

Foundations for Social Change:  
New Leaf project

# Taking Bold Action on Homelessness

Addressing what matters with  
solutions that work.



**FOUNDATIONS  
FOR  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

# Believe in someone

Foundations for Social Change (FSC) is a Vancouver-based charitable organization that innovates, tests and advocates for new models that advance shared prosperity. We seek solutions to ongoing social issues, such as homelessness, with a bold entrepreneurial mindset using data and evidence to evaluate our work and measure impact. Bound by our shared humanity, we stand for a kind and inclusive world where everyone thrives.

Homelessness is a deeply human issue. It threatens the life and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in our society. To date, Canada's primary response has been to manage the crisis through the provision of emergency services, such as shelters, drop-in centres, and meal programs. Although they help people meet their basic needs, these approaches are often one-size-fits-all and rarely enable choice, dignity, and the ability to plan for the long-term.

## WHAT IS THE NEW LEAF PROJECT?

Our New Leaf project (NLP) empowers individuals to move beyond homelessness. Working in partnership with the University of British Columbia, NLP awards one-time cash transfers to youth (19+) and adults who have recently become homeless. Cash transfers provide choice, control and purchasing power at a critical time in people's lives. This is not merely a gesture of help. It is a signal that society believes in them. By preventing people from becoming entrenched as homeless, NLP transforms lives while saving community resources that could be spent on other urgent needs.

*"It helped me out a lot. It's given me purpose in life and has given me hope . . . It's given me the financial needs for me to get what I need for my house . . . "*

NLP Participant



## WHAT IS DIRECT GIVING?

Direct giving is a simple idea that is proving to be powerful and transformative. A one-time cash transfer is awarded to a person who is living in poverty and can be spent according to individual needs. Growing evidence demonstrates that money from cash transfers is well spent and can provide stability in a person's life. The direct giving model has been proven to empower recipients to find housing and purchase goods that improve their lives, while restoring dignity, confidence and a sense of well-being. Further, research has found that cash transfers do not increase spending on goods, such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Building on this work, NLP is the first program in the world to use direct unconditional cash transfers to reduce homelessness. Our evidence to date indicates that we are making an impact, and that direct giving is an effective tool to quickly reintroduce stability into people's lives.



*The New Leaf project applies advances in behavioural sciences, cognitive psychology, and behavioural economics to direct cash transfers in a way that has not been done before.*



## OUR PILOT PROJECT

In spring 2018, we launched our Vancouver New Leaf pilot project to rigorously evaluate the impact of our approach. We conducted the project as a randomized controlled trial, which is the gold standard of scientific research and allows us to compare our supports to business as usual.

Project participants were carefully screened for program eligibility to ensure the highest likelihood of success. Eligibility criteria include: age of recipients, length of time homeless, Canadian citizen or permanent resident, and degree of functionality (mental health and severity of substance and alcohol use). Our goals in designing these criteria were to support participants to the highest degree possible, assess their readiness for change, and reduce any risk of harm.

Fifty individuals were randomly selected to receive a one-time cash transfer of \$7,500. This amount is benchmarked against the annual income assistance rate (2016) in British Columbia. Cash transfers were deposited into participants' bank accounts in one lump sum. This approach is based upon evidence that a lump sum of money has greater potential to transform someone's life than a sequence of small payments (similar to the payment of social assistance).

As an additional support, cash recipients completed a series of workshops involving the development of a personal plan and self-affirmation exercises. Select participants were also offered coaching for a period of six months to support them in developing life skills and strategies.

In total, 115 participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups:

- **Group 1**            \$7,500 + workshop & coaching (N=25)
- **Group 2**            \$7,500 + workshop (no coaching) (N=25)
- **Group 3**            no cash + workshop & coaching (N=19)
- **Group 4**            no cash + no workshop / coaching (N=46)

*The most efficient way to spend money on the homeless might be to give it to them...*

*The Economist, November 4, 2010*



## UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPACT

To evaluate the impact of our approach, we use scientifically validated measures to track participant outcomes over the course of 12 months. Participants complete questionnaires at 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12 months after receiving the cash. To better understand individual experiences, participants also complete open-ended qualitative interviews after 6 and 12 months. Data collection is key to ensuring that our results are valid and concrete.

To date, our impact data indicates that, on average, cash recipients:

- Move into stable housing faster
- Spend fewer days homeless
- Retain over \$1,000 in savings through 12 months
- Increase spending on food, clothing, and rent
- Achieve greater food security
- Made wise financial choices with a 39% reduction in spending on alcohol, cigarettes and drugs
- Reduce reliance on the shelter system of care, resulting in cost savings to society

See **Appendix 2** for a Summary of Impact.

