

**Basic Income: Perspectives, Problems, and Possibilities in Lindsay**

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# **BASIC INCOME: PERSPECTIVES, PROBLEMS, AND POSSIBILITIES IN LINDSAY**

## **A Detailed Analysis of the 2017 Southern Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project's Impacts on Lindsay Ontario**

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**Abstract:** This research report examines the immediate and lasting impacts that the 2017 Southern Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project and its early termination in 2018, had on individuals and the broader community of Lindsay, Ontario. Through a careful examination of past literature, alongside six semi-structured interviews, this research investigates the ability of basic income to alleviate inequities and increase levels of social justice and equality. This report evaluates the impacts of basic income on health, community engagement, nutrition, finances, and work-life, among other things, in the community of Lindsay, Ontario. The findings indicate that recipients experienced improvements in mental and physical health, community participation, access to nutritious food, and overall status of finances during the project. These findings offer insights for future basic income initiatives and underscore the relevance and increasing importance of a robust social support system in our current society.

**Key Words:** Lindsay Ontario, Basic Income Pilot Project, Social Justice, Equality, Community, Cancellation, Food Insecurity, Finances, Poverty, Health, Well-being, Mental Health, Politics

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## 1. Executive Summary

This research was conducted over an eight-month period with the aim of understanding and analyzing the immediate and lasting impacts the 2017 Southern Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project had on the people of Lindsay, Ontario. This report presents and summarizes the history of and current perspectives surrounding basic income, specifically those of Lindsay residents. It is important to note that the pilot project took place in three communities across Ontario, but due to the scope and scale of this project, the following report will be Lindsay-focused.

This research was conducted over an eight-month period with the aim of understanding and analyzing the immediate and lasting impacts the 2017 Southern Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project had on the people of Lindsay, Ontario. This report presents and summarizes the history of and current perspectives surrounding basic income, specifically those of Lindsay residents. It is important to note that the pilot project took place in three communities across Ontario, but due to the scope and scale of this project, the following report will be Lindsay-focused. The Project began in 2017 and was meant to run for three years. Unfortunately, it was abruptly cancelled in 2018, much to the dismay of recipients and the community. A review of relevant literature and six semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information for this research. Four interviews were conducted with Lindsay residents who received basic income, and the remaining two interviewees were key informants with relevant experiences and perspectives. Interview questioning was divided into five sections, each focusing on a different area of impact basic income may have affected. These five sections were: health and well-being, community participation and civic-mindedness, food and nutrition, finances, and work life. These themes

came up frequently during our early stages of research and are important in the life of every individual.

The information and opinions shared by interview participants, while each being unique in their specifics, were for the most part consistent between all interviewees. In general, we found that the mental and physical health of recipients was better while receiving basic income and got worse after the cancellation. Participants expressed a strong desire to engage more within their community, which many were able to do while receiving the basic income funds. Recipients could participate in community events and initiatives, shop locally, and connect with family and friends more easily and frequently. Additionally, basic income allowed individuals to buy more nutritious food, rely less on food banks, and purchase and replace household items they otherwise could not have. All the discussions we had with our interview participants suggested the Basic Income Pilot Project improved their lives significantly and in a variety of ways.

The cancellation left recipients angry and confused. They had budgeted and planned around the expectation of receiving basic income for three years. The abrupt cancellation left people distressed and in some cases in worse situations than before the pilot. The cancellation destroyed the faith and trust of multiple interviewees in the government. While the cancellation has led some to be disillusioned with the government and politics more generally, it has also encouraged multiple recipients to become or continue to be vocal advocates for basic income.

Our final question to all interviewees pertained to whether they thought anything could have been done differently to improve the pilot project. These suggestions and the conversations that ensued have formed the content of our reflections and implications section. Participants

mostly felt that the project was well designed and satisfied, other than the disappointment of the cancellation. Two interviewees suggested, however, that it may have been helpful if some sort of optional money management sessions had been set up to help recipients learn effective ways to handle their money and explain available options regarding spending, saving, and investing.

This project highlights the importance of the conversation on basic income. Ensuring the general population is aware of and well-informed on occurrences such as the 2017 pilot project is paramount. Ensuring citizens are thriving rather than struggling to get by should be the priority of governments everywhere. Understanding the possibilities provided by basic income and the role it has the potential to play in the future of social support should be an essential part of policy makers' agendas moving forward.

## **2. Background and Introduction**

Lindsay is a town in the Kawartha Lakes region of Ontario, Canada. It is situated approximately 120 kilometers northeast of Toronto.<sup>1</sup> Lindsay is known for its picturesque setting along the Scugog River and its rich history as a hub for agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce in the region. With a population of approximately 20,000 residents, Lindsay, like many communities across Ontario, grapples with socioeconomic challenges, particularly concerning income inequality and food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> Many recognize the pressing need to address this issue. The 2016 census revealed that the median household income in Lindsay was around \$55,000 compared to \$72,000 for Ontario's median household income.<sup>3</sup> When the 2017

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<sup>1</sup>*Lindsay and area*. City of Kawartha Lakes Tourism. (n.d.). <https://www.explorekawarthalakes.com/en/plan-your-trip/lindsay.asp>

<sup>2</sup>*Lindsay and area*. City of Kawartha Lakes Tourism. (n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada, S. C. *Census profile, 2016 census Lindsay [population centre], Ontario and Ontario [province]*. Census Profile, 2016 Census - Lindsay [Population centre], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (2021, October 27). <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0472&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&SearchText=Lindsay&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=0472&TABID=1&type=0>

provincial budget mentioned the basic income project, many community members saw an opportunity for Lindsay. Members of the community attended public meetings, organized their own events, and lobbied government officials to consider the area for the pilot project. We had the opportunity to interview Mike Perry, one of our key informants and a member of the community who played an active role in bringing the pilot to Lindsay. When discussing the lead-up to Lindsay's selection and the reaction of the community, he said, "I remember hearing things like, Wow, Lindsay's on the map or, you know, wow. Lindsay got picked for something for once. And I know there was some conjecture about, how can we translate this development into- How do we translate to Lindsay having a reputation as a progressive hub in Ontario".

