn a trade; 3. Go to college or university.”



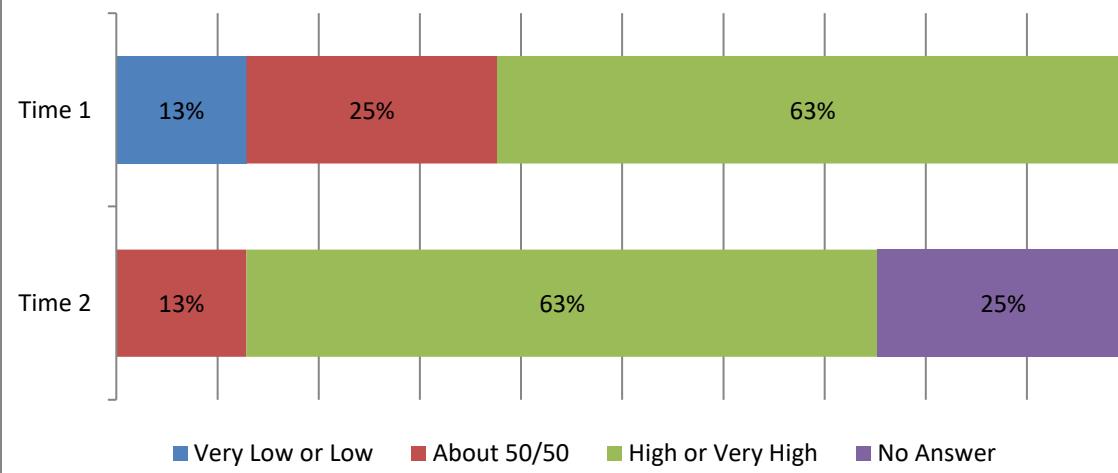
Overall, the results are quite positive: 6 out of 8 young people at both time 1 and time 2 think the chances are high or very high that they will graduate from high school.

Furthermore, 5 out of 8 young people at both time points think chances are high or very high they will go to college or university and go to school to learn a trade. These results suggest that most participants in the program feel positive about their academic future.

## Participants indicate the chances they will go to school to learn a trade (N=8)



## Participants indicate the chances they will go to college or university (N=8)



### Academic motivation

Participants are motivated to complete their GED, high school or post-secondary education for many reasons. At the individual level, participants wanted to complete their education to:

- Improve themselves (5)
- Follow their dreams (1)
- Move on from their past (1)

At the social level, participants are motivated to complete their education in order to:

- Be a positive role model and support for children/grandchildren (4)
- Help others (1)

At the system level, participants want to complete their education in order to:

- Further their education (8), and go on to post-secondary education (5)
- Gain employment (7)

A few participants also described that the best part of TLMLP program was that they had opportunities to learn and had learnt so much already (3), and the open-minded acceptance and intolerance for mockery based on their education level (3).

## Qualitative methods

Qualitative data was collected through the following evaluation measures:

1. Scaled and open-ended survey questions
2. Interviews with TLMLP staff

Qualitative data was analyzed for important quotes and themes. Data was then coded for themes that emerged from the data, youth engagement outcomes (i.e., individual, social, system) and youth engagement qualities. The analyses were structured into tables that outlined the themes, description of the themes and quotes that highlighted the themes.

Theme	Description	Quotes
<b>Connection</b>	Connection was a major theme across TLMLP. Participants talked about various ways they felt connected (including belonging, inclusion, safety, etc.) to their programs and community. Most meaningful were stories of family relationships, feelings of connections to the program and teachers. Senses of safety, inclusion and belonging are key qualities of effective youth engagement activities. Talking about their connections to people in their lives indicates they have consistent caring persons in their lives and therefore indicates a strong baseline to that YOF outcome.	<i>Both her brother and her family are so appreciative of this opportunity because there's nothing else positive for him. This is his only thing. He's never really been considered 'academic' so this is something that he works really hard at and he is so happy and his family is happy.</i>  <i>[They have] an opportunity to hear that they're smart, worthy of something – people like that are told that they're not smart.</i>

		<p><i>Someone told me "You don't see me as an animal. You see me as someone with capabilities".</i></p> <p><i>My consistent caring person in my life is my mother.</i></p> <p><i>It's helped me in so many ways. I feel so comfortable with my teacher I tell her things I've never told anyone!</i></p> <p><i>This is an opportunity for them to focus on something positive.</i></p> <p><i>I would like to go to college and get a career in C.S.W. I always wished to have high school diploma, and follow my future dreams.</i></p> <p><i>I want to become someone in life. I don't wanna be a nobody! I wanna go to collage!</i></p> <p><i>This program has taught me so much already and I can't wait for the rest and can't wait to do my test and see where it goes.</i></p> <p><i>...Walking out of the south and "oh my gosh are you (staff name)? You're working with my son – he's so thankful to be doing this, it really helps his mental state.</i></p>
<b>Personal Growth</b>	<p>Another theme that emerged from qualitative responses was personal growth. Personal growth in relation to how participants are connecting to the program is very important because it is an individual level outcome of effective youth engagement activities. The growth they developed is linked to individual, social and system level experiences such as increased self-esteem, and motivation to continue their education, better their lives and positively contribute to their communities.</p>	
<b>Accomplished</b>	<p>The theme of accomplishment emerged amongst the majority of participants. This is important as a result of YOF programming and is also an indicator that young people are more likely to remain engaged in the programs in their communities and move forward with their personal goals.</p>	

	<p><b>Support others</b></p> <p>One moving response from a participant was related to supporting others by engaging them and providing supports for people who will experience the same challenges as this participant has experienced.</p>	<p><i>I would like to finish it so I can have a better successful life, and get a good job.</i></p> <p><i>It helped me a lot and especially having positive encouragement from the teacher.</i></p> <p><i>His eyes teared up when he found out he got a B+.</i>  <i>"Thank you so much for not giving up."</i></p> <p><i>[I want] to help women like me.</i></p>
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### Additional program outcomes

As a result of the program, participants have benefitted in ways that will help them build a better future. Participants have:

- Learned new things (6)
- Increased confidence (2)
- Increased enjoyment for learning (2)
- A positive focus and plan for the future (2)
- Motivation for post-secondary education (1)

When asked what they liked least about the program, the majority of participants (12) indicated that there was nothing they did not like. One participant wished the program could be every day and another participant did not like that other people used the program only to get a copy of the GED textbook and not to participate in the program.

### Experiences of TLMLP Staff

*For a lot of them in max security – the chance to focus on something that doesn't suck. They have so many problems. We tell them we'll help you continue to get better. Focus on something that you're great at. They have so much...going on.*

*All of your life you thought you weren't smart but look at what they're doing.*

*One facility used to say 'what are you doing here, this program sucks'. Now they get referrals from them – [there has been an] attitude shift of corrections officers.*

*Officers will now say they think they can help make this happen.*

*Officer: "How did it go? Congratulations on getting it done"...said it was fantastic that they could do that.*

## Conclusion

Overall, the TLMLP has contributed to key outcomes: a consistent caring person in participants' lives, resources and opportunities in the community, and academic success. While only half of the participants reported having a consistent caring person in their lives at intake, they are supported by consistent and caring teachers and many of their responses improved at the follow-up points in time. The staff's approach was identified as a key program feature sustaining participants' engagement in their education. As a result of TLMLP, participants are motivated and optimistic about their academic futures.