In addition to the summary outcomes, many participants shared powerful stories of change and triumph. When asked about the impact of the cash transfer at the 6-month follow-up, participants described how they used the cash to move beyond homelessness (see sidebar).

*I had hit rock bottom. You couldn't get any lower than where I was. I had no hope and then when the money came and I found housing and then daycare it just all kind of came into place. It was so nice, you know?*

### **NLP Participant**

(edited for length and clarity)

*The impact it had on my life was huge. I was able to do a lot of things that I couldn't do before. It has changed my ability to make proper choices. If I had not received the cash transfer, I wouldn't be able to move out. Wouldn't be able to get my car back on the road. None of that.*

### **NLP Participant**

(edited for length and clarity)

*It helped me solve a lot of issues, for instance (being) homeless that was one of the major things . Now I have a place, I can focus on getting to school, getting that career, focus on my son right? Those are the most important things.*

### **NLP Participant**

(edited for length and clarity)



## WHAT'S NEXT?

We believe that economic inclusion is critical to being able to participate in society and that no one should be left behind. This requires breaking new ground, and compels us to think radically and test innovative solutions that have not been tried before. By supporting our work, you are investing in projects that allows you to directly impact the lives of men, women and children in your community.

Our fundraising goal is \$10 million. This will guarantee our organization's work for three years, allowing us to:

- Build a robust, agile organization to advance innovation for social change.
- Implement an expansion project that would deliver cash transfers to 200+ people experiencing homelessness.
- Develop technology to streamline program delivery and amplify our impact.
- Scale our approach to multiple cities across Canada.
- Work with people living on the margins to develop measurable solutions to poverty that are scientifically based and informed by lived experience.
- Contribute to evidence-based public policy in Canada, the United States, and beyond.
- Help shift perceptions around people living in poverty.

See **Appendix 1** for an overview of our expansion project.



## TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE AN IMPACT

Homelessness can happen to anyone. Many people are just a few paycheques away from couchsurfing, sleeping in their car or ultimately losing their housing. It could also be the result of circumstances like renoviction, an injury on the job, safety or a pandemic. While the economic impact of homelessness costs everyone, ultimately it is the human cost that is so devastating.

People ask, "How can I make a difference to such a complex and overwhelming problem?" Giving to Foundations for Social Change provides you with that opportunity. Our direct giving model clearly demonstrates the profound impact that donors like you can make on the lives of citizens experiencing homelessness.

*"It helped me out a lot. It's given me purpose in life and has given me hope..."* —NLP Participant

With you as a partner, we stand ready to build on our success. Please join us.

Gratefully Yours,



**Claire Elizabeth Williams**

Co-Founder & CEO

Foundations for Social Change

[info@forsocialchange.org](mailto:info@forsocialchange.org)



# Appendix 1

## New Leaf Expansion Project Overview

### WHY EXPAND?

Given the promising signals coming from the pilot, our expansion project in Vancouver and Toronto will build upon lessons learned to further test and refine our approach before scaling to other cities across Canada. The results of this expansion project will fill an important knowledge gap and demonstrate the power of cash transfers to reduce homelessness. Through rigorous research and advocacy, we hope to transform policy for homelessness and poverty reduction in Canada and beyond. By working closely with stakeholders from various sectors of society (i.e., government, community, academia), we will ensure that the insights gained from this research are translated into policy recommendations that lead to real and lasting change.

### THE EXPANSION PROJECT

As with the pilot, the expansion project will be conducted in Metro Vancouver as a randomized controlled trial. We will provide a target of 200 cash transfers to people experiencing homelessness. We will be leveraging community assets and the power of technology to increase the efficiency of our recruitment and research process, as well as render it more inclusive. This will include the design and implementation of an online application process, as well as the development of a project app. In addition, we will also offer all projected 400 participants with free, optional access to a range of non-cash supports, revised from the pilot based upon the feedback from our individual project alumni and Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP). These will include: (1) a chequing account provided through our partnership with Vancity Credit Union, (2) photo-ID replacement, (3) a smartphone and cell service and data plan provided through our partnership with Telus, (4) our unique project app that will support data collection and participant access to local resources and services, (5) informal money management training to strengthen financial skills and knowledge, (6) a peer support program to foster a sense of community and increase participant engagement, and (7) personalized referrals to local services based on individual need (e.g., counselling, affordable healthcare, pet services, housing advocacy, work training, and certification courses).

### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Relationship is one of our guiding principles and our goal is always to tap into the strengths and assets of existing organizations and institutions to maximize results and impact. Leading up to our expansion project, we plan to consult with LEAP and partners in the community, as well as policymakers from provincial and federal government agencies. Consultation with these interdisciplinary partners will help contextualize, validate, and guide our project revision, implementation, and evaluation. To recruit participants, we partnered with organizations and agencies in Metro Vancouver that serve local homeless populations through the following services: shelters, outreach/drop-in centres, neighbourhood houses, community centres, and primary care clinics. When we launch the project and begin recruitment, we intend to leverage the expertise and resources of our partners to connect with potential participants.

Working together with our community partners, we will also establish approximately 9-10 regional community hubs. They will act as meeting spaces for participants to connect with a peer (LEAP member), volunteer, or their connector to complete surveys, network, or troubleshoot tech. We plan to run coffee mornings, onboarding pizza nights, tri-monthly speaker/workshop events at these hubs to enable skills development, information access, and a sense of community and belonging.

### PLANS FOR EVALUATION

Rigorous data collection is key to ensuring that our outcomes are valid and concrete. We have developed a strong evaluation and measurement framework and will use scientifically validated measures to track participant outcomes for 24 months in the following domains: housing stability, employment and income, assets and spending, physical and psychological well-being, food security, and social service use.



# New Leaf Expansion Project Overview

## NEW LEAF EXPANSION PROJECT (2022-24)

200 cash transfers | 200 control (non-cash)

PROJECT OVERVIEW	<b>PROJECT OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>CONDITIONS AND INTERVENTIONS</b>			<b>OUTCOME MEASURES</b>		
	Evaluate the impact of unconditional cash transfers on individuals experiencing homelessness in Metro Vancouver	<b>2 CONDITIONS</b> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; width: 150px; text-align: center;">1 <b>CASH</b></div> <div style="background-color: #ccc; padding: 5px; width: 150px; text-align: center;">2 <b>CONTROL (NON-CASH)</b></div> </div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">FOR BOTH CONDITIONS NON-CASH SUPPORTS</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> PHONE &amp; PLAN</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> PROJECT APP</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> MONEY MANAGEMENT TRAINING</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> CHEQUING ACCOUNT</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> WORKSHOP &amp; PEER SUPPORT</div> </div>			<div style="display: grid; grid-template-columns: repeat(3, 1fr); gap: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> HOUSING STABILITY</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> EMPLOYMENT &amp; INCOME</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> SAVINGS &amp; SPENDING</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> PHYSICAL &amp; PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> FOOD SECURITY</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> SOCIAL SERVICE USE</div> </div>		
ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES	<b>SHORT TERM</b> <small>(0-6 months)</small>	<b>MEDIUM TERM</b> <small>(6 months - 2 years)</small>	<b>LONG TERM</b> <small>(2 - 5 years)</small>				
	 PARTICIPANTS	Financial security, housing stability, greater food security, increased spending, improved cognitive abilities	Enhanced social & community connections, improved employability, access to education opportunities	Sustained cost savings and increased economic participation (e.g., employment, education, community involvement)			
	 RESEARCH	Better understanding of the impact of cash transfers on homelessness reduction	A catalyst for generating interdisciplinary, cross-sector collaborations	Create new large-scale, cash-based interventions (e.g., universal basic income) to end homelessness and promote economic inclusion			
 SOCIETY	Offer a new form of cash-based assistance to existing services	Positive spillover effects to wider friends, family & community, increasing resilience during a time of continued uncertainty	Use evidence base around cash transfers to reduce homelessness and position us to scale our approach nationally and across North America.				
OUR PARTNERS							



## Appendix 2

### Summary of Impact (Top 6)

The results below show the impact of the cash transfer through 12 months.

We have combined Groups 1 and 2 (cash) and Groups 3 and 4 (non-cash) for these analyses to show the impact of the cash transfer. These results will undergo peer review in the next year.

Compared to their non-cash counterparts, cash recipients saw greater improvements in housing stability, savings, spending, food security, executive function, spending on temptation goods, and reliance on social services. These impacts represent real changes in people's lives, and our Top 6 Impacts are illustrated below.