The Basic Income Pilot Project provided payments to 2,000 residents in Lindsay and another 2,000 across the other two pilot communities. The program offered up to \$16,989 per year for single participants and up to \$24,027 for couples.<sup>4</sup> The Ford government's decision in 2018, to cancel the program was met with controversy and criticism, as it disrupted the lives and plans of many recipients and nullified all prospective research and evaluation on the pilot's impact. The cancellation has sparked debates about the potential benefits and drawbacks of Universal Basic Income (UBI) in Canada and around the world. Advocates argue that UBI can help reduce poverty, provide financial security, and stimulate economic growth, while opponents' express concerns about its cost and potential disincentives to work.<sup>5</sup> The premature termination of the project occurred before any significant findings could be officially reported.

This research builds upon the existing literature on basic income and extends it by providing firsthand insights into the lived experiences of recipients in Lindsay, Ontario. By

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Ontario. (n.d.). <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-basic-income-pilot>

<sup>5</sup> CBC/Radio Canada. *Survey results from basic income project reveal housing, Mental Health struggles* / CBC News. CBCnews. (2019, January 22). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/basic-income-survey-1.4988689>

identifying the challenges and opportunities associated with the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project, this report aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about social welfare policies and their impacts on individuals and communities.

### **3. Methodology and Research Questions**

The methodological approach used for this research consists of two components. The first is detailed literature reviews completed in the fall, examining the pros, cons, and overall impact of the Southern Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project and similar schemes in other jurisdictions. The second component involved a total of six semi-structured interviews, which took place beginning in early January 2024 and concluding mid-February 2024. Four interviews were conducted with Lindsay residents who were recipients of the Basic Income Pilot Project, and the remaining two were conducted with key informants on the topic. Our research has culminated in the completion of this report, as well as two articles which will be published in *The Lindsay Advocate* in the coming months.

#### **Research Questions**

**Core Research Question 1:** What are the advantages, disadvantages and effects of basic income as a tool to promote social justice and equality with emphasis on the Lindsay pilot?

**Intermediate Research Question 1A:** How did the Basic Income Pilot Project impact community health and well-being in Lindsay?

**Intermediate Research Question 1B:** How did the Basic Income Pilot Project impact levels of community engagement and civic mindedness in Lindsay?

**Core Research Question 2:** What are the advantages, disadvantages and effects of basic income as a tool to address food insecurity, poverty and lack of employment with emphasis on the Lindsay Pilot?

**Intermediate Research Question 2A:** What effect did the Basic Income Pilot Project have on the culture of work in Lindsay?

**Intermediate Research Question 2B:** What effect did the Basic Income Pilot Project have on recipients' financial situations?

**Intermediate Research Question 2C:** What effect did the Basic Income Pilot Project have on recipients' food habits?

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Introduction

In 2017, Kathleen Wynne, the former Premier of Ontario, announced the beginning of a three-year Basic Income Pilot Project. The pilot intended “to test the growing view that a basic income could help deliver income support more efficiently while improving health, employment and housing outcomes for Ontarians.”<sup>6</sup> The project was to enroll 4000 low-income Ontarians from three different areas of the province. It was especially exciting as it offered much more support to individuals compared to other provincial support projects such as Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).<sup>7</sup> The pilot was designed to be a negative income tax scheme, where the government paid out specific individuals rather than said people paying the government taxes.<sup>8</sup> When the Ford government came into power in Ontario, it

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<sup>6</sup>Himelfarb, Alex, and Trish Hennessy. “Basic Income: Rethinking Social Policy.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2016). <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Off>

<sup>7</sup>Hamilton, Leah and James P. Mulvale. “Human Again”: The (Unrealized) Promise of Basic Income in Ontario.” *Journal of Poverty* 23, no. 7: (2019). 576–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2019.1616242>.

<sup>8</sup>Mason, Gregory, C. “It Was Time to Walk Away from Ontario’s Flawed Basic Income Project.” *The Conversation* (2018). <https://theconversation.com/it-was-time-to-walk-away-from-ontarios-flawed-basic-income-project-101217>

cancelled the project just 18 months after it had begun and before researchers and analysts had any time to collect and analyze the data.<sup>9</sup> The cancellation was a blatant breach of trust by Ford to Ontario voters, as he had stated during his election campaign, he would allow the project to run its entire course.<sup>10</sup>

Many feel that traditional forms of social assistance in Canada are invasive and inadequate when it comes to the level and types of support they provide.<sup>11</sup> Basic income is argued by many to be a more efficient and equitable alternative to current welfare policies. The recent COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how unfair and fragile many of the government supports we have in place are. The loss and suffering undergone by many due to COVID has made many feel it is time for real change in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Supporters say that poverty is a collective responsibility and that relief is a right of citizenship essential for dignity and equality of opportunity.<sup>13</sup> Supporters see basic income as a helpful tool in striving towards social ideals such as liberty, equality, and solidarity.<sup>14</sup> Over the years, through research, trial, and error, a variety of benefits of basic income have been identified and emphasized, which suggest basic income can and does increase levels of human dignity and citizens' overall quality of life.

The idea of basic income is not a new one, though it has always been a divisive one. In the context of Ontario specifically the main critique of basic income is its economic feasibility.

