

# The ICOF Model of Funding: Impact and Outcomes

In the second half of 2020, a research team conducted an evaluation study of In the Company of Friends (ICOF). ICOF is an innovative model of funding used to support persons with intellectual disabilities (i.e., the ICOF Employers) by offering them independent living options in the Province of Manitoba. This short report summarizes the portion of the evaluation study that investigated how participating in ICOF affected Employers’ quality of life (QoL), life satisfaction, and financial well-being.

## What The Researchers Did

A set of standardized assessment tools were used to collect self-reported survey data on QoL, life satisfaction and financial well-being of 42 ICOF Employers. A description of the study population is provided in Table 1. At the time of data collection, all Employers were residing in a city, town, or rural area in the Canadian province of Manitoba. Nine of these ICOF Employers also participated in a one-on-one telephone interview involving a series of open-ended questions that investigated several aspects of their QoL. This group included five men and four women aged 33-50 years who had been in ICOF for several years (10-23 years). Most study participants were employed, either full or part time (n = 5), while the others were either unemployed or seniors (n = 4). All study participants provided informed consent prior to data collection.

**Table 1:** Description of the Study Population (n = 42)

	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age in years	30-76	46	13.3
Involvement in ICOF in years	5-27	17	6.5

  

	n	%
Sex (Male)	28	67
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Unemployed	23	55
Employed	9	21
Senior	10	24

## What The Researchers Found

Quality of Life. The quantitative QoL assessments revealed that, on average, the study group scored well above what is expected for similar populations of adults with intellectual disabilities in all eight QoL domains evaluated (i.e., well above the standard mean score of 10). As shown in Figure 1, the QoL domains in which the ICOF Employers scored the highest, on average, included self-determination, material well-being, rights, and social inclusion; however, also in the domains of emotional well-being, physical well-being, personal development, and interpersonal relations the study group scored, on average, above the standard mean of 10. The ICOF Employers scored well above average also in global QoL. As shown in Figure 1 (see page 2), the QoL Index for the entire study group was 114, which is approximately one standard deviation above the mean of 100. A QoL Index of 114 corresponds to the 85th percentile, indicating that **85% of the ICOF Employers included in the study scored higher than what was observed in similar groups of adults with intellectual disabilities in global QoL.**

Likewise, during the interviews investigating Employers’ own perspectives on their QoL, all study participants provided accounts of the excellent QoL they were enjoying. The nine study participants positively discussed their independent living arrangements, the caring direct support staff who helped them daily, and their jobs, which they all enjoyed very much. When asked about changes (improvements or deteriorations) in their lives following their involvement in ICOF, many Employers clearly and enthusiastically described the reasons why their lives had improved following their involvement in ICOF. All study participants very resolutely and enthusiastically described how being part of ICOF provided them with ample opportunities to exercise their self-determination capacity.

“ [My life before joining ICOF] was different, I’ll tell you that! I’d say, financially, it was a little different. I just didn’t have as much money as I do now because I was living on a limited income. [Being part of ICOF] allows me to have more funding.... I was living at home when I first got into the program. Living alone does have its advantages. I do get to do the things that I wanna do... I’m definitely happier, there is no doubt about it! - David

“ I go grocery shopping... I have staff that can kind of help me pick what I wanna eat and it’s pretty healthy. I can choose how I wanna spend my free time... I can always speak up and tell people how I want to spend my money.” - Judy

**Figure 1.** Quality of Life Profile for the entire study group (n = 42)



**“ Yes, I ca. No one tells me what to do! I choose my staff and if I’m not happy with them, I let them go. I can decide to let them go with my support network. - Scott**

**“ Oh yeah, I make choices. Sometimes, I need help... I’ve got friends to help me out because, you know, I’m a little bit slower in that. I choose what to eat and in my free time, I come home, watch TV, and probably go for a swim or go biking... Stuff like that, I do. - Fred**

All study participants provided accounts of lives full of opportunities to pursue their own interests and reported having people in their lives who provide them with the emotional support they need in difficult times, including friends, family members, and their support networks. All Employers discussed how they have all the medications and technical devices (for example, a walker or a wheelchair) they need to maintain a good health status, and how they can easily access their family doctors when they need them. Study participants also firmly and enthusiastically discussed how they have all the material things they need to live a fulfilling life and more, including the material things they need at home and the things they need to entertain themselves (for example, a TV, a radio, games, and magazines). Most study participants provided accounts of lives full of opportunities to independently perform activities that promote personal development, including new activities (for example, going on trips to visit new places or trying fun new activities). Unfortunately, many Employers reported not having many ties to their surrounding communities and to rarely have opportunities to meet new people.

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**Life Satisfaction**

Most Employers reported being extremely satisfied with their lives (n = 24, 57%), while more than one-third (n = 16, 38%) reported being satisfied with their current lives and only two (5%) reported being slightly satisfied with their lives. Notably, none of the study participants evaluated their life satisfaction in a neutral or negative fashion.

**Financial Well-being**

On average, the Employers reported a financial well-being well above what is expected for persons of the same age. Additionally, compared to what is expected for persons of the same age, the financial well-being of most study participants was well above average, and only two study participants (5%) had a below-average financial well-being.

**Conclusion**

Altogether, the findings of this component of the ICOF evaluation study provided strong evidence about the excellent QoL the ICOF Employers enjoy, as well as about the very favorable financial standing this funding model offers to the persons with intellectual disabilities who are supported through it. These superior QoL and financial well-being are reflected in the excellent satisfaction the ICOF Employers included in this study reported with their lives. The full evaluation study report, including additional research activities and findings is available at [www.innovativelifeoptions.ca](http://www.innovativelifeoptions.ca)