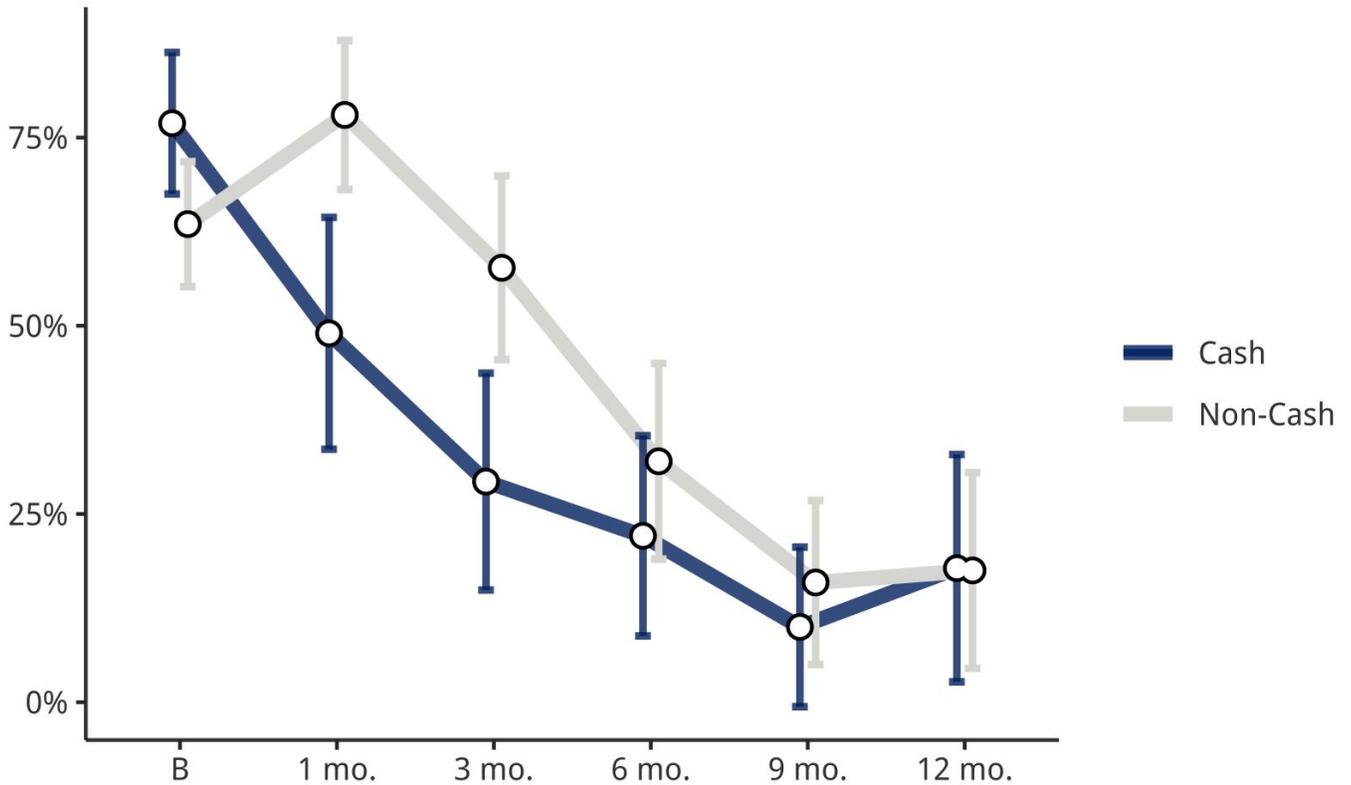
These positive signals coming from our preliminary data compel us to continue advocating direct cash transfers as a tool to transform the lives of people experiencing homelessness.



# Appendix 2

## Cont'd

### 1. DAYS HOMELESS



#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- For the **cash** group, days homeless **dropped** from **77%** to **49%** in the first month
- Meanwhile, the **non-cash** group **increased** from **64%** to **78%**.
- Cash recipients **move out of homelessness faster**; the non-cash group does not catch up for 12 months
- The cash group spent **4,396 fewer nights homeless** over 12 months

#### WHY THIS MATTERS:

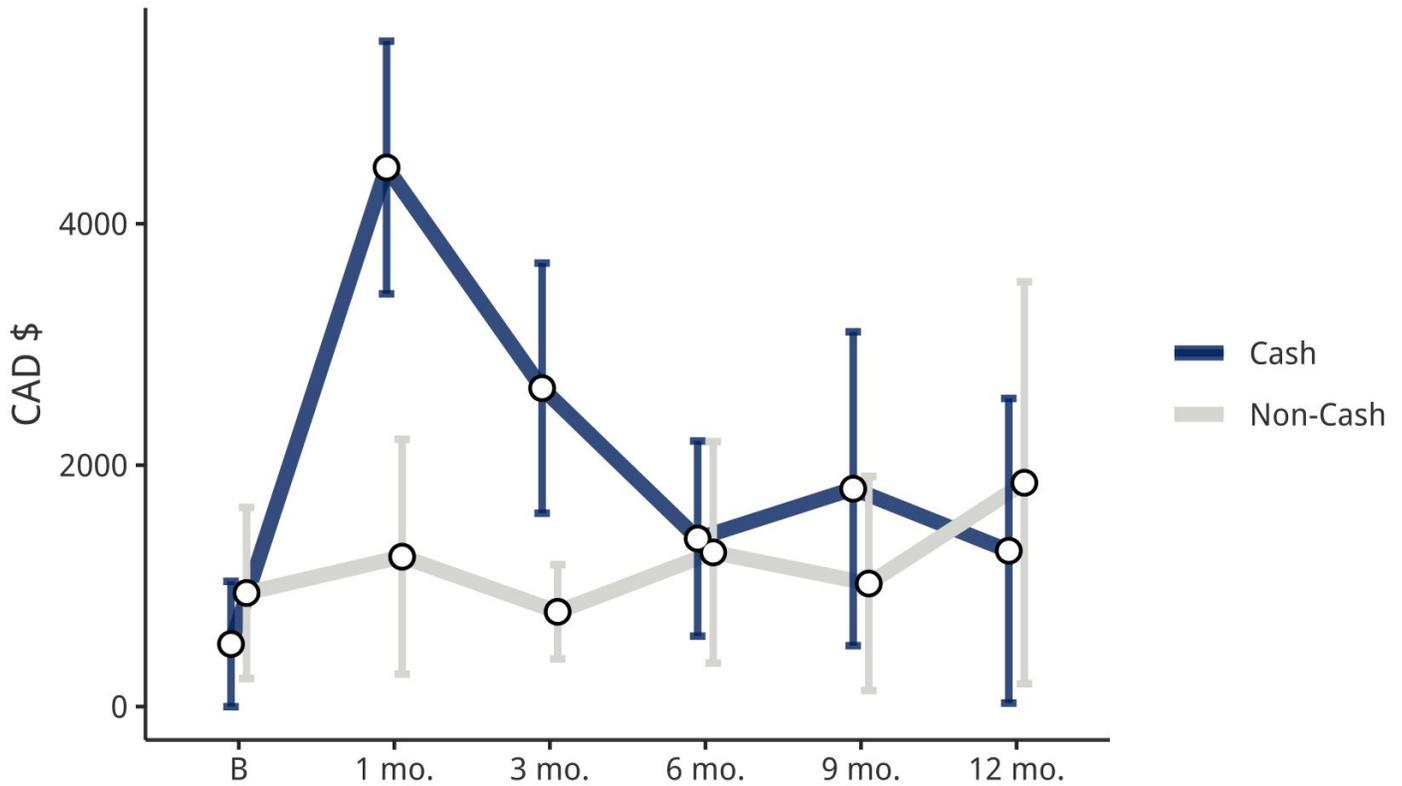
- Moving out of a shelter into housing provides stability, reduces the risk of experiencing trauma, improves health and frees up shelter beds for others in need
- Financial constraints may be keeping people from moving beyond homelessness



# Appendix 2

## Cont'd

### 2. MONEY MANAGEMENT



#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- After **1 month**, cash recipients have an additional **\$4,000** in savings
- Cash recipients **retain** roughly **\$1,000** through **12 months**
- Savings for the non-cash group remain mostly flat

#### WHY THIS MATTERS:

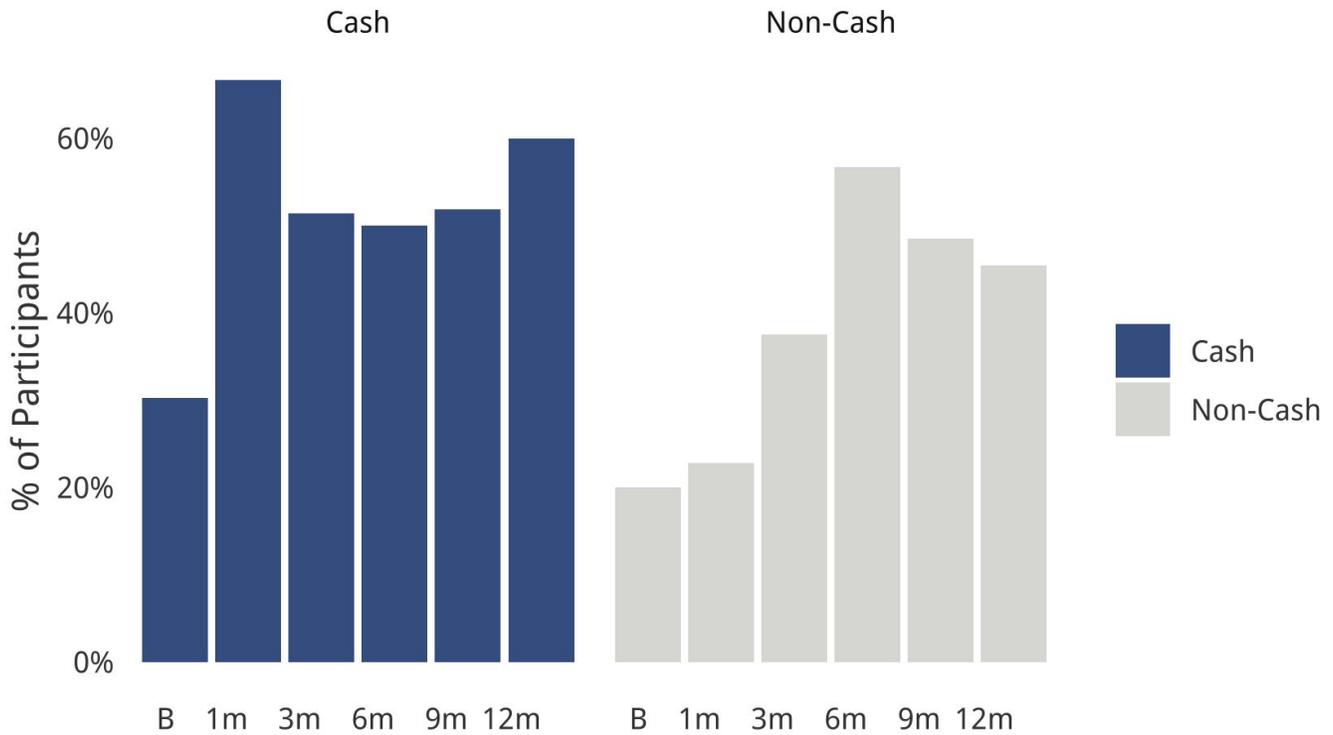
- This challenges assumptions about impulsive spending
- Cash recipients do not spend the money all at once, and instead retain a significant amount over 1 year
- The degree of saving is particularly impressive given the high cost of living in Vancouver



# Appendix 2

## Cont'd

### 3. FOOD SECURITY



#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- **67% of cash recipients are food secure after 1 month, an increase of 37 percentage points from baseline**
- The non-cash group only increases 2 percentage points during the same period
- Cash recipients maintain **greater food security** across the full **12 months**

#### WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Food security is critical for health and well-being
- Cash transfers promote and sustain food security, and empower individuals with choice



## Appendix 2

### Cont'd

#### 4. FINANCIAL CHOICES



#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- Over 12 months, cash recipients reduce spending on goods such as alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs

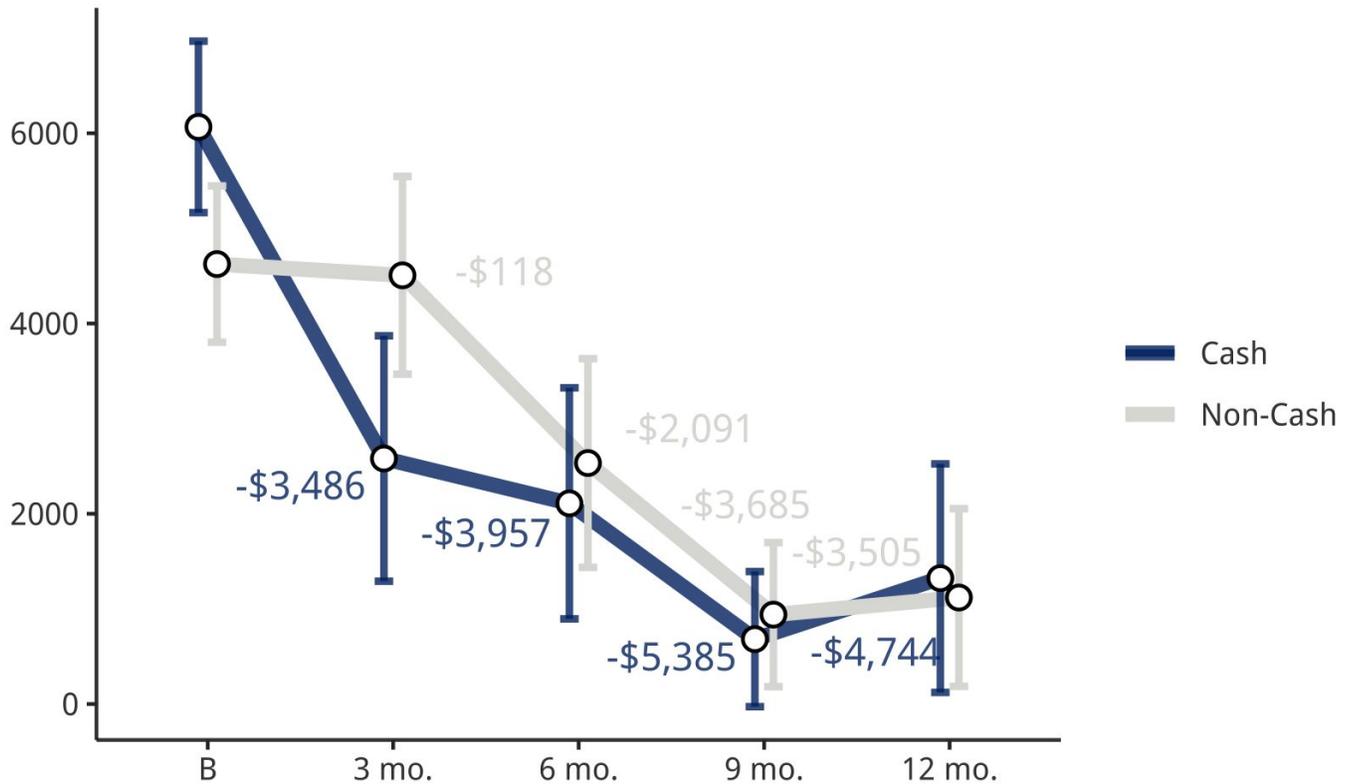
#### WHY THIS MATTERS:

- There is a widespread misperception that people in poverty will spend money they receive on goods such as alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs
- This finding challenges such misperception, demonstrating that participants reduce their spending on temptation goods after receiving cash transfers



## Appendix 2 Cont'd

### 5. COST OF SHELTER USE



#### WHAT THIS MEANS:

- Cash recipients **saved** a total of **\$17,571** compared to their baseline shelter use
- Non-cash participants **only** saved **\$9,399** compared to their baseline shelter use
- In total, cash recipients **saved** an **additional \$8,172** compared to non-cash participants

#### WHY THIS MATTERS:

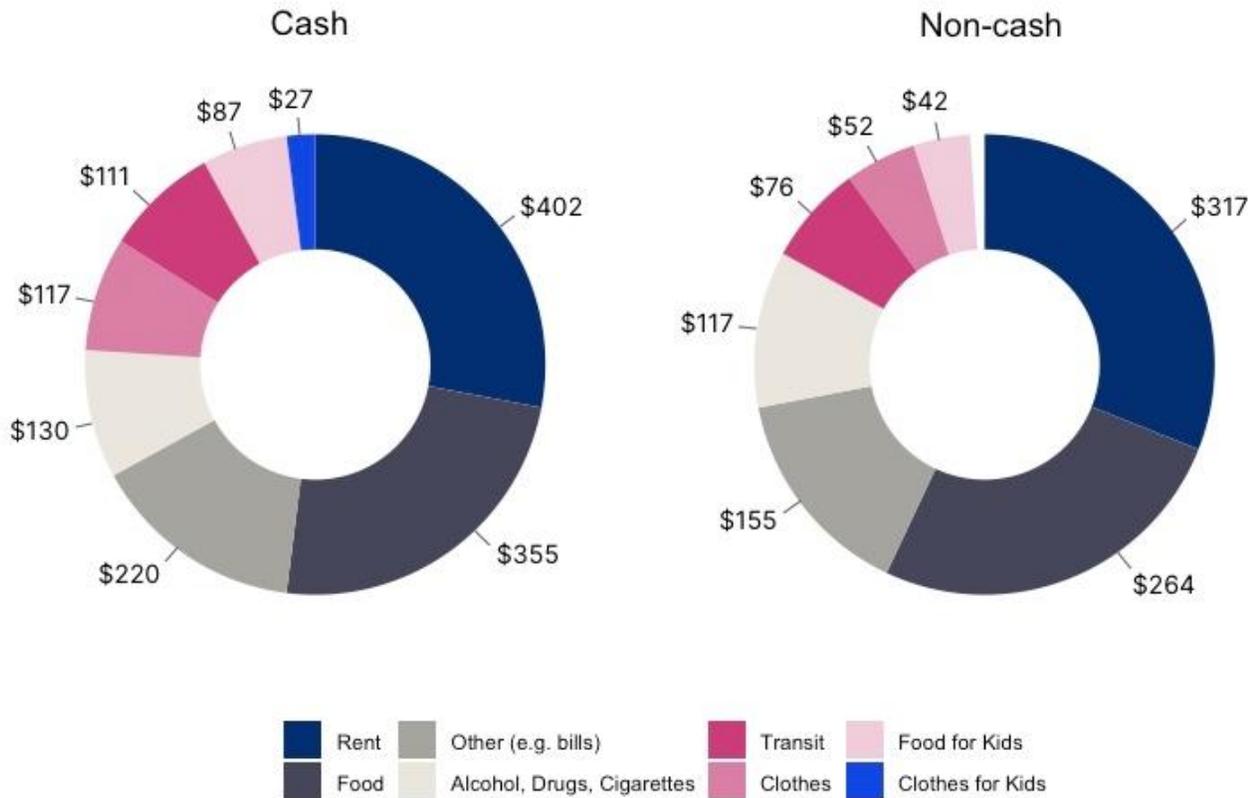
- By empowering individuals to meet their own needs, the cash transfer reduced reliance on social services
- The cost savings after 12 months pays off the cost of the cash transfer
- Thus, cash transfers save money, making them a powerful tool to combat homelessness



# Appendix 2

## Cont'd

### 6. MONTHLY SPENDING OVER 12-MONTHS



**WHAT THIS MEANS:**

- Overall, **cash recipients spent more** money in each category
- Most spending was devoted to **rent, food, and other recurring expenditures like bills**
- Some cash participants also used the money to purchase **food and clothing** for their **children**

**WHY THIS MATTERS:**

- Cash transfers provided choice and enabled people to buy more goods, helping them meet their basic needs
- Counter to some stereotypes, participants spent their money on essential items
- Food and clothing for children can be critical for the development of low-income children



# Appendix 3

## WHO WE ARE

Foundations for Social Change is led by a team of combined expertise in social impact, partnership development, research and policy, behavioural sustainability, organizational management and finance.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Frans Tjallingii** (Chair), Founder & Managing Partner, 7 Generation Capital; Board Chair, PRPA; Co-Founder, Foundations for Social Change

**Caroline Bonesky**, CEO, WJS Canada

**Patti Schom-Moffatt**, Principal & Chief Strategist, PSM Ventures

**Praveen K. Varshney**, Principal, Varshney Capital Corp.

**Jacqueline Koerner**, Co-Founder & Co-Chair, Ecotrust Canada

**Beier Cai**, Co-Founder & CTO, Commit

## LEADERSHIP TEAM

**Claire Elizabeth Williams**, MA; Co-Founder, Foundations for Social Change

**Heather Hay**, RN, MA, MSC(A); COO & Acting CEO

**Alice Hopkins**, MSC; Research and Design Manager

**Hani Lee**, BA; Strategic Partnerships Manager

**Ray Bonnetrouge**, LEAP Co-Chair & Peer Coordinator

## RESEARCH TEAM

**Dr. Jiaying Zhao**, PhD; Canada Research Chair; Professor, Department of Psychology, UBC; Principal Investigator

**Ryan Dwyer**, MA, PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, UBC; Research Partner

**Dr. Anita Palepu**, MD, MPH, FRCPC, FACP; Professor of Medicine and Head of the Division of Internal Medicine, UBC; Co-Investigator

## KNOWLEDGE PHILANTHROPISTS

### LEAP members (anonymous)

Janice Ma

Flora Yang

John Hwang

John Kim

Kenneth Ong

Lukas Guderjahn

Jeffrey Wong

Maxim Isakov

Sarah Keating

Sayema Badar

Shoshana Coodin

Ivan Chiang