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<sup>9</sup>Ferdosi, Mohammad, Tom McDowell, Wayne Lewchuk, & Stephanie Ross. Southern Ontario's Basic Income Experience. *McMaster University*. (2020). <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/28173/1/southern-ontarios-basic-income-experience.pdf>

<sup>10</sup>Mulvale, James. "The Cancellation of Ontario's Basic Income Project Is a Tragedy." *The Conversation*. (2018).

<https://theconversation.com/the-cancellation-of-ontarios-basic-income-project-is-a-tragedy-101555>

<sup>11</sup>Hamilton and James. "Human Again." *Journal of Poverty* 23, no. 7 (2019): 576–99.

<sup>12</sup>Cooke, Jamie. "Basic income is needed to underpin a fairer society." *The Lindsay Advocate*. (2021). <https://lindsayadvocate.ca/basic-income-is-needed-to-underpin-a-fairer-society/>

<sup>13</sup>Himelfarb and Hennessy. "Basic Income: Rethinking Social Policy." (2016).

<sup>14</sup>Hanel, Johannes. "Basic Income and Social Justice An Analysis for the BIEN-Congress1 in Dublin 20 June 2008." *Goethestr.* 23, 99817 Eisenach (2008). <https://basicincome.org/bien/pdf/dublin08/1eiiihanelbisj.pdf>

In 2021, the Parliamentary Budget Officer conducted an assessment indicating that implementing a nationwide guaranteed basic income, modeled after Ontario's 2017 pilot project, could potentially halve Canada's poverty rate within a single year. However, this initiative would come with a substantial price tag, estimated at \$91 billion in 2024–25 and \$93 billion in 2025–26.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, critics argue that basic income could be a disincentive to work. They believe that individuals may choose to opt out of employment as the basic income might outweigh the low income that could be earned from employment.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.2 Advantages of Basic Income as a Tool to Promote Community Health and Well-being**

Research has shown that receiving basic income can positively impact individuals' and communities' mental and physical health. A study done on the Ontario pilot project at McMaster University stated that eighty percent of participants in the pilot project reported increases in their overall health. In comparison, just ten percent reported a decline.<sup>17</sup> Eighty percent of respondents also reported they experienced positive changes in their mental health during the pilot.<sup>18</sup> Most respondents reported decreased stress and anxiety levels, and overall improved quality of life.<sup>19</sup> Most participants reportedly felt a more positive home life, higher levels of relaxation, and lower levels of anger.<sup>20</sup> Researchers involved in this study then pointed out that these signals point to the idea that introducing basic income would likely reduce the need for increased investments

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<sup>15</sup> Levesque, C "Why Canada won't implement a guaranteed basic income anytime soon" in National Post. (2024) <https://nationalpost.com/news/no-government-could-afford-it-why-canada-wont-implement-a-guaranteed-basic-income-anytime-soon>

<sup>16</sup> Muir, D. "Universal basic income: Pros, cons and evidence: Institute for employment studies (IES)." Universal basic income: pros, cons and evidence | Institute for Employment Studies (IES). (2023). <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/news/universal-basic-income-pros-cons-and-evidence>

<sup>17</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020) , 6.

<sup>18</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 6.

<sup>19</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 8.

<sup>20</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 9.

and support in the health sector, specifically in mental health services, which have been and continue to be a pressing concern and area of need.<sup>21</sup> According to the same McMaster study, participants' usage of healthcare services in the form of doctor visits decreased for one-third of respondents.<sup>22</sup> There is a clear, strong connection between poverty and poor health and between basic income and reduced healthcare costs.<sup>23</sup> The basic income pilot saw a decrease in the frequency of pain and feelings of fatigue in respondents.<sup>24</sup>

The benefits of basic income on human dignity also play a role in social justice and equality. Financial stress and economic uncertainties can have immense negative impacts on an individual. Problems with or a lack of financial support can negatively influence an individual's self-image, self-esteem, and ability to see themselves in a good light and take care of those they care for.<sup>25</sup> Basic income allows individuals to feel less shame around their financial situations and maintain a semblance of control over their situations even when they come upon hard times. The pilot allowed individuals to feel independent and secure without needing to involve and rely on their families, friends, or other relationships just to get by.

### **4.3 Advantages of Basic Income as a Tool to Promote Community Engagement and Civic Mindedness**

Studies have shown that when people feel financially secure and have free time, they are more likely to give that time to others and work within their communities.<sup>26</sup> The Basic Income Canada Network conducted a survey in which more than ten percent of those receiving basic

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<sup>21</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 9.

<sup>22</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 35.

<sup>23</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 35.

<sup>24</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 36-39.

<sup>25</sup>Gregori, Daniela. "Social Vulnerability and Contrast Actions: Basic Guaranteed Income as a social promotion tool." *Pensée plurielle* 16, no. 3 (2007): 73–83. <https://doi.org/10.3917/pp.016.0073>

<sup>26</sup>Benns, Roderick. "Quarter of basic income recipients spent time volunteering: Survey." *The Lindsay Advocate*. (2018). <https://lindsayadvocate.ca/nearly-a-quarter-of-basic-income-recipients-spent-time-volunteering-survey/>

income in Ontario participated. The results of this survey exemplified that a quarter of people receiving basic income chose to volunteer their time.<sup>27</sup> The study by Ferdosi et al. found that just under half of their respondents were able to volunteer their time, thanks to the money received from the pilot project.<sup>28</sup> The higher overall outlook on life reported by 85% of participants due to the pilot also suggests it would encourage individuals to engage more within their communities and seek more fulfillment in their lives.<sup>29</sup>

Research has also shown that basic income, or additional income, impacts an individual's ability to participate politically and engage in civic activities such as voting. Time, money, education, and health all affect a community member's ability to participate in voting, and income allows for the advancement and allocation of resources that encourage participation.<sup>30</sup> When governments introduce systems and projects such as basic income, it can increase feelings of trust and inclusion in the political and public sphere and encourage people to engage with them.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4.4 Advantages of Basic Income as a Tool to Address Food Insecurity**

The provincial household food insecurity average is approximately 13%; the Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton food insecurity exceeded 14% in 2019, making the region the most food insecure in Ontario.<sup>32</sup> The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit defines food insecurity as “not having enough food, uncertainty, and/or lack of access to enough healthy food.

