

# Sustainable Livelihoods

## Surviving to Thriving

2023



# Sustainable Livelihoods: Surviving to Thriving

Imagine... every person has a sustainable livelihood and contributes to their community. This is the vision that guides Momentum's work.

The Sustainable Livelihoods framework is an asset-based approach for understanding and working with individuals living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Since 2002, Momentum has collaborated with Eko Nomos and the Canadian Women's Foundation to integrate the Sustainable Livelihoods framework across the organization.

Momentum has conducted a long-term evaluation that engaged participants over a two-year period to explore the ways they are building sustainable livelihoods in partnership with Momentum. The evaluation results found growth in participants' skills and knowledge, self-confidence, money management skills, and income, as well as improved debt management, living situation (housing), and employment.

## Dimensions of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods framework uses three broad dimensions to understand the experiences of individuals living in poverty:

- Stages of Transition
- Assets
- Vulnerability Context

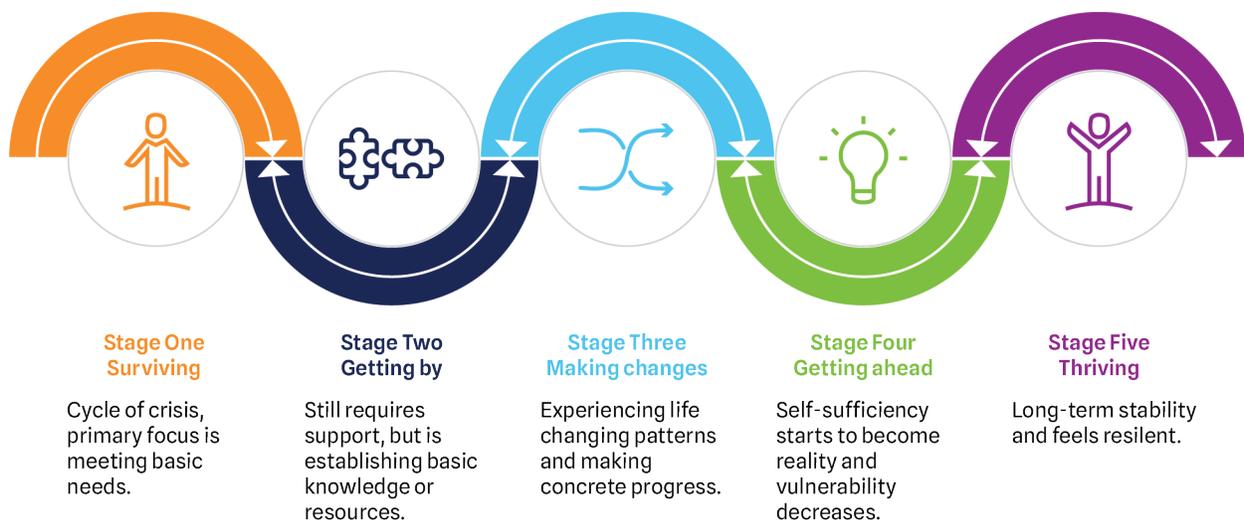
A **sustainable livelihood** is defined as "the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future." (UK Department for International Development, 1999).

## Stages of Transition

Stages of Transition identifies key patterns of progress towards a sustainable livelihood. The stages include: Surviving, Getting By, Making Changes, Getting Ahead, and Thriving. As individuals build their assets, they increase their resilience and ability to thrive.

Momentum offers a range of skills training, entrepreneurship, and financial empowerment programs for individuals with diverse backgrounds and experience. Momentum uses the Stages of Transition as a measurement tool to capture how participants' livelihoods are developing across its programs over time. Data is collected with participants at the start and end of their program as well as two years following their program. Even though the stages are presented in a linear direction, the framework recognizes the dynamics and challenges of everyday life can cause individuals to move back and forth through the Stages of Transition.

