



CASE STUDY | CORNER BROOK: FREE TUTORING BUILDS STUDENT CONFIDENCE

BY SEANNA DECKER

[After the Bell Student Supports Tutoring Program](#) is a new initiative created by Communities Building Youth Futures Corner Brook, supported by the YMCA of Western NL. Corner Brook is a small city in Western Newfoundland with a population of 19,805 (2016 Census) and is the hub for several small communities in the Humber Valley and Bay of Islands area. Surrounded by beautiful mountains and never-ending ocean views, Corner Brook is located approximately 700 kilometers away from the nearest major city. Statistics Canada Census in 2016 stated that in the Corner Brook region, high school drop-out rate is 10.1%, which is above the provincial average, and 48.5% of youth aged 16 to 24 score a level 2 or below in literacy (equivalent to Grade 7 to 9). After the Bell Student Supports aims to decrease these numbers by supporting students to overcome academic barriers through mentorship and academic tutoring.

Launched in February 2021, our program is designed to support youth aged 10 and above to ensure their continued attachment to education and graduate with a high school diploma. The goal is to reach youth who need extra assistance or mentorship with the school curriculum and who would not be able to afford tutoring services. Currently, there is no access to free tutoring services outside of the school system in Corner Brook. Some schools may offer peer-to-peer tutoring or “free period” help classes where a teacher is available for students to come ask questions or get guidance in a certain subject. If a student is connected with any First Nations groups, they are able to take advantage of Jordan’s Principle and receive [some help with tutoring costs](#). Otherwise, the only available tutoring comes at a cost of \$40 to \$75 an hour for families. In 2018, Statistics Canada reported that 19.7% of families in Corner Brook fall in the low-income category. Typically, these families do not have the extra money to take out of their weekly budget. Even though they understand the need for this service, it can be a difficult decision to make between paying bills or extra curriculum help. This is why our program is so beneficial to our families.

Working collectively with partnering organizations YMCA and Community Youth Network, we have observed that the loss of connection to the education system is occurring at the elementary age level. It is becoming more challenging to reintegrate students back into the school system due to barriers such

as lack of family support, financial responsibilities and mental health issues. We see the frustrations that families have with curriculum and their inability to assist their children and how that plays a role in their connection with the school. After the Bell Student Supports is individualized and expands on relationships to make a positive impact on the students. Through our community connections on the Leadership Table and other community organizations, we are able to provide extra support to the students when necessary.

While the critical focus of the program began with curriculum and academic accomplishment, it is quite clear that building a client-centered relationship is as important in helping them achieve their academic goals. The program works with individuals, understanding that participants are not one dimensional and recognizing the uniqueness in each. A relationship focus begins by building connection before getting into curriculum. This approach will empower and build confidence in youth and help us to better understand barriers.

CLIENT-CENTERED APPROACH

How does tutoring differ from teaching? Both decide on the best ways of instructing the student, however, tutoring focuses on the individual learning needs of the student, which they don't often get in a crowded classroom. Tutoring can also be provided during breaks within the school year.

Our client-centered approach to tutoring really came to fruition after the start of the program. The students were looking for the individualized attention to their learning needs and to have another positive connection made to an educational instructor. Also, some students are more receptive to working through their learning struggles outside of the school system. After the Bell Student Supports became a beneficial program to our students because of:

- **Independent Learning Experiences** – independent learning promotes a sense of self-confidence, accountability and critical thinking in the student. Our tutors are there to guide students through the learning process, however, this is not the only way students can learn. Attempting math problems and figuring out next steps and solutions on their own within the safe space of a tutor-learning environment provides students with the essential skills to move forward in their education.
- **Personalized Learning** – before beginning the program, tutors met with each student individually to discuss their curriculum needs and effective ways the student likes to learn. This session is more about the student and getting to know them so that there is a positive base for the tutor-student relationship. The number of tutoring sessions is also determined as some students may only need one session a week and some may need more.
- **Incorporating Learning Processes** – each student is given clear expectations of what is required of them with regards to goals for learning. Our tutors provide continuous support, encouragement, and multiple opportunities for students to confirm their understanding of the material.

[New Pedagogies for Deep Learning](#) (NDPL) is an initiative “that fosters deep learning in individuals so that all learners contribute to a common good, address global challenges and flourish in a complex world.” We value this model because it embraces the desire to shift the shape of education to better prepare students for the world around them.

When we think of how students learn and what is involved in deep learning, the NPDL breaks it down into six categories: Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Character and Citizenship. Each of these categories play an integral part in the learning and development of our students. These categories create opportunities for success and enhance the relationship between tutor and student. Again, in line with NPDL, our tutors have become the “Activators” in the engagement of student learning. Tutors are very clear and up-front about learning goals and inform students that this isn’t just about understanding things right away, but about making progress and building confidence. There is continuous feedback from both the student and tutor, and other tools are utilized to diversify ways to teach students.