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<sup>27</sup>Benns, “Recipients spent time volunteering.” *The Lindsay Advocate*. (2018).

<sup>28</sup>Ferdosi, et al “Basic Income Experience” *McMaster University*. (2020), 10.

<sup>29</sup>Ferdosi, et al “Basic Income Experience” *McMaster University*. (2020), 10.

<sup>30</sup>Loeffler, Hannah. “Does a Universal Basic Income Affect Voter Turnout? Evidence from Alaska.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 11, no. 3 (2023): 521–36. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2022.38>.

<sup>31</sup>Loeffler, “Basic Income Affect Voter Turnout?” (2023): 521–36.

<sup>32</sup>Lindsay Advocate. *Food insecurity in Kawartha Lakes one of the highest in Province* (2021, December 30). <https://lindsayadvocate.ca/food-insecurity-in-kawartha-lakes-one-of-the-highest-in-province/>

It means that you or your family worry about paying for groceries, where your next meal might come from, or cutting back on food to pay the bills.<sup>33</sup>

The introduction of Ontario's Basic Income Pilot Project enabled participants to afford regular, balanced meals and, in some cases, more nutritious food. The intake of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits and vegetables, increased for most respondents. In a collaboration between McMaster and Hamilton Roundtable for poverty, a study showed that 18.2% of the 4000 participants in the Ontario Basic Income project felt food secure while 53.1% reported severe food insecurity.<sup>34</sup> Among respondents who used food banks before the pilot, food bank usage decreased considerably. This change was particularly notable among participants who were previously reliant on OW or ODSP. One OW recipient mentioned that with basic income, they no longer needed to rely on food banks, which led to improvements in their overall health.<sup>35</sup> They could shop at the farmer's market, purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, and have a positive impact on their health and well-being. On the other hand, OW provided limited funds, primarily for rent, and food banks often offered unhealthy or [redacted]. In these cases, access to produce was also restricted. These findings suggest that basic income can play a significant role in addressing food insecurity and improving the overall well-being of recipients, especially when compared to other types of government support. of recipients, especially when compared to other types of government support.

#### **4.5 Advantages of Basic Income as a Tool to Address Poverty**

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<sup>33</sup> *Food insecurity*. HKPR District Health Unit. (n.d.). <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/health-topics/eating-and-nutrition/food-insecurity/>

<sup>34</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 28.

<sup>35</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 45.

Haliburton County in Ontario grapples with significant poverty rates, where roughly 17.2% of its population falls into the low-income category, including 18.5% of children residing in low-income households.<sup>36</sup> Well over half of the respondents in the McMaster study felt better prepared to handle financial emergencies with the support of basic income. Over three-fourths of the survey participants indicated that they depended less on family or friends for financial assistance during the basic income pilot. The majority of participants also reported that they found it easier to repay their debts during the pilot project.<sup>37</sup>

Data collected by St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto and released by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction reveals that many participants faced desperate housing situations. Over 8% reported experiencing homelessness in 2019, and 2.4% indicated they were homeless.<sup>38</sup> Close to 85% of the participants reported experiencing increased ease in buying essential household items during the basic income pilot, with around 10% expressing some difficulty.<sup>39</sup> These participants highlighted their ability to save money to acquire fundamental household necessities for both them and their families. Basic income has clear positive impacts on the financial status and spending abilities of recipients.

#### **4.6 Advantages of Basic Income as a Tool to Promote Employment and Work-Life Balance**

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<sup>36</sup>Mike Baker, By, & Baker, M. *Basic income "prevents poverty."* The Highlander. (2023, May 25). <https://thehighlander.ca/2023/05/25/basic-income-prevents-poverty/>

<sup>37</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 5.

<sup>38</sup>CBC/Radio Canada. *Survey results from basic income project reveal housing, Mental Health struggles | CBC News*. CBCnews. (2019, January 22). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/basic-income-survey-1.4988689>

<sup>39</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 48.

As of 2020, Kawartha Lakes' median employment income is \$31,800<sup>40</sup> and the Ontario employment income stands at \$70,100.<sup>41</sup> To afford a monthly rent of \$1,125, an individual should have an annual income of \$43,200. Studies show that 51.7% of renters residing in Kawartha Lakes allocate over 30% of their income towards housing<sup>42</sup>. The Basic Income Pilot Project increased participants' ability to finance their living accommodations and basic/primary household purchases, including rent and essential items.<sup>43</sup>

In data provided by McMaster, a comparison is made between two groups of basic income recipients: an *employed* group (138 individuals) and an *unemployed* group (63 individuals). The data indicates the impact of basic income on various aspects of their lives, including health, job search, and well-being.<sup>44</sup> Employment data collected during the pilot project showed that 33% of the participants were currently employed, 20% were unemployed, and 47% were "not in the labour force." Additionally, 12.6% of respondents had two or more jobs. It was noted that many participants were unable to work due to a disability, with 70.6% reporting this as the reason for not working.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Government of Canada, S. C. (2023, February 1). *Census profile, 2021 census (2023, of Population profile Table*. Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - Kawartha Lakes [Census agglomeration], Ontario. (2023, February 1). <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Kawartha+Lakes&DGUIDlist=2021S0504530&GENDERlist=1%2C2%2C3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

<sup>41</sup> Government Of Canada, S. C. *Table 2 median after-tax income, Canada and provinces, 2016 to 2020* . Median after-tax income, Canada and provinces, 2016 to 2020. (2022, March 23). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220323/t002a-eng.htm>

<sup>42</sup>City of Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton Poverty Reduction Roundtable. (n.d.). *Resources*. Ckl & Haliburton County Roundtable for Ending Poverty. <https://cklhpoverty.ca/resources>

<sup>43</sup> Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 4.