### Sustainable Livelihoods Stages of Transition



*Adapted from Eko Nomos*

## Assets

The five asset areas highlight individuals' existing valuable capabilities in pursuing a sustainable livelihood. At Momentum, participants learn about assets, assess their assets, and use the asset areas to set short and long-term goals. The five asset areas include: Connections, Sense of Self, Basic Needs & Services, Skills & Knowledge and Finances.

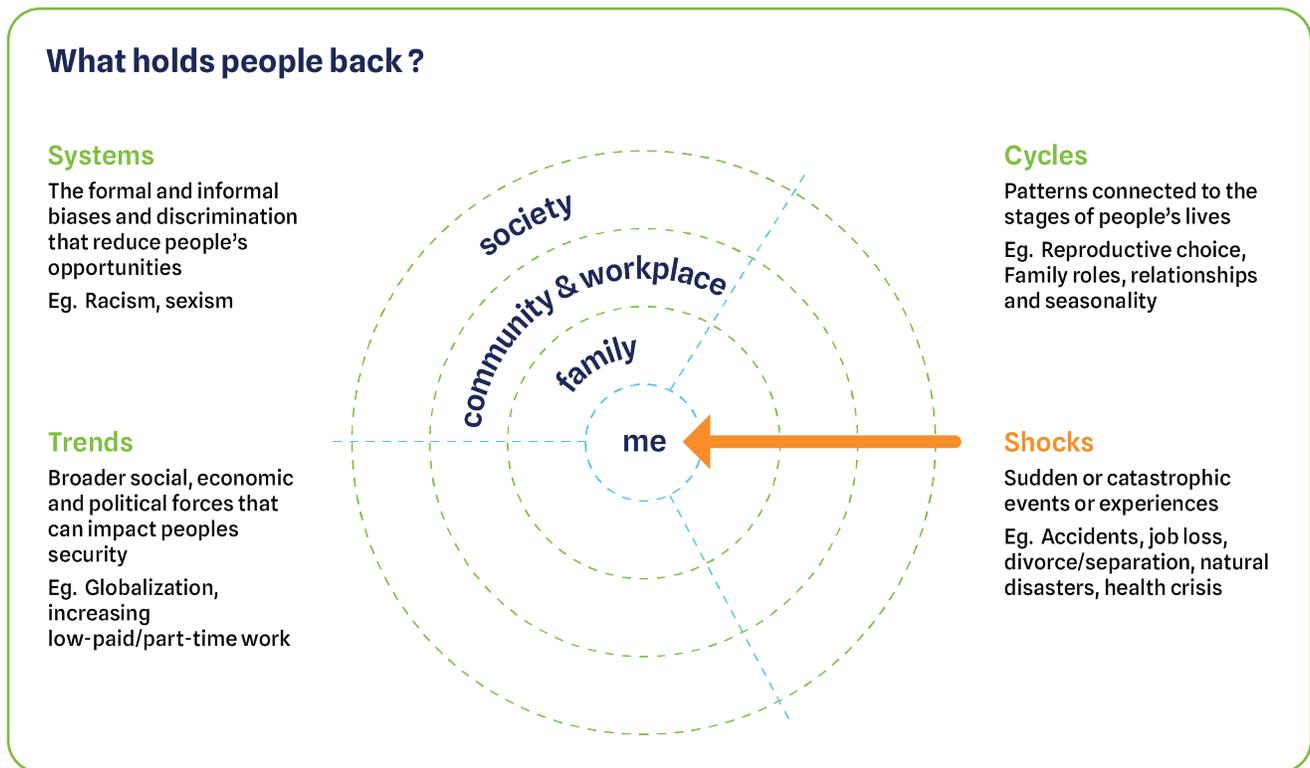
### Sustainable Livelihoods Assets



## Vulnerability Context

The Vulnerability Context aims to understand the external factors that influence an individuals' assets, and the opportunities that are open to them. While individuals can and do make choices that make them more vulnerable to poverty, understanding how broader, systemic forces impact individual choice or lack of choice is critical to develop practical and strategic supports and programs.<sup>2</sup> The framework identifies four key forces that can make an individual vulnerable: systems, cycles, trends, and shocks.

