



**FROM CUSTODY
TO COMMUNITY:**
EARLY-STAGE SUCCESSES
OF THE NORTHSTAR
TORONTO SOUTH
PRE-RELEASE PILOT
PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

“This program changed my mindset from thinking now that I am in jail and my future is over to thinking about building a real future. A step to a better future with NorthStar.”

– NorthStar Client



According to Public safety Canada, lack of effective pre-release supports create greater risk of recidivism, emphasizing the vital need for strong reintegration programs.¹ Too often, individuals are released from incarceration without the robust preparation, direction, or continuity of support required to navigate the complex transition/reintegration back into community life. This places an additional strain on public safety measures and increases risks for reoffending and recidivism.

“Post-release, barriers to work and housing prevent people who experience incarceration from economic and social participation, and incarceration in Canada leads to vastly disproportionate poor social, economic, physical health, and mental health outcomes.”²

The NorthStar Toronto South Pre-Release Pilot Program is a tailored intervention program developed by the Oaks Revitalization Association (ORA) in partnership with the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

Designed to complement and extend traditional pre-release programs, NorthStar targets one of the most underserved points in the justice system: the period immediately before release. It responds to limited pre-release supports and fragmented reintegration pathways in Toronto by introducing more intentional, transition-focused support.

NorthStar works with individuals prior to release to provide critical, wraparound supports that help address stigma and discrimination. The program rebuilds confidence, strengthens social support systems, and closes gaps in practical employment assistance. NorthStar supports a more stable transition from custody back into community living.

This report documents the Program’s participant experiences and assesses early outcomes of the NorthStar Pre-Release Pilot at Toronto South Detention Centre. It provides early insight into who the program is reaching, what participants experience through the program’s learning environment, and how NorthStar is influencing readiness for prison release and future outlook in the community.

The findings are early stage results. Further research is required to determine the full impact of the Pilot Program. However, ORA’s current assessment (as formed through first-person testimonies provided by Program participants), is that the Program is of immense value and is opening the doors to learning new life and employment readiness skills for eventual release from prison.

As the NorthStar Program continues to grow and expand, the ORA has an important opportunity to track elements of the Program that generate the greatest impact, particularly in supporting people in custody to feel prepared to lead transformed and aspirational lives in the community.

Subsequent reports emerging from the Pilot Program will examine outcomes in greater depth, offer potential policy and practice recommendations, and contribute to broader conversations about approaches to better prepare people for release.

As an initial analysis of ORA’s work, this report documents early-stage findings from the Pre-Release Program and establishes a practice benchmark that can be built upon.

¹ [The Social Reintegration of Offenders and Crime Prevention, Public Safety Canada, 2022.](#)

² Shawn McAleese, “Job Search, Suspended: Changes to Canada’s Pardon Program and the Impact on Finding Employment,” in *After Prison: Navigating Employment and Reintegration*, ed. Rose Ricciardelli and Adelle M. Forth Peters, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017;

TORONTO SOUTH PRE-RELEASE PILOT PROGRAM AIMS

There are two foundational factors that guide the NorthStar program:

1. The reintegration process of confidence building, mentorship, release-readiness, which must start inside the incarceration facility, several months prior to release.
2. Upon release there should be a seamless transition into several months of post-release programming focused on tactical skills building, vocation training, housing, mental health, and employment readiness support.

NorthStar began as a pilot program at the Toronto South Detention Centre in August, 2025. The focus was to create new correctional reintegration approaches that:

1. **Reduce Recidivism**
2. **Improve Pre-Release Readiness**
3. **Establish Continuity of Support**
4. **Strengthen Personal Accountability and Decision-Making**
5. **Remove Practical Barriers to Reintegration**
6. **Create Pathways to Long-Term Stability**

NorthStar was designed to create a clear pathway to success for incarcerated individuals approaching release, with continued integration support once they return to the community. The program's reintegration model focuses on building confidence and readiness prior to release, while demonstrating how structured, wraparound post-release supports can contribute to meaningful reductions in recidivism. Through ORA's mentorship, customized curriculum, and practical guidance, participants develop accountability, increase self-awareness, and prepare for successful community reintegration while still in custody.

EARLY-STAGE FINDINGS

The early success of the NorthStar program presents an opportunity to learn about critical factors that will contribute to current and future program adaptations and inform the process by which current pre-release systems, strategies, and polices may be adapted. Based on participant feedback, survey findings, and ORA's staff insights, the following early stage findings are offered to strengthen and sustain the NorthStar Program as it continues to evolve

1. Mentorship and Discussion are Crucial to Pre-Release Preparedness and Confidence Building

When asked, participants consistently identified open dialogue, discussion, and relationship-based mentorship as central to their engagement and learning. The strong sense of psychological safety, evidenced by high comfort levels in asking questions and sharing perspectives, suggests this approach is a key driver of program effectiveness. It is recommended that NorthStar continue to prioritize adult-learning approaches facilitated through discussion, and practical tools and examples. As adult learners, lecture-based or standardized delivery formats are likely to minimize the potential for full dialogue, discovery, and learning among participants.

2. Post-Release Support is as Important as Pre-Release Support

While participants in the Program reported strong confidence, motivation, and readiness for release, responses related to employment and training confidence showed slightly more variation. This suggests an opportunity to build structured post-release follow-up, including mentorship check-ins, referrals to resources, and navigation support during the critical first months after release.

3. Expand Employment and Training Pathway Connections

Nearly 80% of participants strongly agreed that they gained skills relevant to future employment. This suggests strong potential to expand pre-release partnerships with employers, training providers, and credentialing bodies to create clearer pathways from custody into the community. Strengthening these pathways could help translate participants' confidence and skill development into tangible opportunities for long-term economic stability.

4. Younger Adults Need Tailored Planning and Guidance

With most participants between the ages 25 and 30 years, NorthStar is successfully reaching individuals at a life stage where appropriate tailored guidance, accountability, and planning have resonant impact. Maintaining focus on the 18-30 year age bracket, while remaining open to broader age ranges ensures resources are directed where they are likely to produce the greatest pre-release support preventative recidivism benefit.