<sup>44</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 15.

<sup>45</sup>CBC/Radio Canada. *Survey results from basic income project reveal housing, Mental Health struggles | CBC News*. CBCnews. (2019, January 22). <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/basic-income-survey-1.4988689>

The analysis reveals that, in general, both groups experienced positive outcomes during the pilot period.<sup>46</sup> Basic income also seemed to have a positive impact on family relationships, with over half of the respondents' reporting improvements in this aspect.<sup>47</sup> The data indicates that many recipients used the financial support to strengthen family bonds and engage in activities together, suggesting that basic income provides recipients with the ability to have a healthier balance between work life and family life. The data also shows that both the previously employed and the unemployed were motivated to search for better-paying jobs during the pilot, dispelling concerns that basic income might lead to recipients exiting the labour market. A considerable portion of the recipients started educational or training pursuits during the pilot, indicating that basic income provided the means for personal and professional development.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, low-income jobs are often criticized for their limited structural impact on the economy but can still be highly beneficial for the individuals or communities that rely on them.<sup>49</sup> With a secondary income on top of their existing disposable income, people in these jobs can remain active, improve their skills, and more easily transition to higher-paying roles in the job market.<sup>50</sup>

## 4.7 Conclusion:

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<sup>46</sup>Ferdosi, M., McDowell, T., Lewchuk, W., and Ross, S. On how Ontario Tried Basic Income. *UNESCO*. (2022).

<https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/analytics/how-ontario-trialed-basic-income>

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<sup>47</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 6.

<sup>48</sup>Ferdosi, et al "Basic Income Experience" *McMaster University*. (2020), 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ferdosi, et al. "Ontario Tried Basic Income." *UNESCO*. (2022).

<sup>50</sup> Blais, F., & Hutchinson, J. Ending poverty a basic income for all Canadians. Toronto Ont: J. Lorimer. (2002). <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy1.lib.trentu.ca/lib/ocultrent-ebooks/reader.action?docID=3255740&ppg>

In conclusion, the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project promised to address long-standing issues of poverty, inequality, and social support inadequacies. Initiated to provide a comprehensive test of the viability and effectiveness of basic income, the project garnered significant attention and hope from both participants and observers. However, its premature cancellation by the Ford government after just 18 months was not only a betrayal of trust but also deprived researchers of crucial data needed to assess its impacts fully.

The pilot's preliminary findings revealed the advantages of basic income as a tool for promoting community health, well-being, engagement, and civic-mindedness. Participants reported improvements in overall health, mental well-being, and reductions in stress and anxiety levels. Moreover, the project contributed to mitigating food insecurity, enhancing financial stability, and empowering individuals to seek better opportunities through employment, education, or community involvement. The pilot's positive impacts on participants' lives underscored the potential of basic income to address systemic issues and provide a more equitable and dignified approach to social assistance. By offering unconditional support, basic income demonstrated its capacity to alleviate financial stress, foster independence, and strengthen social cohesion within communities. Moreover, the pilot shed light on the interconnectedness of poverty, health, employment, and social engagement, highlighting the need for holistic approaches to address these challenges effectively. Basic income emerged as a promising strategy to not only alleviate immediate hardships but also to empower individuals and communities to thrive in the long term.

## **5. Findings**

Both core research questions in this project sought to determine the advantages and disadvantages of basic income. Our first core research question sought to assess the effects of basic income on Lindsay as a whole community through the lens of social justice and equality. Our second core research question focused on the experience of individual recipients and the ways in which basic income may have changed specific areas of their lives. Through our research, we have found that many of the indicators of improvement in the lives of individuals seen in core question 2, often directly relate back to and indicate improvements in core question 1. In this section, the impacts, trends, and experiences of our interviewee's responses will be used to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of basic income.

In order to answer core question 1, “What are the advantages, disadvantages and effects of basic income as a tool to promote social justice and equality with emphasis on the Lindsay pilot?” two intermediate questions were employed to identify more specific topics and issues. The first intermediate question deals with the basic income pilot’s relationship to community health and well-being, while the second intermediate question looks at whether basic income impacted levels of community engagement and civic-mindedness in the area.

To ensure a thorough and detailed understanding of the impacts the pilot project had on individuals, the second core research question, “What are the advantages, disadvantages and effects of basic income as a tool to address food insecurity, poverty and lack of employment with emphasis on the Lindsay Pilot?” was also further divided into three intermediate questions. These questions looked closely at the impacts of basic income on recipients' food habits, financial situation, and overall employment experience. These subcategories all help determine whether the basic needs of individuals are met, contributing to broader issues of equality and social justice within Lindsay or the topics that are the core question one looks at.

The rest of this section is divided and discussed the same way as the intermediate questions. The first step is looking at community health and well-being, followed by community engagement and civic-mindedness, food and nutrition habits, the overall culture of work, and lastly, discussing the state of individuals' finances. The information displayed in these specific sections all relates directly back to the larger questions around the impact and ability of basic income to improve the lives of recipients and communities in which it exists.

### **5.1 Community Health and Well-being**

The main indicators we identified and used to determine the impact of basic income on community health and well-being were physical health, mental health, access to care, and socialization. The overall physical health of recipients was much better while on the pilot; recipients were able to dedicate time and resources to improving their physical health. One recipient got a membership at the local YMCA and took up swimming. She said, “I went to the pool, and the better I felt, the more often I went. I ended up losing 110 lbs. in the year and a half that I was on the basic income.” The basic income funds allowed recipients to buy over-the-counter prescriptions and things like vitamins that were otherwise inaccessible to them. It additionally made getting to medical appointments less of a hassle. During the interviews, two out of four past recipients cited transportation to and from medical appointments as an issue for them before basic income and which was less of a concern during the pilot.

The mental health of recipients was also significantly better during the pilot, with five out of six interviewees stating there was an improvement in their mental state and/or that of others they knew during the pilot. Recipients were less stressed about finances and could engage socially with their family and peers in ways and at a frequency which they previously could not. On this topic, one recipient said, “We were able to go visit our family in North Bay. We barely

could afford to go once a year at Christmas time. And a lot of times, we would have to stay home.” All four recipients we interviewed told us the pilot gave them a sense of freedom, independence, and dignity, which they had not experienced before. One recipient and vocal advocate for basic income in the community said, “I wasn't embarrassed to stand in the grocery line. I wasn't worried about what I was putting across that belt and looking and asking for subtotals, and what I was gonna have to put back. I wasn't ashamed.” Unfortunately, since the cancellation of the project, mental health has decreased in some recipients and left them angry, anxious, and depressed. When discussing mental health and morale in the community after the cancellation, a key informant told us, “After being cancelled, it was quite shocking. So, I know that mental health definitely struggled quite significantly after that.” People were not prepared for the blind side, which was the pilot’s cancellation. People felt hopeful and excited for the future, just to so quickly be disappointed.

## **5.2 Community Engagement and Civic Mindedness**

Community engagement and civic-mindedness produced a multitude of subcategories throughout our conversations with interviewees. Political outlook, political advocacy, sense of community, and community involvement were the most prominent and identifiable.

Many of our interviewees felt a sense of solidarity during the pilot. The community came together to ensure the pilot project benefited everyone as best as possible. “We were working together as a nucleus and being able to. We were making sure everybody had. Now (since the cancellation), it's getting so tough. It's kind of like I can't afford to help. I can't afford to. I'm the one looking for an egg instead of being able to give you an egg.” All of the recipients we spoke with had a strong desire to give back and invest into their communities; basic income provided

them the opportunity to participate in events, be a part of community initiatives, and help others in the community by supporting locals.

Based on the experience of the individuals we interviewed, the civic engagement and civic mindset of past recipients appear to have been impacted in two main ways. The cancellation of the pilot project has inspired some past recipients and community members to become passionate advocates for basic income. They have been outspoken about their experience, feelings, and beliefs surrounding the pilot project, basic income as a whole, and government policies surrounding it. It has led others to want nothing to do with politics due to the feelings of betrayal and political disillusionment the cancellation created among residents. Three recipients told us they feel a tremendous lack of trust in, and accountability from the government regarding the cancellation. One recipient spoke to their perspective on the political outlook within the community since the cancellation, and said, "A lot of anger and a lot of people now do not believe a word the government says (and) wants absolutely nothing to do with it...There's no faith left."

### **5.3 Food Habits and Nutrition**

While probing the topic of food and nutrition, the theme of agency was brought up by multiple recipients, particularly concerning food choices. The Basic Income Pilot Project provided recipients with considerable relief from food-related stresses. Heather Kirby, Executive Director at Kawartha Lakes Food Source, noted a significant decline in food bank visits during the pilot period. For instance, for the whole of the Kawartha Lakes Region, which Lindsay is a part of, at the start of the Basic Income program in August 2017, 409 individuals were served, compared to 920 individuals served in December 2018, three payments before the cessation of all basic income payments.

These insights reinforce the critical role income support initiatives play in alleviating food insecurity and giving recipients the ability to make autonomous food choices, highlighting the complex interplay between economic stability and nutritional well-being. All six interviewees mentioned that either they or someone they knew of, in the case of the key informants, had the opportunity to access fresher and broader food choices during the pilot. One recipient said, "I got to go to local farmers' markets. I got to buy vegetables, and planting garden plants like vegetables and herbs, and that way, I could grow my own food as well." Recipients all spoke very positively about the changes basic income funds allowed in their lives concerning food.

#### **5.4 Employment and Culture of Work**

The majority of the recipients we interviewed were on the Ontario Disability Support Program, meaning they were unable to work due to disabilities and/or illnesses. Participants expressed a strong desire to work, but were limited by various ailments. Basic income gave individuals the opportunity to find or create work opportunities for themselves that they could fully partake in. One recipient who used the funds to start her own home business said, "Periodically, I've tried to have part-time jobs or full-time jobs, but with my illness, I end up getting sick and miss too many days. And then I get let go because they can't keep me. And that's really demoralizing...So, I needed to find something that I could do from home around my illness. And this gave me the opportunity to do that and something that I really loved." From our research and conversations, it became clear that basic income incentivizes work in many ways. Mike Perry again shared with us the story of a basic recipient he was familiar with who went on the basic income pilot to get a new business up and running and then went off it after six months as it was no longer necessary. People used basic income to forge work opportunities for

themselves that were feasible for them and that they were passionate about. We were told it allows people to “retrain and reeducate” in order to access jobs and fields that may have otherwise been inaccessible to them.

## **5.5 Finances**

Regarding personal finances, we were interested to see what impact basic income funds had on recipients’ purchasing power and money management. All four recipients told us that during the basic income pilot, they experienced higher levels of financial freedom and less stress about money. Two interview participants suggested to us that ODSP and other social assistance programs could be very infantilizing, and that basic income finally allowed recipients to feel in control. When describing her experience with both social assistance programs, one recipient said, “ODSP all goes in one day, after bills and groceries you're broke and scrambling...That cushion from basic income...means if your tires blow on your car or the transmission goes, you are able to get it looked at to get your repairs done.” Speaking of the same financial struggle since the cancellation, another recipient said, “I cannot afford an emergency of any kind. There's just no way.”

Recipients expressed that they often had to make trade-offs regarding transportation, food, personal items, and household goods as the money received from ODSP was very minimal. When receiving basic income, participants could buy things such as freezers, undergarments, pillows, and furniture without considering giving up another product or service. Speaking about her increased spending ability thanks to the pilot, one recipient said, “We didn't go hog wild. It wasn't again, we weren't rich. It was just that we had the money.” Recipients were still spending

responsibly and being resourceful; they were simply able to afford to cover all of their needs without added anxieties and barriers.

During the pilot project, recipients were also seemingly trying to spend and shop locally as much as they could, which also positively impacted businesses in Lindsay. One recipient said, “...A lot of the local businesses found that, too, that the basic income was going back into the community and not just being hoarded.” It is encouraging to hear that not only were the basic income funds positively impacting individual finances but also the broader economy of Lindsay

### **5.6 Closing Discussion of Findings**

Our findings clearly indicate the variety of positive impacts basic income funds had on Lindsay and its residents. For the most part, our findings align with those we found in related literature. There are clear links between the implementation of basic income and increased levels of social justice and equality among individuals and within a broader community. Basic income helps decrease the barriers low-income people experience and gives them chances and opportunities to invest in themselves and their futures.

## **6. Reflections and Implications**

The nature of our research has not been focused specifically on analyzing the program design of the Basic Income Pilot Project, we instead focused on the programs impact. This makes providing recommendations somewhat difficult. Rather than providing specific recommendations, we are using this section to discuss the reflections interview participants shared with us regarding the pilot and their experiences during it. From these reflections, broad

recommendations could be drawn regarding the possibility of a future pilot, however, our biggest recommendation would be to not cancel future projects prematurely and without valid reasoning.

Multiple participants expressed a desire for enhanced support structures within the project, particularly in the form of financial literacy classes or support groups to navigate the complexities of managing newfound income. We were told by two interview participants that a group or class that took recipients through saving, spending, and investment skills would have been beneficial as some of the recipients had never managed large sums of money before.

Reframing the idea of basic income in the minds of the public and those who may be opposed to it was another critical issue brought up in interviews. Those who oppose basic income often credit their stance to their belief that basic income provides a disincentive to work. However, based on the literature on the topic and the direct experience of our interview participants, that does not seem to be the case. Basic income provides an incentive and an opportunity for individuals to improve their financial situations, pursue new career opportunities, go back to school, and take care of their mental and physical health. There are likely people who would not make efforts to improve their situation in life if they were to receive basic income, but this is not reflected in the majority of people.

We were very grateful for the personal stories and anecdotes our interview participants shared. Many became emotional during our conversations and found certain aspects difficult to discuss. However, all of them stressed the importance of keeping the conversation around basic income alive and educating people on the topic. The public often gets stuck on the economics of basic income and the dollar sign attached to it all, when what we should be focusing on is the humanity of the issue. As one past recipient pointed out, you never know what situation you may find yourself in, "...in a heartbeat, you lose your job, and you're in the same place as I am. It's

(basic income) about self-esteem and dignity, and being able to be part of a community, and part of society, and feeling good about yourself.”

The disappointment surrounding the cancellation is rooted in a variety of factors. People felt betrayed by the government, anxious about what this would mean for their futures, and sad about what could have been if the project had continued. Outside of the experiences and feelings of individual recipients, the cancellation is also frustrating from a research standpoint. The information and statistics that could have been provided through this project had the potential to shift many perspectives on basic income and perhaps show governments the strength and possibilities basic income offers. The loss of this data is disheartening. If a positive can be drawn from this, it would be the fact that the conversation has not yet died. Past recipients and members of the public alike have continued to speak out and advocate for themselves and basic income in general.

## **7. Limitations of Research**

It is essential to highlight the limitations and weaknesses that exist in our work. A variety of factors have led to several areas lacking within this report. One significant limitation encountered during this project's completion was the limited number of interviewees. While our original intention was to conduct eight to ten semi-structured interviews evenly distributed between past recipients of the Lindsay pilot program and key informants on the topic, we faced challenges in recruiting enough volunteers willing to participate, which left us with only six.

Time constraints, coupled with our limited connections to the Lindsay community and absence from the physical location, hindered our ability to meet the desired target. Furthermore, our project may have benefited from a more diverse pool of interviewees regarding gender, age, race, and ethnic background. The recipients we interviewed, though all having their specific and

unique experiences, were all the same race, gender and roughly the same age. The lack of diversity in our sample could potentially limit the generalizability of our findings and hinder a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, a fundamental limitation of our research lies in our inability to determine whether the observed results merely represent the initial impact of basic income or if they signify a sustained trend or improvement over time. This uncertainty undermines the robustness of our conclusions and suggests the need for further longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of basic income initiatives. Moreover, the absence of specific numerical data pertaining to Lindsay presents another limitation. While data from the food bank was utilized, it is essential to note that it represents the entire Kawartha Lakes region rather than being specific to Lindsay alone. This lack of localized data may limit the accuracy and applicability of our findings to the targeted community.

## **8. Conclusion**

This research has provided valuable firsthand insights on the topic of basic income as a concept and on the level of change brought about by the Ontario pilot project as a whole. Our findings underscore the significant positive changes experienced by recipients during the implementation of the Basic Income Pilot Project. Participants reported improvements in many sectors in their lives. These outcomes align with the existing literature on the potential benefits of basic income in addressing socioeconomic challenges and promoting equitable welfare initiatives.