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One of the tools used was a learning and curriculum-based website called IXL Learning. The lead tutor registered for this website and utilized the most up to-date and local curriculum for our area. This became an invaluable tool for both student and tutor and at the end of the program, we purchased individual memberships for students for the next year of the program.

CHALLENGES AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

COVID-19 Pandemic: The model in the original proposal was not achievable and required review and re-evaluation. It was important to consult with different sources to determine what the issues were and the best strategy to address them and still achieve our intended results. An oversight in the original proposal was building in program staff time dedicated to program administration.

Some of the other challenges included:

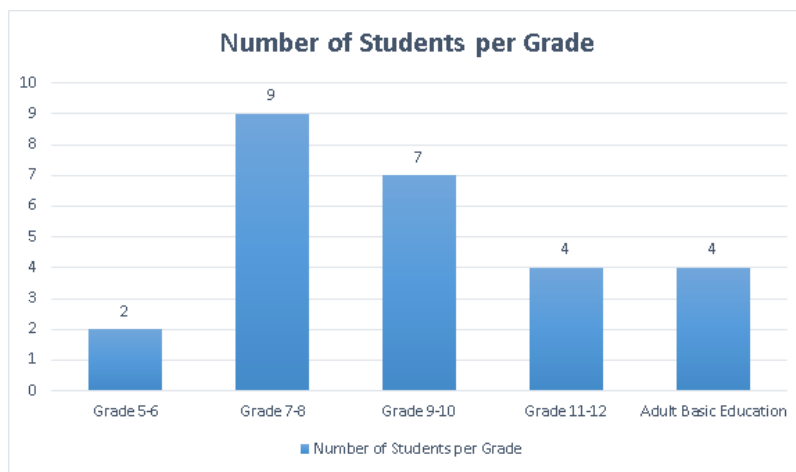
- Inability to access any school spaces due to COVID restrictions
- Inability to attract appropriate qualified tutors for the \$30/hour pay rate
- The loss of an external space that was to be provided by a community partner
- Inability to connect with teachers and school administrators due to school closures and other COVID challenges they were facing
- Allocation of hours for program administration

We shifted our focus and hired a lead tutor to oversee the recruitment, training, and direction of two additional tutors. Through this approach we were able to enhance our outcomes by ensuring that a strong and consistent program was delivered, recognizing any challenges, positively making any changes necessary and collecting a variety of resources to share with the other tutors and families.

Online Learning: Two weeks into the start of the program, Newfoundland and Labrador went into a shut down for schools and businesses. During the next month, After the Bell was moved to online tutoring. Although most students were well versed in the ins and outs of online learning, it was definitely a challenge to effectively teach students and build a relationship over Zoom and Google Meet.

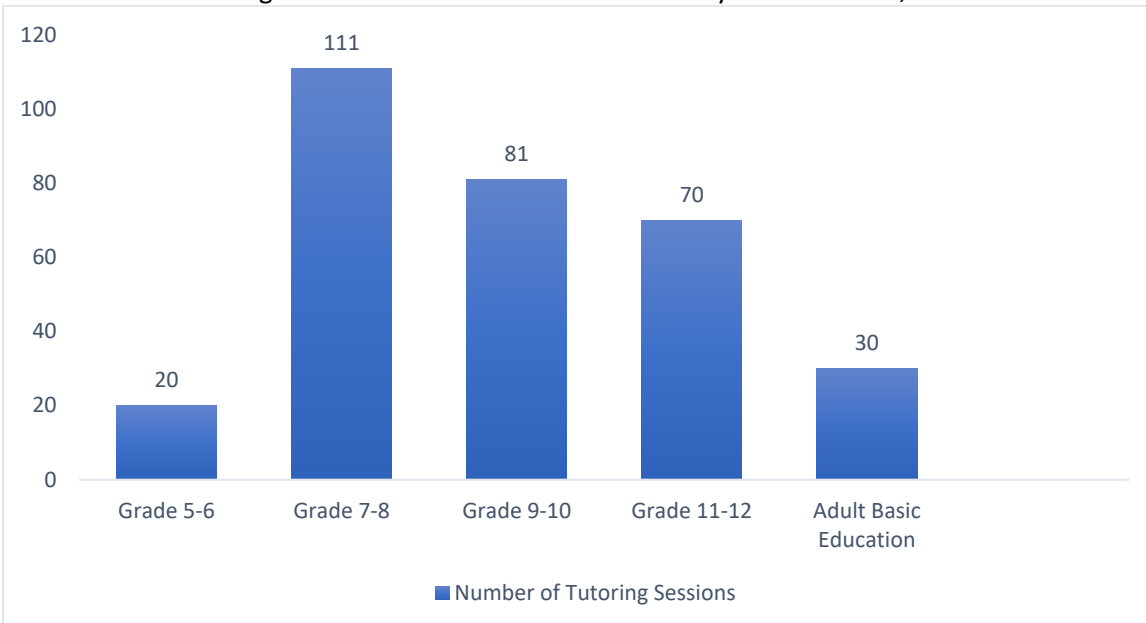
School Connections/Referrals: Despite the initial excitement for this program, we did not receive many referrals from the local high school. We quickly learned the benefit of having a lead tutor who was able to reach out to other schools and youth organizations to bring additional youth to the program. We believe that because our program did not start until mid-February, when two-thirds of the school year was already completed, this may have hindered the referral process from the schools. Some of the schools may have had in-school helps sessions and peer-to-peer mentoring already in place by the time the program had started.