NORTHSTAR PROGRAM PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS: CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVE

“If someone asked me what NorthStar is like I would tell them it is a program that prepares you for a life that brings peace and comfort to us and our families.”

– NorthStar Client

A structured 24-question survey was administered to 35 participants enrolled in the NorthStar Program at the Toronto South Detention Centre. Five ORA staff were involved in the implementation of the program. The survey was distributed to clients who were actively participating in the program and approaching release. Due to the controlled correctional environment, all surveys were administered in person and on paper within the facility.

Participants completed the survey in a supervised group setting. To ensure accessibility and consistency, each question was read aloud to the group, allowing participants of varying literacy levels and learning styles to fully understand the questions. Participants then completed the surveys independently, without assistance or discussion, and recorded their own responses.

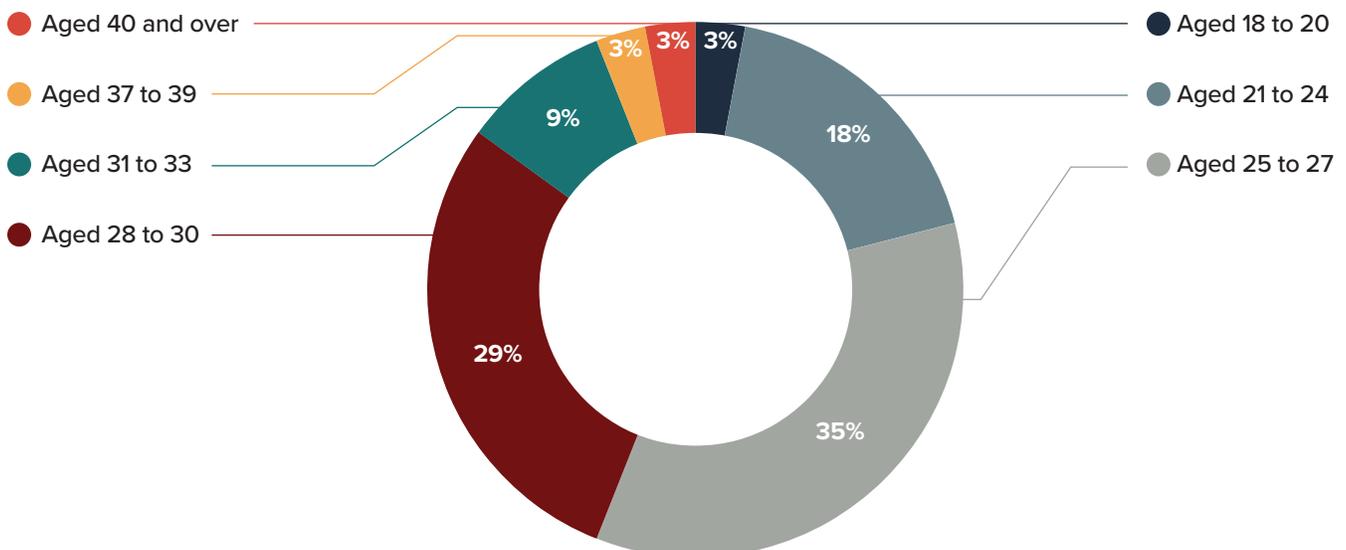
Statistics presented in this report refer to the total number of participants who completed the survey. As not all respondents answered every question, some figures reference only those who fully completed specific sections of the survey. All completed surveys were collected on paper within the Toronto South Detention Centre and analyzed to assess participant outcomes and program impact.

“The purpose of this program is to impact simple lessons on life through historical events as much as the current landscape of this generation that is prevalent, hence the targeted aged demographic.”

– NorthStar Client

Northstar Program Participate Age Groups

Most participants are young adults, with about 82% between the ages of 25 and 30. Many are in their mid-twenties (25 to 27), a stage of life where decisions around education, work, and direction can have a lasting impact. This shows the program is reaching people at a moment when guidance and support matter most.

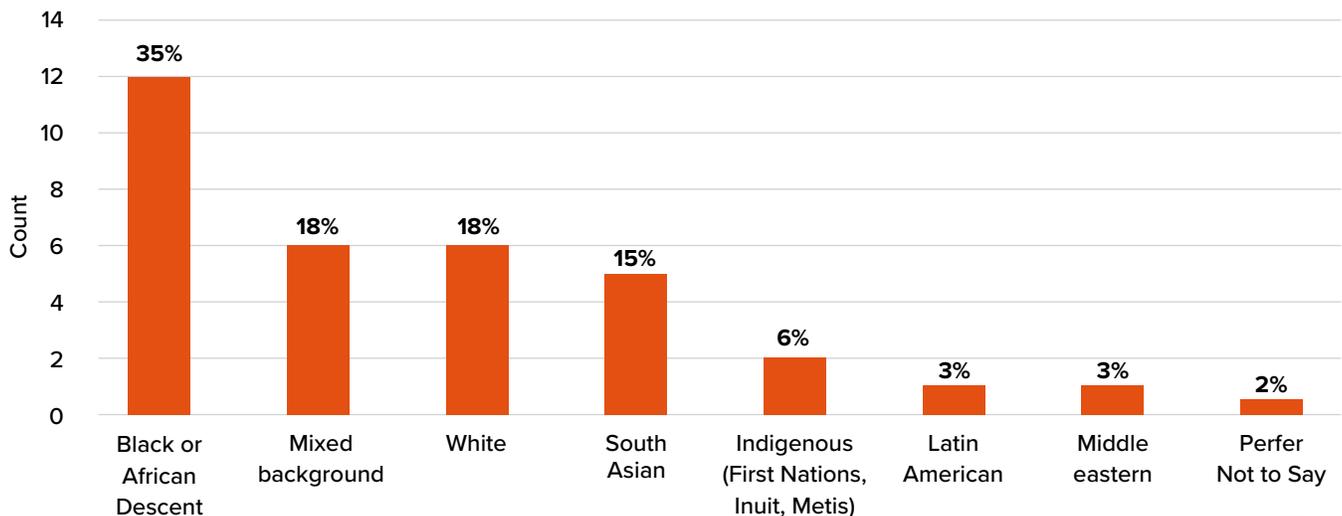


“I wish I met the facilitators before making the mistakes I’ve made that led me to where I am at right now. I feel like they help a lot of young men like myself realize the potential we have, and grow into better men, better versions of ourselves.”

