



Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary

Social Return On Investment (SROI) Case Study: Beltline Youth Centre



Fast Facts—About Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary is here to support, respond to and to offer every child who needs us, *A good place to be.*

- Operates 21 locations in Calgary.
- Connects with 40,000 children, youth and their families each year.
- Offers educational support, employment preparation, life and living skills and arts and recreation programs.

Beltline Youth Centre

- links 290 youth, who would otherwise be marginalized and considered high-risk, to positive social, education and recreational activities;
- provides services to increase their employability;
- reduces educational barriers;
- exposes youth to positive lifestyle choices;
- builds relationship with staff through the provision of needed services;
- creates hope;
- contributes to a sense of belonging by providing a safe and healthy environment where relationships can be fostered.

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“Youth, 15-24, have the highest unemployment rate of any group in Canada, and, for those employed, they make up over half the workers earning low wages.” National Poverty Organization, 2004

Program Background:

The Beltline Youth Centre (BYC) serves as a link to the community for immigrant youth and their families. Beltline is a free-of-charge centre accessible to all youth in Calgary.

Many youth involved in Beltline are routinely exposed to local gang activity or have witnessed violence in their neighbourhoods. They typically are living in or close to poverty. Many attempt to work multiple shift jobs at minimum wage in order to make ends meet.

Beltline is often the only place where these youth feel safe, respected and accepted.

The referrals and information shared by staff regularly filters back to the youths' families, as often times the youth are better able to speak English than their parents. As a result, Beltline ends up indirectly supporting a large number of immigrant families to work their way through the maze that is their new home, Canada. Beltline youth have few other options to access free recreation and greatly benefit from the tutoring, support and professional advice that is offered by Beltline Staff.

Social Value Created

Beltline helps to prevent youth, who are mostly immigrant and have only lived in Canada for a short time, from getting involved or further involved in street and/or gang activity. They come from low income families, who are

experiencing a number of barriers, including limited skill in English. This prevents many families from accessing resources that would otherwise help them to settle into their new lives in Canada.

Beltline youth often struggle with school and/or finding work; some are involved in gang or street life and struggle with making positive life decisions. Not only are they dealing with “normal” issues that teens face (i.e. peer pressure, drugs/alcohol, relationship issues, deciding what to do with their lives), but those issues are compounded by poverty, their community of residence, and cultural issues.

Theory of Change

If at-risk youth that feel isolated due to their cultural experience have social, educational, recreational and employability opportunities, then they will have the tools to make positive life choices and transition into adulthood successfully.

Beltline Youth Centre Clientele

Beltline primarily serves immigrant youth. Participants originate from around the world but are primarily:

- between 12 and 24 years old;
- socially & economically disadvantaged;
- immigrant, visible minority youth from war torn countries;
- living in poverty.

290 Calgary youth are involved in Beltline and engage with the youth centre annually:

- 50 youth aged 12-15
- 130 youth aged 16-18
- 60 youth aged 19-21
- 50 youth aged 22-24

For more information on SROI, visit www.simpactstrategies.com



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Beltline engages youth in a number of social and recreational activities that are designed to indirectly impact their ability to become productive citizens.

For example, basketball is the vehicle that staff use to get the youth through the door. While playing ball, staff have the

chance to build relationships with the youth, which creates opportunities to help them in other areas of their lives such as their homework, job search, resume writing, assistance with administrative red tape related to immigration, solution focussed counselling, referrals to other services, etc.

Social Value Creation

The Beltline Youth Centre creates social value by engaging youth who would otherwise be socially and economically marginalized as a result of being new to Calgary and/or new to Canada. Many are not fluent in English, which becomes an obstacle preventing them from succeeding at school, interacting with peers in a positive manner, securing part-time or full-time work or becoming settled.

Many have experienced unimaginable difficulties in their journey to Calgary, including poverty, civil or territorial war, physical or environmental disasters, loss of friends and family, and even persecution.

These experiences, and the experience of moving to a foreign place and feeling unable to express oneself, can lead youth to feel extremely isolated, which leads to an increasing sense of frustration and helplessness.

These emotions can be difficult to overcome without strong links to a reliable community that will help to counter those

feelings by offering a sense of security and an opportunity to belong. Beltline offers 290 youth a place to meet other youth who can relate to their experiences and now find themselves facing similar challenges while living in Calgary.

Without Beltline, many participants would be increasingly isolated. Varying degrees of isolation can lead youth to involvement with a negative peer group, either by choice or as a result of ending up in uncomfortable circumstances.