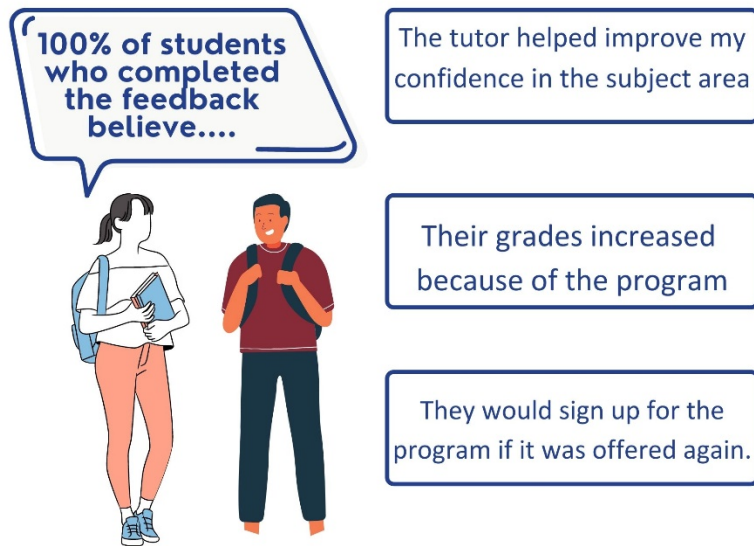
PROGRAM DATA



*Adult Basic Education (ABE): A Provincial High School equivalency program.

A total of 312 tutoring sessions were held between February 1 and June 22, 2021





PROGRAM IMPACTS AND SUCCESS

We knew pretty early on the impact this program was having on each student. Once a connection was made with the tutor and the student felt safe and supported, we began to see positive growth.

Some of the comments made from students:

- “Before I was in the program, math was hard, but once I got into the program I found it easier with the tutors help.”
- “I liked that the tutor could give me extra help because the teacher (school) didn’t have time for me when I was struggling.”
- “Not only did I feel overwhelmed starting Grade 11 math after not finishing the work in grade 10 because of the pandemic, but my confidence level in math was also at the lowest point possible. Before I found out about the tutoring program, I even considered dropping academic math to do basic math. Once I started and met with my tutor, within a few sessions I had already started to notice a change in myself. I could finally answer questions in class and understand the material. This changed my confidence as I was now at the same level as others in my class and I now felt comfortable taking on math questions alone. My tutoring experience was amazing and I’m so thankful I got to be a part of this program and have such a great tutor. Not only did I know she was there whenever I needed help, I knew she truly cared about my grade and this made this experience so much more meaningful for me.”

We made a connection with a local organization to tutor a youth who was hesitant in being tutored. Through some encouragement from his guardian, he agreed to join and expressed interest in helping with Math and English. After he cancelled the first meeting, we realized that we may have to take a different route when tutoring this student. We always left his time slots open so that he could make the decision to attend, but we also figured out that meeting him at our location was not working. Our first session was

for coffee at Tim Hortons. This was a safe place for him and a place where he could be comfortable opening up to the tutor. With this meeting, the tutor was able to understand the circumstances that influenced his life decisions. We left the meeting feeling positive and agreed on meeting twice a week. Our next few sessions were held at the community organization and we began to strengthen the trusting relationship and open the doors to learning. We continued working with his abilities and on days where he wasn't feeling the best, we just walked and chatted about his future and how the program could help him. We believe that the trusting relationship we made had an impact on his personal life. After one of our sessions, his guardian commented "he actually had a really good day overall. It's rare for him" after one of his successful sessions.