In addition to our findings, it is important to acknowledge the reflections shared by interview participants regarding the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project and their experiences within it. While our research did not primarily focus on critiquing the strengths and weaknesses

of the pilot's design, these reflections offer valuable insights into potential areas for improvement in future initiatives. Furthermore, our discussions with participants revealed a pressing need to reframe public perceptions surrounding basic income. Despite common misconceptions, our findings and existing literature suggest that basic income does not disincentivize work but instead provides individuals with the means and opportunity to improve their financial circumstances, pursue educational opportunities, and prioritize their well-being. It is crucial to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding basic income and emphasize its potential to empower individuals and foster social mobility.

The personal anecdotes and emotional testimonies shared by interview participants help highlight the human aspect of basic income and the importance of empathy in policymaking. Moving forward, policymakers must prioritize empathy and respect in their approach to social welfare policies, recognizing all individuals' inherent dignity and worth. Despite the setbacks posed by the cancellation, the continued advocacy and resilience demonstrated by past recipients and members of the public offer a glimmer of hope. The conversation surrounding basic income persists, fueled by a collective commitment to justice and equity. While the loss of potential data from the pilot project is unfortunate, the ongoing dialogue serves as a testament to the enduring importance of addressing poverty and inequality through innovative and compassionate solutions. By centering the voices and experiences of recipients, policymakers can chart a course towards a more just and equitable society where every individual is afforded the opportunity to thrive.

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## Appendices

SSI Questions – Basic Income: Perspectives, Problems, and Possibilities in Lindsay

Ice Breaker Question 1 for Recipient: When did you start receiving the basic income pilot funds, and for how long?

Ice Breaker Question 2 for Recipient: In general terms, did the BIP money impact your life in any way or not? If so, how?

Ice Breaker Question 1 for Informant: How familiar are you with the Basic Income Pilot Project which the Govt of Ontario rolled out in 2017?

Ice Breaker Question 2 for Informant: What is your role in the community of Lindsay? (Job, etc.) How familiar are you with the BIP project in Lindsay?

### Section 1: Community Health and Well-being

#### *Recipient Questions:*

1. Did the BIP affect your physical health in any way or not? If so, how? Did it impact your mental health in any way or not? If so, how?

- Did the BIP funding affect your ability to access health services for which you have to pay, such as dental care, or not? How about eyeglasses? How about prescription drugs? Anything else you can think of?
- Did the BIP funding affect your ability to make time to go to medical appointments or not?
- Did the BIP funds have any impact on the number of times you accessed medical services or not? (by accessed, I mean sought and received aid care from places like the ER, after-hours clinic, and paid services)
- Have you ever opted out of seeking medical attention due to your financial situation? If yes, did receiving BIP funds allow you to receive treatment for things you otherwise would not have, or not?

*Informant Questions:*

Are you aware of any differences in the overall state of community members' physical health during the BIP or not? If yes, please elaborate on these differences. Are you aware of any differences in the overall state of community members' mental health during the BIP or not? If yes, please elaborate on these differences.

- Are you aware of any change in the accessibility of medical services in Lindsay during the BIP project or not? (dental care, eyeglasses, prescription drugs, clinic appointments)

Section 2: Community Engagement and Civic Mindedness

*Recipient Questions:*

- Do you think that the BIP Project impacted the way you view and interact with your community or not?
- Did you notice any changes in Lindsay as a community due to the BIP Project or not? If yes, were these changes positive or negative? (in terms of the number of events/initiatives, turnout of community members at events, type of events/initiatives)
- Did you notice a shift in civic engagement due to the BIP Project in Lindsay or not? (By civic engagement, we mean participation in activities that improve one's community or address wider social issues, i.e., voting, volunteering) If yes please elaborate, were the shifts positive or negative?

*Informant Question:*

- Do you think the implementation of the BIP Project impacted the way recipients viewed Lindsay as a community? If yes, was the impact positive or negative?
- Are you aware of any shift in civic engagement due to the BIP in Lindsay or not? If yes, please elaborate, were the shifts positive or negative?

### Section 3: Work Life

#### *Recipient Questions:*

Did the BIP have any effect on your work life balance or not? If yes, was the impact positive or negative?

- Did it give you more time to spend on hobbies, or not?
- More time for the family, or not? More availability to socialize with friends or not?

Did BIP funds impact your employment opportunities or not?

#### *Informant Questions:*

Are you aware of any impact the BIP Project had on the work life of individuals in Lindsay or not? If yes, was the impact positive or negative?

- Are you aware of changes in the job market in Lindsay due to the BIP Project or not? If yes, please elaborate.

### Section 4: Finances

#### *Recipient Questions:*

Did the project provide you with more options in the ways you spent your money or not? (were you able to make purchases in addition to spending on necessities and bills)

Did the BIP provide a greater sense of financial security for you or not?

- Were you able to save or put money towards future endeavours, or not?

#### *Informant Questions:*

Are you aware of any changes in people's spending in Lindsay due to the BIP project or not?

- Are you aware of any impact the BIP project may have had on Lindsay-owned businesses, or not?

### Section 5: Food Habits

#### *Recipient Questions:*

Did the BIP have any impact on your spending on food?

- Did you buy different types of foods, like fresher vegetables or not?
- Did you buy different brands than you typically would before or not?

Did the BIP affect any trade-offs you've had to make regarding food versus other expenses, or not? (By trade-offs, I mean, opting for cheaper food or skipping meals instead of buying other things?)

*Informant Questions:*

Are you aware of any changes in food-related challenges in Lindsay due to BIP or not?

- Are you aware of any change in the number and/or frequency of food bank visits during the BIP project in Lindsay or not?
- Are you aware of any difference in the accessibility of food in Lindsay during the BIP project or not? If yes, please elaborate.

Closing Question 1: Is there anything else you want to share with us today? Are there any aspects you feel are important that we did not touch on?

Closing Question 2: With the benefit of hindsight, is there anything about the Basic Income Pilot Program in Lindsay that could have been done differently in order to have had a greater impact? (outside of letting it run for three years)