– NorthStar Client

NorthStar Program Participant Ethnic Backgrounds

Over one third of participants identify as Black or of African descent, and nearly one in five identify with more than one racial or ethnic background (mixed background). This reflects NorthStar’s strong connection to diverse communities and its success in reaching those most impacted by barriers to opportunity and high rates of incarceration.

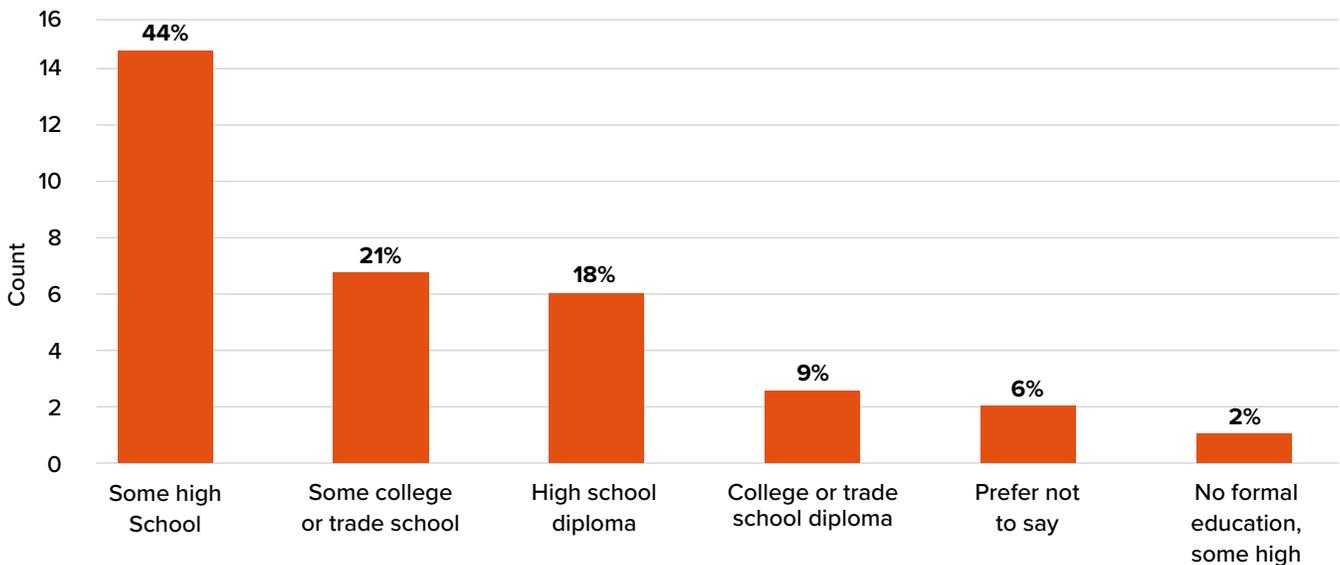


“I think that NorthStar program should be a part of what we are taught in high school because so much of what they teach us is essential to being a great person if asked to pick out one of all the amazing aspects of this amazing program I would have to say it’s the hope, hope in myself, hope in my situation, hope in the fact that I’m not alone, hope for more, hope for a better tomorrow walking out of this program.”

– NorthStar Client

NorthStar Program Participant Prior Education

Most participants entered the program having completed some high school or with some post-secondary education, including college or trade school experience. Only a small proportion of participants (2%) reported no prior formal education, indicating that the program functions as a bridge that builds on existing knowledge and accelerates progress.

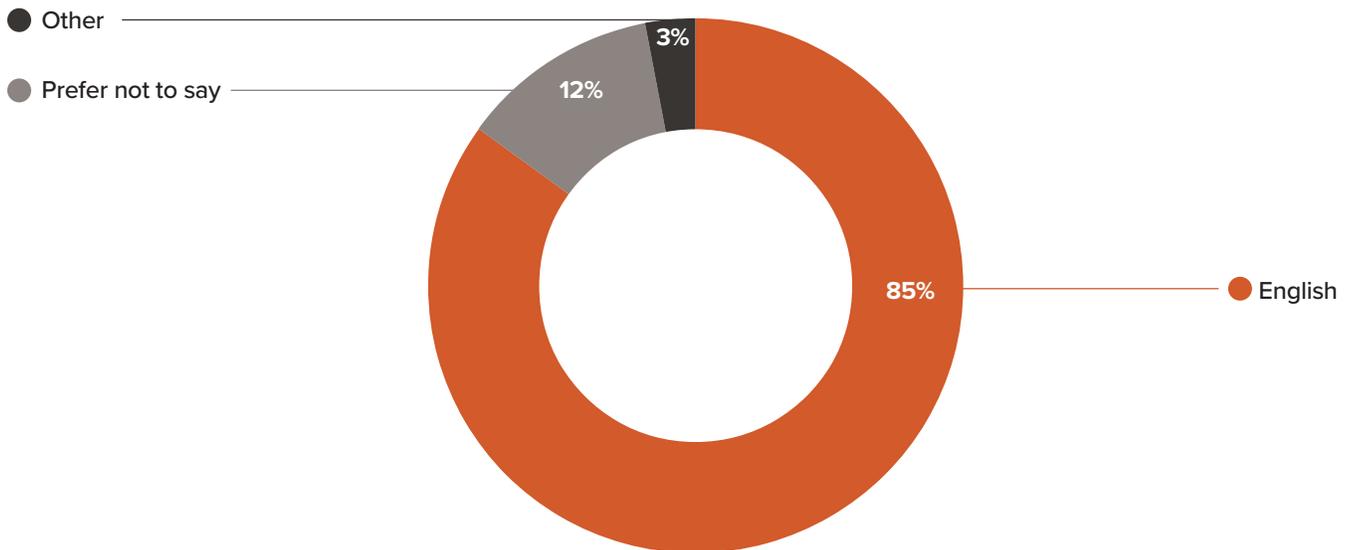


“The NorthStar program removes the victim morality exposed by others and in its place imposes a distinctly empowering form of accountability while showing us the fruits of that accountability through both visual media and through the direct mentorship, experiences and discussion of its facilitators.”