Parent Feedback:

- "Thank you so much for your time. She went from getting 30's to 90's! I knew she could do it, but now she knows she can."
- "To have free tutoring for a student who otherwise can't afford it, and would have continued to struggle, has lifted a great deal of stress. Greatly appreciated!"
- "The tutor was a vital part of my child's education this year and without her help she would have struggled and fallen behind more. With the tutor's help my child not only caught up but excelled in her math curriculum and is now ready for the next grade level."

PROGRAM SUPPORT

Supporting youth in their educational endeavors also includes ways we can help reduce their barriers to learning. Feedback provided from parents and students outlined the need to provide the following initiatives to assist them with individualized learning:

- **Laptops:** we purchased 5 laptops and gave them to students who had limited or no access to a computer at home. Students were chosen based on their need and how involved they were in the After the Bell program.
- **School Supplies:** graphic calculators were purchased and loaned out to students as needed. Learning Blocks/Cubes were purchased as a tool to help strengthen subject comprehension.
- **IXL Online Memberships:** IXL is an online personalized learning program that has comprehensive curriculum for all school grades. The curriculum is based on your provincial guidelines and provides up-to-date student tracking to meet the needs of each unique learner.
- **Staples Gift Cards:** each student received a \$50 gift card upon completion of the program. This gift card was to be used to purchase any necessary schools supplies for the next school year.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Students who struggle in school have negative attitudes towards school and their teachers. Our tutors created open and positive environments for students to learn and be comfortable.
- Meeting students where they are and hearing their stories and experiences creates connections and effective learning.
- Recruitment of tutors and students is a moving process and needs to change with the expressed needs of the program and community.
- Expanding the program to include those attending Adult Basic Education.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships can play a significant part in the success of programs. According to Wikipedia the statement, “it takes a village to raise a child” is an African proverb meaning an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to grow in a safe and healthy environment.

And as the old saying goes, “many hands make light work”, it is true to say that the resources and assistance from these organizations helped this program flourish. Our community partners have collectively shown their commitment to youth and this project by generously sharing their time and resources.

- **Community Youth Network:** provided a safe and inviting space for tutoring sessions.
- **Newfoundland Labrador English School District:** provided guidance and support in initial stages of application process and throughout the program.
- **Western Health Youth Early Intervention and Outreach Worker:** due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, outside members of the community were not permitted into the local schools. As a result, we were not able to be physically in the school for tutoring sessions. However, the Youth Worker was connected with the school and was able to refer students to our program.
- **John Howard Society:** the coordinator of a Youth In-Care Home sits on our Leadership Table and became intrigued with the tutoring program as well as the benefits. We connected with a youth in their care and worked with both the coordinator and youth care workers to keep the student engaged in learning. John Howard Society also let us use space at their In-Care Home to tutor the student.

TIPS FOR COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENTING A SIMILAR PROGRAM

There is never a reason to question if there is a need for a free tutoring program in your area because there always is a reason. We look beyond the youth in low-income families as being the only ones that need this program, as other youth may also benefit. As said above, the cost of tutoring can be astronomical to students in single parent families, or even those in middle income families. The extra cost of \$40 to \$75 a week, for one tutoring session, can make or break a family’s weekly budget. Sometimes it can be a decision between extra help for their child or lunches for the week.

Bringing students into this program who fall between failing and excelling was a huge learning as well. There are students who just need a few extra credits or need to upgrade their marks a few percentages to have a successful post-secondary acceptance. Situations and students like these are just as important as those who need consistent tutoring.

CONCLUSION

Communities. Building. Youth. Futures.

Separately these words are meaningful, but together they mean a whole lot more. After the Bell Students Supports connects our community together to bring the youth in, build on their skills and learning so that their educational future is free of stress and worry.

Empowering youth and building resiliency towards the completion of high school is the first step on the road to employment. Through this program, we want to help build independence and confidence in students through engaging tutoring sessions, so that they are successful when they do the work on their own.

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter "a".

Initial funding for the **After the Bell Student Supports Tutoring Program** was provided as a Community Innovation Fund grant to [Corner Brook Communities Building Youth Futures](#). The aim of [Community Innovation Fund](#) grants is to pilot and scale innovative projects to support better outcomes for youth.

The logo for Tamarack Institute, featuring a stylized yellow "T" icon to the left of the text "TAMARACK INSTITUTE" in a serif font.

[Communities Building Youth Futures](#) (CBYF) is a five-year, pan-Canadian project to develop Collective Impact, system-wide solutions for youth as they build and act upon plans for their future. CBYF is funded by the [Government of Canada's Goal Getters Program](#) and delivered by the [Tamarack Institute](#).

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada