

Drayton Valley's Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program: Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence for Return on Investment



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Drayton Valley's Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program

Executive Summary

This report shares the results of an assessment of the economic benefits of the Drayton Valley Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program. The goal of this assessment was to determine whether the TAB program is helping local people develop skills that enable them to build careers locally and in jobs that provide higher incomes and benefits compared to their pre-TAB employment.

The TAB program is undeniably a strong local economic development strategy. TAB recipients are now filling good, in-demand local jobs that are needed for people to live healthy and full lives in the community. TAB recipients are earning more income than before their TAB training and building skilled careers, moving from lower paying roles primarily in retail and food service into more skilled roles primarily in healthcare, early learning and child care, and other social services. They have also moved from being unemployed or working part-time to full-time employment. Consequently, residents have more stable jobs that are likely more lucrative than reported through the addition of some non-wage benefits (e.g., pension; dental and medical; maternity, parental or caregiver leaves; sick days and vacation days). These extra dollars earned are also circulating back into the Drayton Valley economy. We know that for every additional dollar attained through increased pay, individuals will spend some portion of that dollar locally on goods and services. For example, in the context of the nursing and residential care sector in Alberta, that means that for every additional \$1,000 in household income gained by someone working in this sector, \$849 of additional value is created across the economy and likely directly in the community through increased use of local shops and services. Out of the 102 TAB recipients, we believe only two have left the community. TAB recipients want to live and raise their families in Drayton Valley, further amplifying the local investment in the TAB program.

Finally, TAB has benefits that extend beyond measurable impacts to the local labour market. TAB participant experiences highlight how accessible, local education enriches both participants' lives and the lives of those around them. With TAB assistance, individuals can pursue personally rewarding careers, overcome financial barriers to education, and inspire others to pursue their own post-secondary training. Their experiences demonstrate that investments in education create broad social outcomes that enrich the community in diverse, if intangible, ways.

Drayton Valley's Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program

1. Introduction

This report shares the results of an assessment of the economic benefits of the Drayton Valley Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program. The goal of this assessment was to find out whether the TAB program is helping local people earn skills that enable them to develop careers locally and in jobs that provide improved incomes and benefits compared to their pre-TAB employment conditions.

2. People Are Filling Good Local Jobs

From the day they started their TAB training, every person who responded to our post-training employment survey had found work in their new field within one to two years. Many of them now work for well-known local employers, sometimes called “anchor employers” because they are large, stable organizations that the community depends on. These include:

- Drayton Valley Hospital
- Points West Living (Senior Care)
- Seasons Retirement Residence
- Brazeau Foundation
- Breton Continuing Care
- Drayton Valley Early Childhood Development Centre
- Opportunity Home Addiction Treatment & Recovery
- The Town of Drayton Valley

Most participants are now working in healthcare, early learning and child care, and other social services. These are jobs needed in Drayton Valley, and TAB has provided local people with the skills to fill them.

For example, the TAB program has strengthened community capacity by helping address workforce shortages in one of Drayton Valley's most essential sectors—early learning and child care. Since the introduction of TAB, graduates of the Early Learning and Child Care program have contributed to the growth of six local early learning and child care facilities, compared to just one in 2019. The resulting increase in qualified Level 2 and Level 3 Early Childhood Educators has positioned the region more favourably than many parts of Alberta, where shortages of qualified educators continue to limit access to child care.