– NorthStar Client

NorthStar Program Participant First Language

Most participants (85%) reported English as their first language, while a smaller proportion indicated another first language. This distribution suggests that while most participants are comfortable engaging in English-language programming, there remains some linguistic diversity within the participant group.

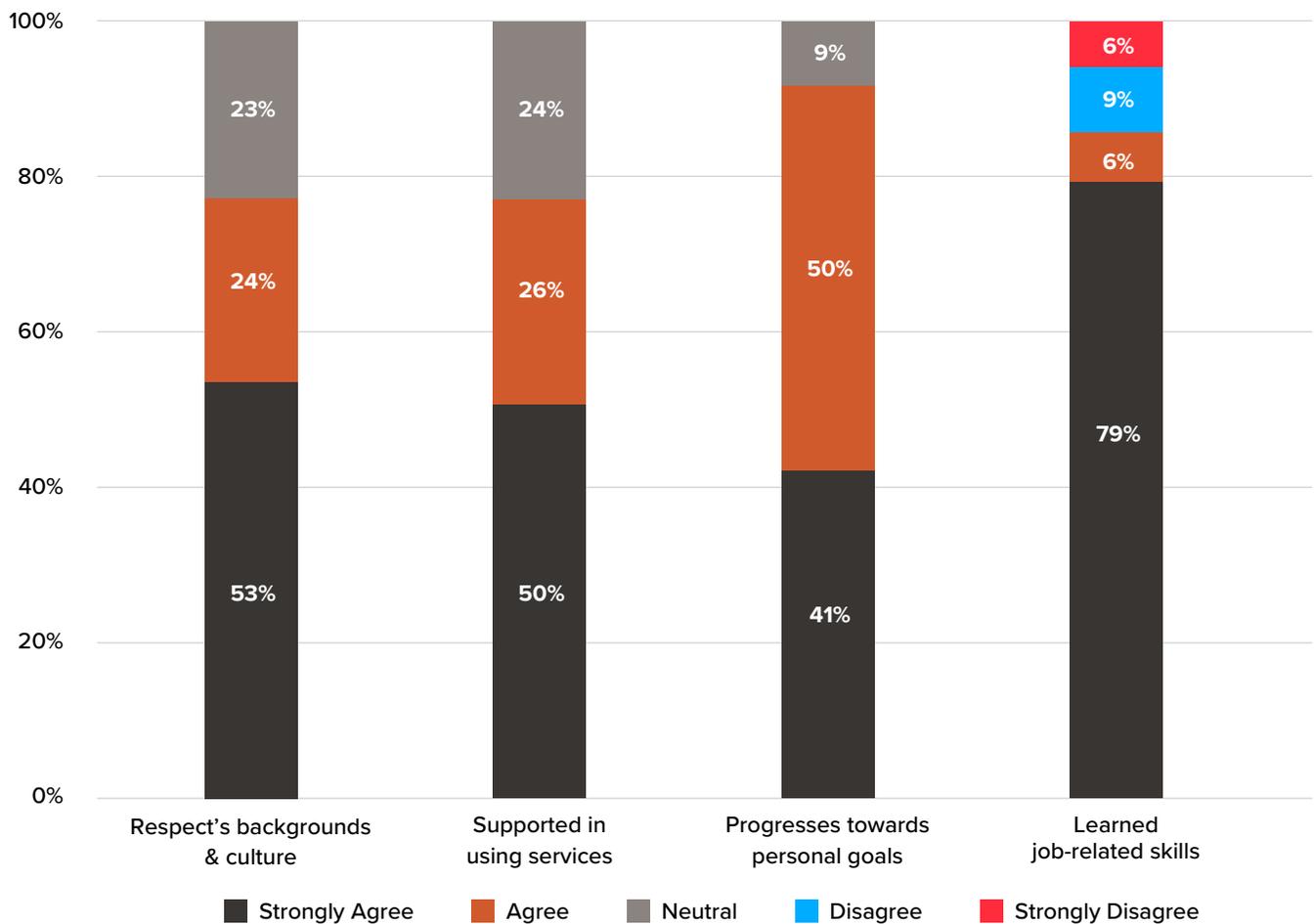


“The most important thing I learned from this program is the mindset of working hard and smart.”

– NorthStar Client

Program Experience and Perceived Impact

Participants shared overwhelmingly positive feedback across the survey. Most felt that the program respected their background and culture, with more than **75%** agreeing or strongly agreeing. Similar levels of positivity were seen around feeling supported when accessing services. Confidence in personal progress was especially strong, with over **90%** of participants saying they are moving closer to their goals. The strongest response came around skill-building, with nearly **80%** strongly agreeing that they gained skills that will help them succeed in future employment.

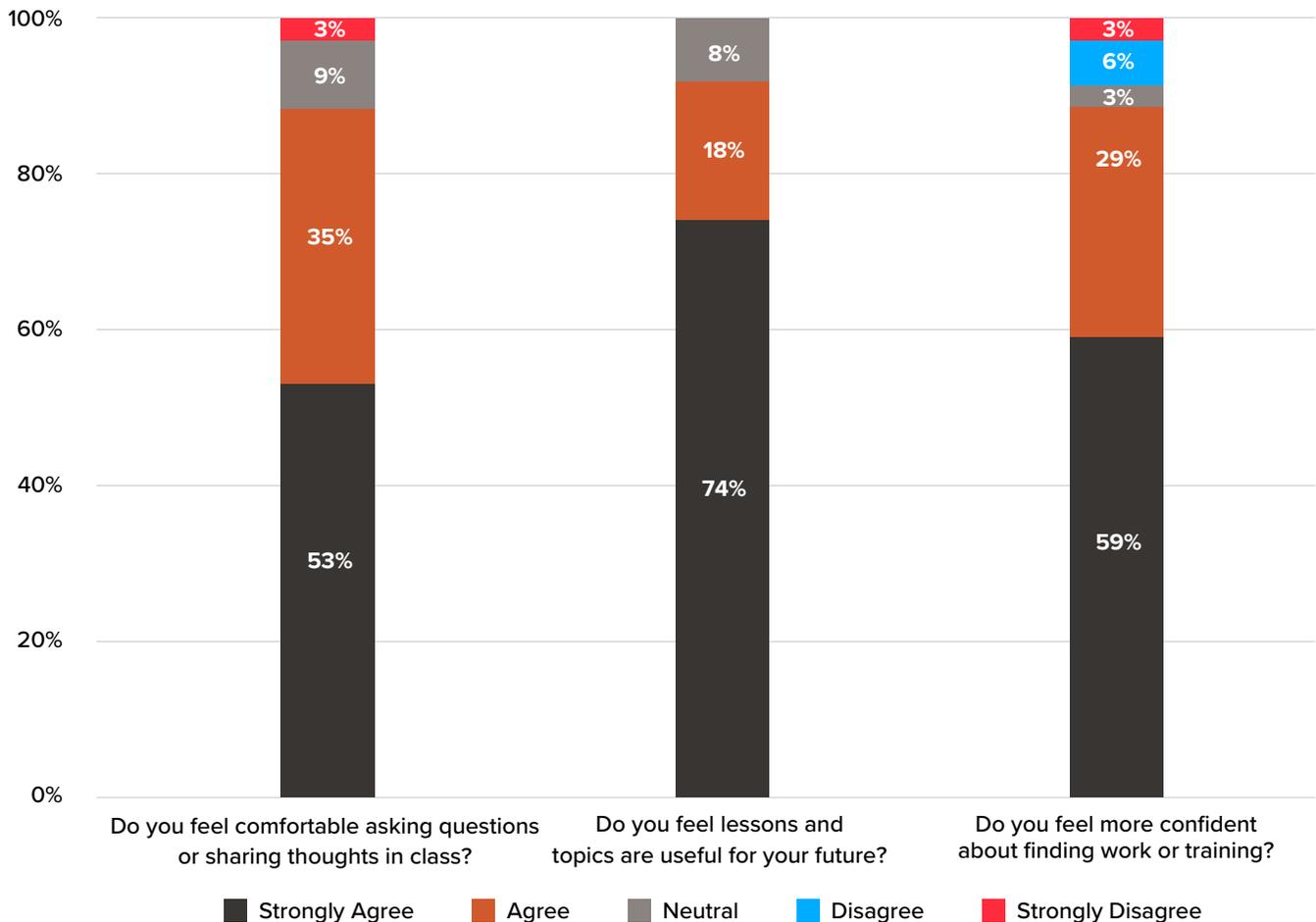


“There is so much that I’ve learned from this program. I’ve taken 28 programs and this is light years ahead of any of them.”

– NorthStar Client

Learning Environment and Confidence

Participants reported a strong sense of psychological safety and engagement in the learning environment. The majority indicated that they feel comfortable asking questions or sharing thoughts in class, with **90%** expressing agreement or strong agreement. Perceptions of the usefulness of lessons and topics for future goals were particularly strong, with over **90%** of participants reporting positive responses. Confidence related to finding work or training was also high, though responses in this area showed slightly greater variation, suggesting this outcome may continue to strengthen as participants progress beyond the program.

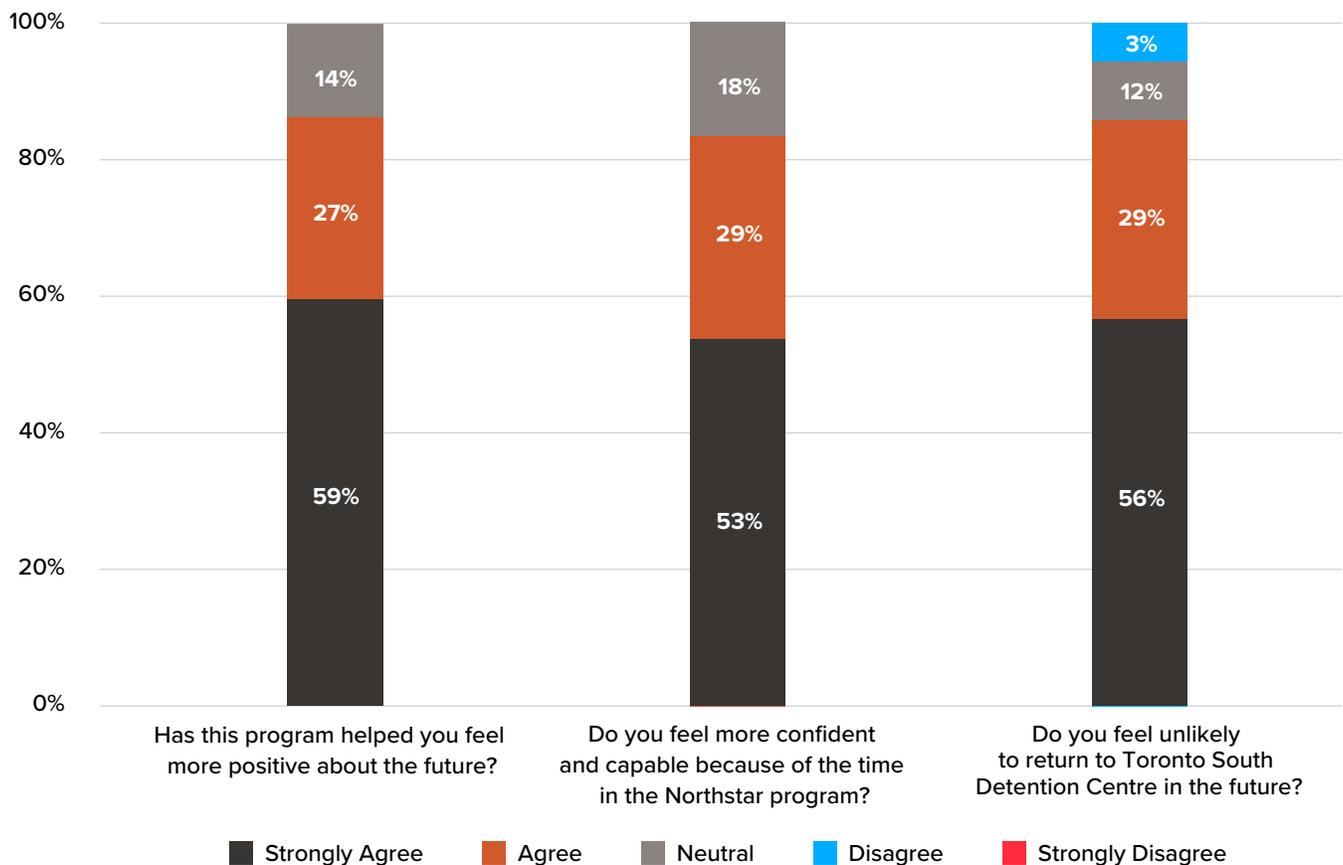


“The program covers many different topics and criteria, such as family law, building your financial future, mental and physical health, positive relationships strategies and many more. I could only describe this program as the art of success.”

– NorthStar Client

Future Outlook and Personal Confidence

Participants reported strong positive shifts in outlook and self-perception as a result of the program. A substantial majority indicated that the program helped them feel more positive about their future, with over **85%** expressing agreement or strong agreement. Similar levels of positive response were observed for increased confidence and sense of capability following participation in the program. Most participants also reported feeling unlikely to return to Toronto South Detention Centre in the future, suggesting the program may be contributing to positive changes in outlook and decision-making related to future behaviour.

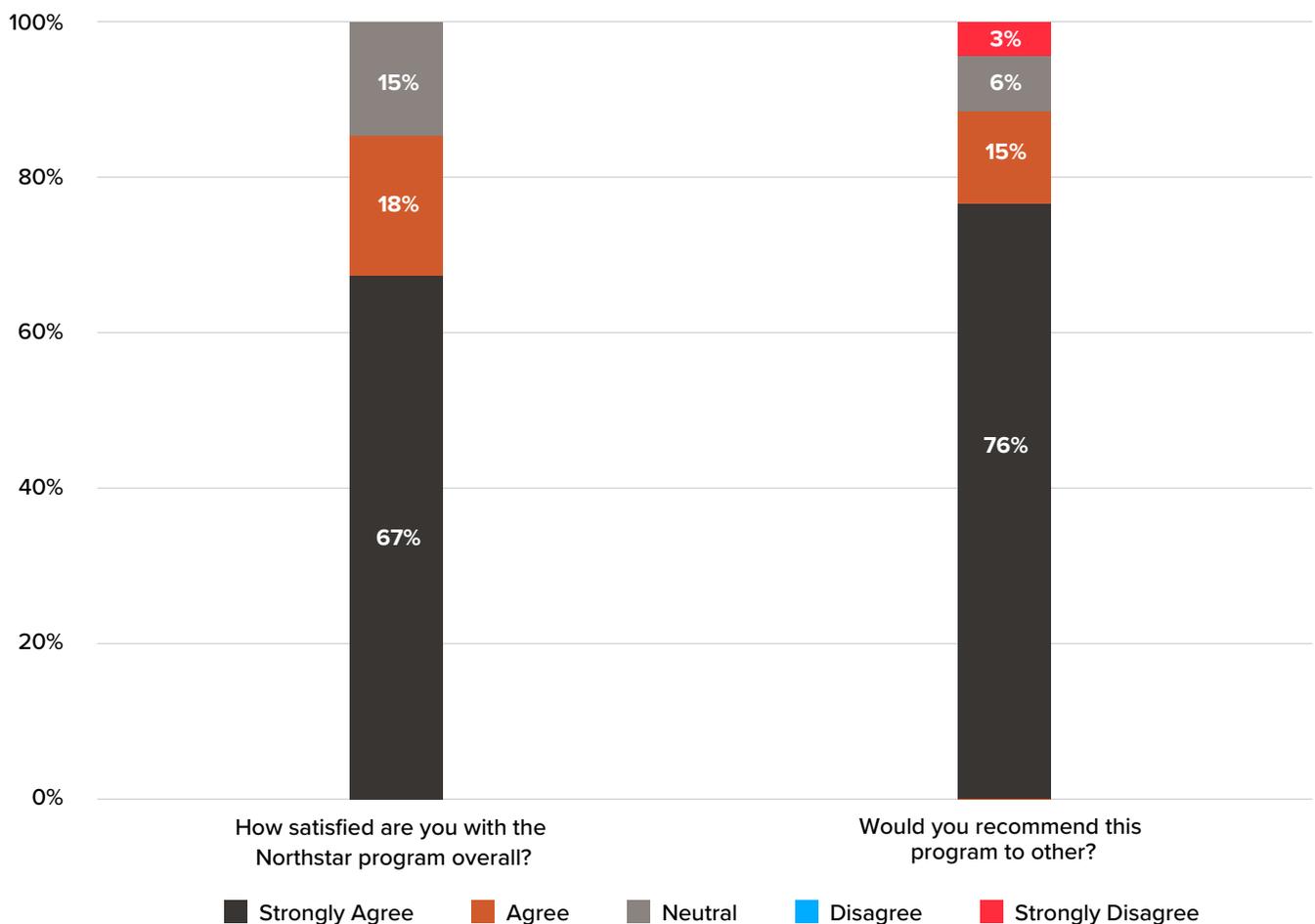


“Overall amazing program 10/10 highly recommend to others with amazing staff and a overall very resourceful and helpful team who are extremely dedicated individuals.”

– NorthStar Client

Overall Satisfaction

Participants reported very high levels of satisfaction with the NorthStar Program. More than four in five participants indicated that they were satisfied with the program overall, with a strong majority selecting “Strongly Agree.” Willingness to recommend the program to others was also high, with over **90%** of participants expressing agreement or strong agreement. These findings suggest a high level of perceived value and endorsement among participants.





CONCLUSION

“ I can honestly and truly say thank you for giving one who had lost all hope the audacity to hope once again thank you for teaching me that I am worth such hope and beyond that I deserve nothing less thank you for my hope. ”

– NorthStar Client



The early-stage findings presented in this report demonstrate that the NorthStar Program is achieving its intended purpose as a pilot pre-release intervention that supports accountability, readiness, and positive future orientation among participants approaching release from custody. Participant feedback reflects strong engagement, high levels of satisfaction, and a clear perception that the program provides practical tools, meaningful mentorship, and a supportive learning environment during a critical transition period.