Reallocating Scarce Resources

Based on five years of programming, Beltline staff estimate that scarce city and judicial resources were reallocated in the following ways, as a result of their work with the 2007 cohort:

- 50 of the 290 youth would otherwise be demonstrating negative behaviour, monthly, that would require police intervention;
- 15 youth would otherwise end up in front of a youth court judge, each year, which would also require police attendance;
- 8 youth would otherwise be placed in a youth detention centre, and then require probation.

Skill Development and Job Readiness

Beltline staff also work to increase the employability and job readiness of participants. Some succeed in securing part-time work while others pursue and secure full-time work.

If each of the 90 youth referred to in Table 1 begins work at minimum wage,

Table 1. Annual SROI Beltline Youth Centre

Beltline Youth Centre: Social Value Calculation				
SROI Indicators Included:	Indicator Code	Total Value YR 1	Notes	
1	Avoidance of Police Time	CPS	\$205,200	\$342 /call-out, 50 youth (of 290) would be face-to-face with police, once a month
2	Avoidance of Youth Court Process	J1	\$19,125	\$1275/process, 15 youth (of 50 of 290) would end up in front of youth court judge
3	Avoidance of Police in Youth Court	J9	\$4,785	\$319/appearance, 15 youth court appearances are avoided by police
4	Avoidance of time in prison	J7	\$14,000	\$150/day youth detention, 8 (of 50 of 290) would be in youth detention for 7 days each
5	Avoidance of probation time	J2	\$10,758	\$30/hour, 2 hours week/26 weeks * 8 youth
6	Part-time earned income	F19	\$202,752	\$8.80/hour * 8hrs/week*48 weeks/year * 60, who then move into full time work in year 4
7	Permanent employment	F19	\$591,360	\$8.80/hour * 40 hrs/week*48 weeks/yr * 30
Social Value Created (per 290 participants)			\$1,047,980	
Total program investment			\$216,539	
Investment per person			\$747	
One year SROI ratio			4.84	

the social value created by increasing personal and/or household income is more than \$850,000 each year.

While the personal presentation and interview skills developed are important, Beltline staff will say that the most important thing that youth develop at the Beltline Youth Centre is a belief in their own ability and future potential.



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Success Stories

Success on the Basketball Court

Tim was a refugee from Sudan who began coming to Beltline as a tall, awkward, 13 year old who liked playing basketball with friends. It became his daily routine to come to Beltline and play for a couple of hours and Tim's skills quickly improved. He began to stand out as he played for his junior high school team.

Tim practiced over the summer and made the high school team. His team went to the Calgary city championships and Tim quickly built a reputation as one of the best players in the city. After two years playing high school basketball, he was recruited to play for the Boys to Men Academy in Chicago for his final year. Tim became ranked as the 93rd best senior in the United States after only one season. Upon graduation, he was offered a full scholarship to DePaul University.

Tim's experience has made a huge impact on the youth at Beltline. Every weekend the weight room and basketball gym are full of passionate youth who believe that they too can work hard, improve their skills and find success like Tim.

A Sense of Belonging

Imagine being ten years old and watching your mother get injured during a bombing raid. Imagine running into a burning building to find your 6-year-old sister. Imagine realizing that your village has emptied out and that your mother is nowhere to be found. Imagine walking for two days, with your sister, until you are placed in a refugee camp – for two years. Finally a host family in Calgary sponsors you to come to Canada.

John came to Calgary from an African country in turmoil. He struggled to belong, had difficulty in school, hung out with a negative peer group and was starting to make bad choices. At 14, John heard about the Beltline Youth Centre and started attending. He accessed the computers and volunteer tutors. John's grades improved and he became more successful at school.

Today, John is now 18, sees a brighter future for himself and remains involved at Beltline. He will tell you that Beltline staff, support and friendships gave him a much yearned-for sense of belonging and have made a significant impact on his life.

Conclusion

Time and time again, research illustrates that a socially marginalized or isolated person will eventually seek out community. If a positive community is not available, they are at-risk to create a negative community, which may include gang involvement, drugs and criminal activity.

When these things occur, a young person is less likely to graduate high school, has reduced wage-earning potential and a higher likelihood of continued involvement in crime, in drugs and in other anti-social behaviour.

Participants in Beltline Youth Centre programs are at serious risk of all of the above. Interestingly, many get involved in Beltline for the long term, illustrating the value they place on the positive and supportive community that Beltline offers.

At least 35% of the 290 youth involved in 2008 had been a Beltline regular for the three previous years. They remain involved because of the support and friendship offered within the Beltline community, which contributes to each individual developing a more positive personal view of their own future prospects. Access to tutoring, employability and job-readiness training are additional significant factors in the development of a more positive outlook on each youth's future prospects.

Graph 1. 5-year SROI Beltline Youth Centre (one cohort, 290 youth)