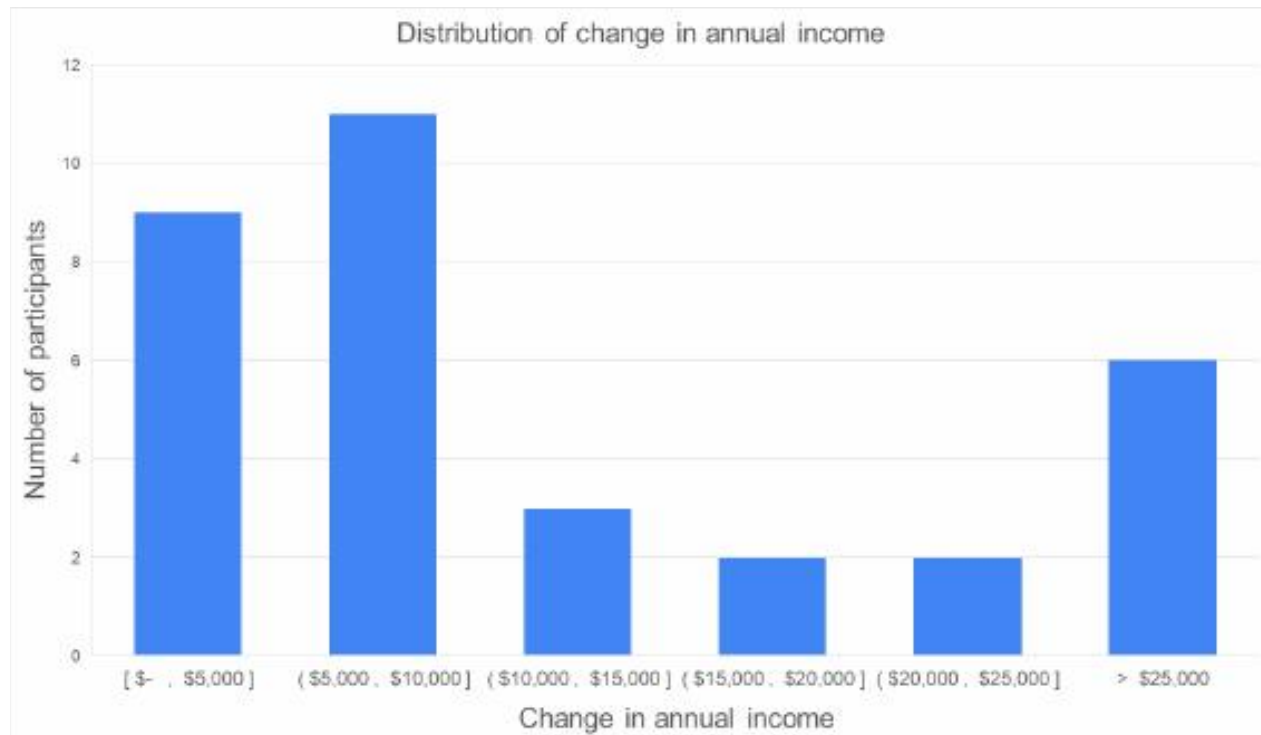
When local people can fill a role, they are more likely to stay in the community.

3. People are earning more

After completing the program, every survey respondent reported a higher income compared to their pre-training income. While some saw small increases, others earned much larger increases. The lowest reported increase was about \$1,500 per year, and the largest reported increase was nearly \$30,000 per year (Figure 1). On average, participants now earn \$11,601 more per year than before the program. The typical (median) participant earns \$7,022 more per year. Most participants gained between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year in income. One individual with an income gain of \$70,100 post-training was excluded from the above analysis as an outlier; it was felt that this experience was outside what would typically be expected from participation in the program

and would unduly influence the results. However, it does showcase the potential of TAB to build careers, invest in community leaders, and transform lives.

Figure 1: Distribution of annual income gains



4. People Are Building Skilled Careers

The table below shows real examples of the kind of change the program made possible. Many participants moved from lower-paying jobs in retail and food service into skilled roles in health care and early childhood education, often earning \$5 to \$10 more per hour.

Table 1: Examples of changes jobs and wages for TAB participants

Wage in Previous Role, Pre-TAB		Wage in Current Role, Post-TAB
\$15.00 – IGA	→	\$20.95 – Points West Care Facility
\$16.00 – Dairy Queen	→	\$22.70 – Points West Care Facility
\$16.00 – Fast Food Restaurant	→	\$27.87 – Hospital
\$16.00 – Dance Studio	→	\$23.43 – Seasons Retirement Facility
\$16.10 – Independent Grocer	→	\$23.60 – Serenity House Care Facility
\$16.80 – Dollarama	→	\$25.14 – Hospital
\$17.00 – A&W	→	\$26.49 – Hospital
\$17.15 – Walmart	→	\$22.70 – Points West Care Facility
\$20.00 – Janitorial	→	\$28.72 – Hospital
\$21.00 – Education Assistant	→	\$29.24 – Hospital
\$21.80 – Scotiabank	→	\$30.62 – Hospital
\$22.00 – Tim Hortons	→	\$31.47 – Hospital
\$15-18 – Multiple Jobs	→	\$26.49 – Hospital
\$00.00 – Unemployed	→	\$27.08 – Early Childhood Education
\$19.00 – Restaurant	→	\$23.00 – Early Childhood Education

5. People Have More Full-Time, Stable Jobs, Likely with Benefits

The program made a significant difference to the kinds of jobs people now have. Many people have moved from part-time employment to full-time employment. And all participants who provided us with data are now working in their field of training. Thirty-three TAB participants provided us with pre- and post-training employment status data. Prior to TAB participation, only 27% (n=9) of participants were in full-time work, while 61% (n=20) of participants were in part-time work, and 12% (n=4) of participants were unemployed. And just 21% (n=7) were working in lower-paying health-related roles while 79% (n=26) were working in roles outside the health sector (e.g., retail, food-service). Following TAB participation, the changes in employment status are notable, with 52% (n=17) of participants now in full-time work, almost twice as many as before participation. Notably, 100% of participants who were unemployed prior to TAB are now in work, and no participants are unemployed following TAB participation.

Table 2: Pre- and post-TAB employment status (N=33)

	Pre-TAB	Post-TAB
Full-time employment	9 (27%)	17 (52%)
Part-time employment	20 (61%)	16 (48%)
Unemployed	4 (12%)	0 (0%)
Working in health sector	7 (21%)	33 (100%)
Working in other sector	26 (79%)	0 (0%)

In addition to the increased income, many individuals have moved jobs that offer non-wage benefits that will be superior to those they had working in retail or food services sectors, although we did not collect this data from participants. However, 84.7%¹ of people working in the health support services sector in Alberta receive at least one benefit from a group including employer-sponsored pension plans, dental, medical, and life insurance plans, leave entitlements, such as maternity, parental or caregiver leave and sick days and vacation days. This compares to 53.4%² for retail clerks and 44.5%³ for fast-food service attendants. While we cannot make estimates of the monetary value of improved non-wage benefits based on our data, we expect that some individuals described in Figure 2 that moved from fast-food or retail work into the health sector will have seen improvements in their non-wage benefits as well as increases in income.

6. The Economic Return To Drayton Valley Will Keep Growing

Between 2019 and 2025, we estimate that the program produced a combined income gain of nearly \$500,000 across all participants (Figure 3). During the first year of TAB no changes in income are observed, as individuals are in their training program. Once people begin working, the training costs are quickly recovered through increases in annual income. Importantly, training costs are incurred only once per participant, but any increase in income for the participant benefits them for as long as they remain in their new employment. The value the program returns to the community will continue to grow. The red line in Figure 3 (cumulative income gains) is rising faster than the blue dashed line (cumulative program costs), and is projected to continue growing.

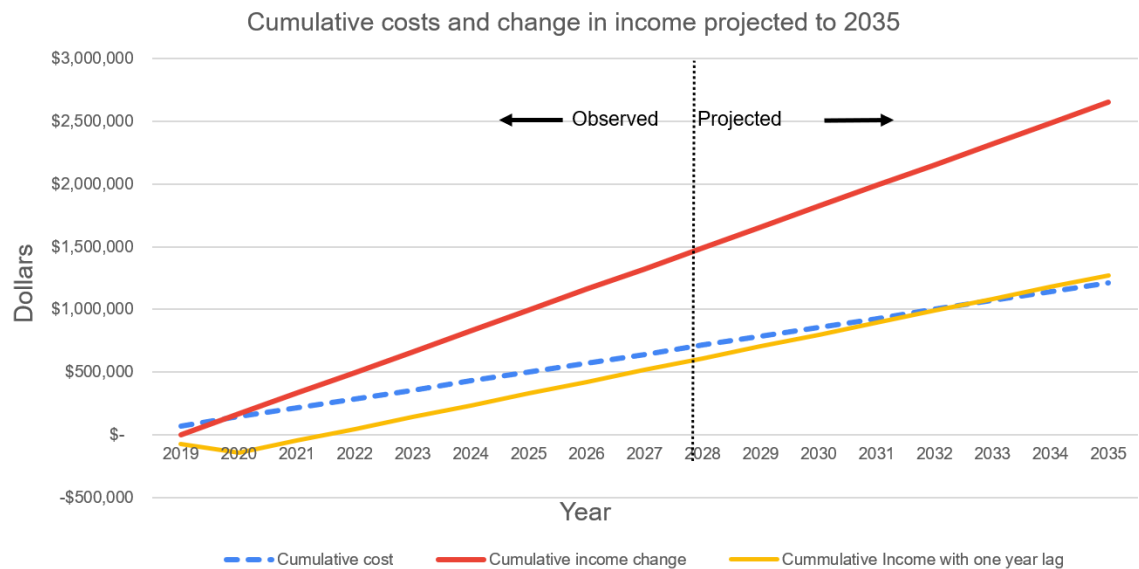
¹ <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/4565/AB>

² <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/20628/AB>

³ <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/wages-occupation/17223/AB>

It is important to note several assumptions that were made when estimating the total and projected increases in income. First, we assumed that participants all found work in their field shortly after their training. In practice, TAB participants took varying, but unknown lengths of time before taking up new roles. If we instead assume a one-year delay in employment for all TAB participants, measured from their first day of training, then the time required for the program to be cost-neutral is longer (the yellow line in Figure 3). These estimates relate only to the direct benefit to TAB participants however; taking into account income multiplier effects (see Section 7 below) the gains to the community will be substantially higher, and the time to cost neutrality will shorten.

Figure 3: Observed and projected financial benefits for TAB participants



7. Drayton Valley Benefits, Not Just TAB Participants

It is not just the TAB participants who benefit from the program. While it is beyond the scope of this report to conduct a full benefit-cost analysis of the program, it is known that changes in labour income through an increase in wages generate value greater than the value of the amount invested. For every additional dollar invested through increased pay, individuals will spend some portion of that dollar locally on goods and services, adding further value to the local economy. In the nursing and residential care sector in Alberta it is estimated⁴ that every dollar of investment generates an additional \$0.849 dollars of total value. That means that for every additional \$1,000 in household income gained by someone working in this sector, \$849 of additional value is created across the economy. And much of this value may be generated directly in the community through increased use of local shops and services.

⁴ Table 3: Alberta Total Multipliers With Safety Net (Industries), Closed Model – Direct, Indirect and Induced Impacts. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/47490b9d-5805-4be3-8174-068d72ec9101/resource/5fee810f-d4ef-4d66-8108-a6fb6a016e59/download/tbf-alberta-economic-multipliers-2022.pdf>

8. Beyond Income: Outcomes That Are Harder to Measure

While increased wages and employment are important indicators of the program's success, participants also described benefits that are not captured through economic data alone. Participants described being able to pursue their professional goals because of the support offered through TAB. For example, one said: "it's like when I got here, I got the job that I dream of. I saw the town daycare (ECDC). I was like, I want to work there someday. Then it happened." Another participant explained that they had seen TAB open doors for others, as well as for themselves:

"[TAB] is really good, and it's really helpful for me. Even with some of my workmates in the daycare. I hope this will continue to help other people. Without this, I don't know if most people who have dreams of being someone or getting their goals, I don't know if they would be able to go achieve those goals or dreams."

For many, the jobs that TAB opened to them didn't just mean higher pay, but also gave them purpose through helping others:

"I was looking for a career instead of a job. Looking for connection in something that I was going to make a difference in."

"I didn't just want to be a receptionist. I wanted to be able to help the community, help organizations. Job placements—if they're struggling with—'hey, I don't know how to do my finances,' or 'hey, I have to close my doors because I don't know how to keep things organized'. I want to go out and help people with their businesses to keep succeeding."

"I was an interior designer by trade, but it just wasn't really fulfilling."

Participants agreed that without TAB, they wouldn't have been able to pursue further education because of financial constraints. TAB itself was key to knocking down barriers and allowing participants to achieve goals previously considered unrealistic. When asked if they would have done their programs without TAB, participants said:

"No. I'm a single parent now so that is a hard no."

'It was definitely a stumbling block, without the [Tuition Assistance Bursary]. It was something that I always wanted to do, but I always had to put [it] on the back burner."

"Probably not because, just because out of pocket, it can be quite costly."

"On that financial scale—it could be a big barrier for moms. They don't want to spend money on themselves. I think anybody who's over 40, if they want, can change their career (...) with [TAB] I think anybody can do it!"

For some participants, finances weren't the only barrier that needed to be overcome. Some participants had previous post-secondary education experiences, but others came from families and backgrounds where post-secondary was neither encouraged nor expected. As one participant said, when asked about how post-

secondary education was talked about at home when they were young, “growing up, it really wasn't. My mom, like my dad, just got grade six schooling, so we never really talked about doing anything, any schooling really.” For those unfamiliar with post-secondary schooling, the ability to undertake education while remaining in one’s community is important, removing risk for first generation post-secondary students.

Lastly, participants talked about how TAB provided inspiration to others in participants’ social circles to pursue their own goals and professional ambitions. That is, TAB helps promote a culture of education broadly across the community, impacting more individuals than just those who receive bursaries:

“[My husband] is now restarting his apprenticeship. Because he's like, okay, if you can do this, if all you ladies can do this, I can do this too. So we've inspired him to go back to school.”

“My 13 year old, she knows she wants to be a nurse. She knows and then, you know, she sees my textbook. And she's like, this is so cool.”

While the above quotes offer a broad picture of the intangible benefits of TAB, each individual TAB participant also has their own story of the immediate impact that TAB has had for them. Just a few of these stories are documented in Table 3.

Table 3: TAB’s intangible benefits, with participant examples

TAB Participants’ Stories	
A fresh start and leadership opportunity	A single mother increased her annual income from approximately \$23,500 to more than \$93,000 and was hired as the Executive Director of Drayton Valley’s first addiction recovery centre before completing her program.
Keeping family together during hardship	A recently widowed mother caring for her mother following a stroke, used the \$5,000 TAB bursary to complete Health Care Aide training, modify her home, and keep her family together during a difficult period.
Stability, time, and well-being	A single mom facing burnout and depression from juggling 4 jobs used the Business Administration certificate to land a stable job with benefits. She now has time for herself, her family, and her friends.
Resilience and growth	One TAB participant had to put her Addictions Counselling certification on hold when she faced a life-threatening illness. The education was on hold, but the goal remained. After recovering, she returned to her studies and landed a job at the local addiction recovery centre.
A new beginning, safety, and purpose	For a newcomer from Ukraine, TAB allowed her to restart her career through the Early Education Certification. She was able to stop waitressing and earn money in the same daycare her son attended, allowing them both to safely build their lives “...without bombs going off.”

The above illustrates that TAB’s investment in accessible, local learning has important social and emotional benefits in addition to measurable economic benefits. Participants described gaining stability during periods of significant personal hardship that strengthened family relationships, improved their mental well-being, and renewed their purpose through meaningful careers. Their experiences demonstrate that investments in education create broader social and community outcomes that strengthen Drayton Valley in ways that extend beyond labour market participation.

9. TAB Inspires New Approaches to Workforce Development

Reliable, affordable access to well-trained childcare is essential to workforce development. It enables both parents to participate in the labour market when necessary, supports household financial stability, and provides employers with a larger and more dependable labour pool. In resource-based communities, where economic cycles fluctuate between periods of boom and bust, access to reliable child care is even more fundamental to workforce participation. Yet rural and remote communities often struggle to find qualified staff for early learning and care that matches existing and potential demand. Investments in early learning and child care can therefore generate benefits that extend well beyond the sector itself, strengthening the overall resilience and productivity of rural economies.

Building on this success, an Early Learning and Child Care mentorship model is currently being developed through partnerships established through the TAB program with local employers, educational institutions, and community organizations. The model is being explored as a regional approach to workforce development and has the potential to position Drayton Valley as an innovative leader in integrated, place-based community development. Rather than responding to labour shortages after they occur, this approach demonstrates how communities can proactively strengthen local workforce pipelines, build community wealth, support families and employers, and foster long-term economic resilience.

10. Conclusion

Although these outcomes are difficult to assign a monetary value, they represent meaningful returns on investment for the community. Increased family stability, improved health and well-being, stronger local leadership, successful newcomer integration, and a more resilient workforce all contribute to Drayton Valley's long-term social and economic sustainability. Together, these stories demonstrate that the benefits of the TAB program extend well beyond increased earnings—they strengthen the capacity of individuals, families, employers, and the community as a whole.