Across survey responses, participants consistently reported increased confidence, improved outlook on their future, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility. High levels of comfort in asking questions and participating in discussion point to the effectiveness of NorthStar's relationship-based, dialogue-driven mentorship model. Participants' willingness to recommend the program to others further reinforces its perceived value and relevance within the correctional setting.

The program is successfully reaching individuals at a pivotal stage of life and custody, particularly young adults for whom guidance, structure, and planning can have lasting impact. By intervening before release and emphasizing continuity of support, NorthStar addresses well-documented gaps that often undermine successful reintegration and contribute to recidivism.

Overall, the early outcomes of the NorthStar Pilot Program suggest it is a promising and effective model for pre-release intervention and could present a valuable platform for post-release support. Work to refine and evaluate the Pilot Program is continuing and will be critical to sustaining our initial promising outcomes.

Safer transitions, through pre-release and post-release programming are likely to prove as effective solutions to recidivism, while also improving community outcomes for participants. As NorthStar continues to evolve, our aim is to offer deeper valuable lessons for justice, community, and policy stakeholders seeking approaches that move beyond short-term interventions toward meaningful, preventative change.



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PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK



As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we invited participants to share open-ended feedback in our survey. This section highlights a selection of direct responses from our clients, offering valuable insights into their experiences, expectations, and perspectives. Their voices provide important context and help guide our future efforts to better serve their needs.

“If someone asked you what Northstar is like, what would you tell them? What is the most important thing you have learned so far?”

If someone asked me what Northstar is like I would tell them hands down best program to exist! From the staff to the curriculum never a dull moment with these individuals who have taught me an incredible amount of things over a short span of time which I'm grateful to have learn. These individuals and the energy they bring along with hopes and dreams really impacts us in a very positive way which is almost undescrivable. The amount of connections this program has would save you 10+ years and a significant amount of money. They train you mentally and physically to get yourself reformed and ready to become an independent young individual ready to step foot in the industry and make things happen and elevate yourself to the middle class income which we all know is not easy to do. The most important thing I have learned so far in this program is a tough question because I have acquired so much useful and beneficial knowledge it's very difficult to say what the most important thing is. I guess for me personally it would have to be Financial Literacy because my goal is to be financially free so this session really gave me an abundance of knowledge which is being applied on a day to day basis in my personal life as well as others around me. My favourite is how Mark really goes in depth into certain subjects during the session which really tops it off for me and tells us about his personal mistakes he has made to further benefit us and steer us away from going down the same path! Overall amazing program 10/10 highly recommend to others with amazing staff

and a overall very resourceful and helpful team who are extremely dedicated individuals. From Joe's integrity and dedication to getting the point across, to Kwame's curiosity and understanding others and Nigel's Intellect and Intelligence which really makes them a strong and powerful organization. THE BEST!

– NorthStar Client

NorthStar is above and beyond any program I've enrolled in my years at TSDC so far. It removes the victim morality exposed by others and in its place imposes a distinctly empowering form of accountability while showing us the fruits of that accountability through both visual media and through the direct mentorship, experiences and discussion of its facilitators Joe, Nigel, Mark and Kwame.

Financially the most important thing I've gained is Faith in the ordinary stock market where I've been reluctant and skited it in favour of crypto in the past. Intelligent investing is a major key to thriving in the middle class and beyond.

Socially, the program has saved me from a trap I've fallen into as a part of my experience at TSDC. Entering a passive and calculated approach to my own ambition for freedom. In short, I had given up on myself and was in dire need of the form of motivation a course like NorthStar provides.

– NorthStar Client

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK (Continued)

The NorthStar program in my opinion is a program focused on helping at-risk youth adults with mentorship and employment. I have learned many things but the most important ones are the way that I think about relationships with women. For example I learned that genuine desire isn't negotiable, I need to choose women that naturally desire me. I know that buying or doing nice things for a woman with any expectations is a covert contract. It is better to be upfront with my expectations instead of being covert. Another important thing I learned about is how to register a business and how to structure it. I plan to become a business owner once I'm released. I feel confident with the understanding of what should be done. Deciding on federal vs. Ontario corp, then doing a nuans search to make sure my business name is available. Next would be me getting a business number and organizing the business with banking. Book keeping, etc. I'm eager to continue learning and getting mentorship from the NorthStar program., I'm thankful and very appreciative of the opportunity to be part of the program.

– NorthStar Client

The NorthStar program is not a program that can be described by one definition. The program covers many different topics and criteria, such as family law, building your financial future, mental and physical health, positive relationships strategies and many more. I could only describe this program as the art of success. Ultimately the main objective of this program is to prepare us for society after incarceration. The program guarantees several different career choices for those with criminal records, with the knowledge obtained from the course if applied to everyday life after incarceration/One should have a positive and successful future.

– NorthStar Client

NorthStar is such a hard thing to describe its become so many different things for me on the one hand its a way to get off range and be in a true learning environment again, something that is so hard to find here at the Toronto south detention center. So many people are always confined with the "right" way to do things when

in jail as opposed to just doing what is considered to be "Right" or decent from a humane perspective but now after all these weeks of the program it has become so much more for me its a time where I actually get to use my brain. I get challenged on an emotional and mental basis am able to learn things that I would have wanted my younger self to know and understand years ago and most importantly a safe place when I am taught to grow and challenged to do better not just for those that I love but for myself above all else I think that just like so many other programs you get out of NS what you put into it and I have to mark all the guys in our class for all helping it be such an amazing learning experience to me I think that NS program should be apart of what we are taught in high school because so much of what they teach us is essential to being a great person if asked to pick out one of all the amazing aspects of this amazing program I would have to say it's the hope, hope in myself, hope in my situation, hope in the fact that I'm not alone, hope for more, hope for a better tomorrow walking out of this program I can honestly and truly say thank you for giving one who had lost all hope the audacity to hope once again thank you for teaching me that I am worth such hope and beyond that I deserve nothing less thank you for my hope.

– NorthStar Client

The NorthStar program in my opinion is a program focused on at risk youth and young adults with mentorship and employment. I learning that genuine desire isnt negotiable, I need to choose women that naturally desire me. I know that buying or doing nice things for women with any expectation is a comfort. It is believable up front with my expectation instead of being covet another important I learned is how to register a business and how to start.

– NorthStar Client

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK (Continued)

I would say that NorthStar is something that a lot of us need. It offers us another path and gives people hope. The most important thing I have learned is how to be a proper adult. Managing money, time and relationships.

– NorthStar Client

If someone asked me what NS is like I would tell them it is a program that prepares you for a life that brings peace and comfort to us and our families. If a person was to take notes learn with an open mind and even at different stages of life refer back to the material given to us by NS, the choices of him coming back to jail the chances of losing everything due to mistakes other people make are very low.

One is to teach like a teacher and one is to mentor like a mentor. People of NS don't teach they mentor. NS is made up of a group of individuals who don't care only to see us leave this place but care to see us succeed in life. Mark and Joe both have said this different times during the program have said we want to see you live beside us and drive cars like us. Every person who I've met from NS during the program their actions have showed their care for us.

The most important thing I learned from this program is the mindset of working hard and smart. Building a future me and my family to always have a NorthStar shining in front of you that keeps you away from acts that effect you and your family.

– NorthStar Client

There is so much that I've learned from this program I've taken 28 programs and this is light years ahead of any of them. Some of the most important things I've learned that theres nobody coming to save me the onus is one me to take control of my life if I want better. Also everything wrong in my life I'm 100% to blame this helps me take accountability to change that which no longer serves me, sexual market value understanding this helps me value myself and who I spend my time and energy with and also understanding why woman want to play the field when their younger and settle down when they reach their early 30s. Another big one is the role testosterone plays in male depression or lack there off and at times in their suicide.

Sadly one of the last most important aspects is it helped me prioritize resilience determination not being afraid of failure and facing adversity having discipline and not to shy away from suffering. Every class I leave inspired excited to attack life once given the chance I am so grateful for the opportunity. I'm 45 years old I know this program was not created with me in mind I want to extend a heartfelt thank you for gifting me this chance I will take full advantage of the privilege extended to me by allowing me in this hallowed fraternity thank you thank you thank you

– NorthStar Client

North Star Is that reality check from your bigger brother who had seen it all and has been there and done that whether through direct or indirect experiences.” is something I'd say for a quick summary of what Northstar is like if someone were to ask me about the program.

I can say there's a couple of important things ranging from different topics that all coincide with the overall aim and purpose of the program. The aim of the program is to give a proper and more optimal perspective on how to carry out our lives and a more respectable manner. Whether it's for the long way in shaping what we want out of life and how to go about the execution of it or the short term however that looks for such. Some of the important things from the subjects pertaining to the aim of the program has been delivered so actively and more than one notion of the discussions being held that day I leave feeling invigorated throughout the day going into the next ready to take affirmative action on my part of the plan. The REN and direct approach taken in this program is very needed; “nobody cares” is something we all know, but most people would rather believe the beautiful lie that they do. “Momento Mori” is not only interesting in the wording being that is different than the normal English. Most of us are privy to, rather than the Roman saying from a time before. It's a good reminder to those of us to take life for jokes, as well as not taking it serious in nature, “remember you are mortal” alas, am I transformed of years of my life it's a very important saying that rings more and more true with each passing moment in my lifetime. The purpose of this program is to impact simple lessons

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK (Continued)

on life through historical events as much as the current landscape of this generation that is prevalent, hence the targeted aged demographic. Given us the very much needed understandings and insights on life. Furthermore adequately equipped with information that we'll be able to use in real life as we see it. "Ubermench" is something worth repeating throughout the program on top of the honest relationships built with the Northstar/ORA facilitators, we get an active financial literacy class to give us that extra confidence to seize the day by seizing the moment to advance in our lives, moving forward. It's not too late. I just don't have a lot of time.

– NorthStar Client

If someone asked you what Northstar is like, what would you tell them and what's the most important thing you have learned so far

I wish I met Joe, Nigel, Kwame, and Mark long before making the mistakes I've made that led me to where I am at right now. I feel like they help a lot of young men like myself realize the potential we have, and grow into better men, better versions of ourselves.

– NorthStar Client

The facilitators of this program used real life experiences of the mistakes they've made throughout their lives to teach us very valuable lessons in life and how to avoid similar mistakes. I thought I've been through shit, but these guys helped me realize there are other others that been through a lot worse and not only did they make it through they made it out and reached bigger highs in life than they've ever reached in their lives.

This Northstar program is like a map a guideline to our northern star (our goals, our desires, our aspirations). It teaches us how to better ourselves as people, as man, as key figures of society. I've learned and grown a lot since joining this program, all about the importance of certain things like routine and setting priorities about masculinity and the look of it.

Nothing has helped me want to reform and be better than this program. I feel like I have a new outlook in life and I can't wait to apply everything. I've learned here on the outside world it's everything I need to hear to motivate me enough to go reach my goals.

– NorthStar Client

I would tell them Northstar is a great program that teaches you multiple different things as in the way you've viewed different life aspects change your mindset about certain situations gives you more of a broad view of how you should take on life. Also helps you get motivated for a brighter future work and living wise. The most important thing we learned is to invest my money wisely, how to take responsibility to become a better man and a better version of myself, how it's still possible to beat this obstacle in front of me right now, and that there is a better future, waiting for me out there, that my current situation is not the end of me.

– NorthStar Client

I would tell them to look into and join the program if capable. Have to become the best version of yourself.

I've learned about sexual market value and drive between men and women.

About male/female Inter-sexual dynamics and how to manage relationships positively.

– NorthStar Client



Research conducted collaboratively by The Oaks Revitalization Association (ORA) and AgentsC.



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THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS

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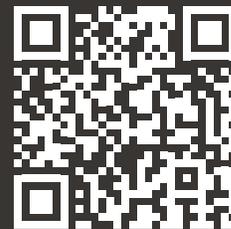
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