### The Vulnerability Context: The Forces the Make People Vulnerable to Poverty



Adapted from Eko Nomos



# Building Sustainable Livelihoods at Momentum

## 2023 Sustainable Livelihoods Long-Term Evaluation Report: Results Summary

Momentum examined the ways that participants are building sustainable livelihoods over the long term, following them for two years after they started a program at Momentum. The evaluation results found growth in participants' skills and knowledge, self-confidence, money management skills, and income, as well as improved debt management, living situation (housing), and employment. An equity analysis of the different communities and groups that make up Momentum participants found a diversity of people experienced growth and success across programs and learning approaches. Overall, the results of the evaluation demonstrate impressive success from participants while managing the many recent COVID-19 pandemic-related and economic challenges.



Almost **600 participants** from **2019-2022** were asked about the ways they have built a sustainable livelihood in partnership with Momentum, and how they have built their assets over the long-term.



Over 2 Years





90% increased their understanding of money management



78% increased their connections



92% were more hopeful about the future



61%

increased their income



78%

reported their living situation now meets most/all of their needs



Across All Departments

86%

increased their skills and knowledge



54%

participants that gained household income averaged an increase of \$28,000 or 54%



19%

increase in participants paying down or paying off debt each month

Trades Training Participants



74%

passed the pre-apprentice exam

Financial Empowerment Participants



95%

applied the skills and knowledge to build assets and income

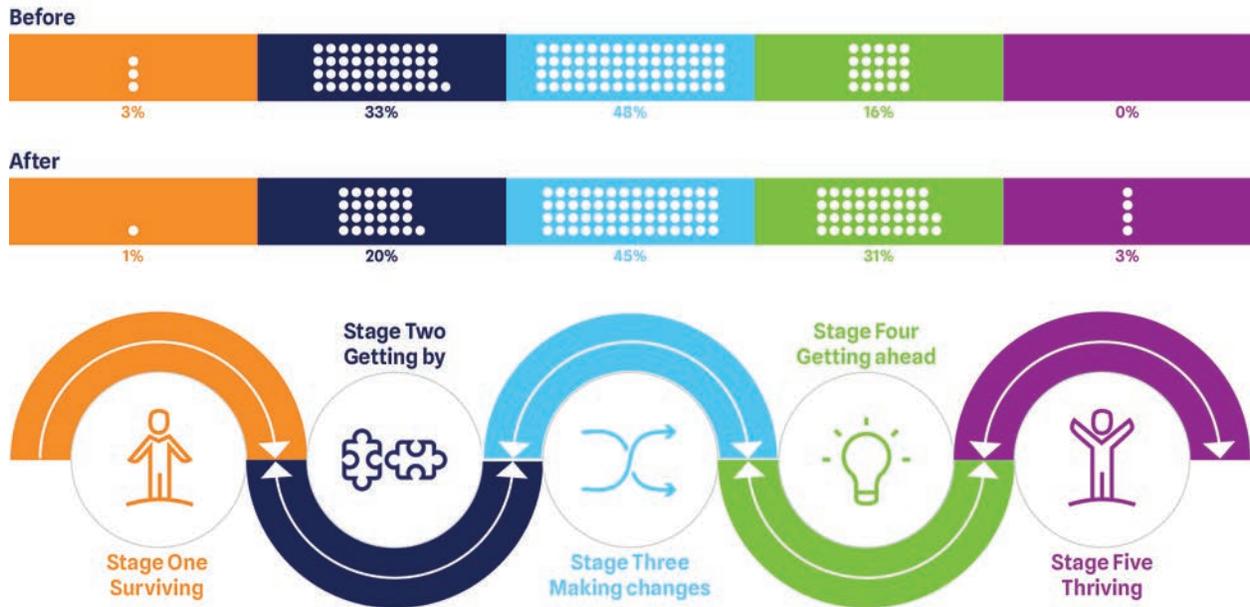
Local Economy Development Participants



93%

completed their business plan

## 2023 Sustainable Livelihoods Long-Term Evaluation Report: Results Summary



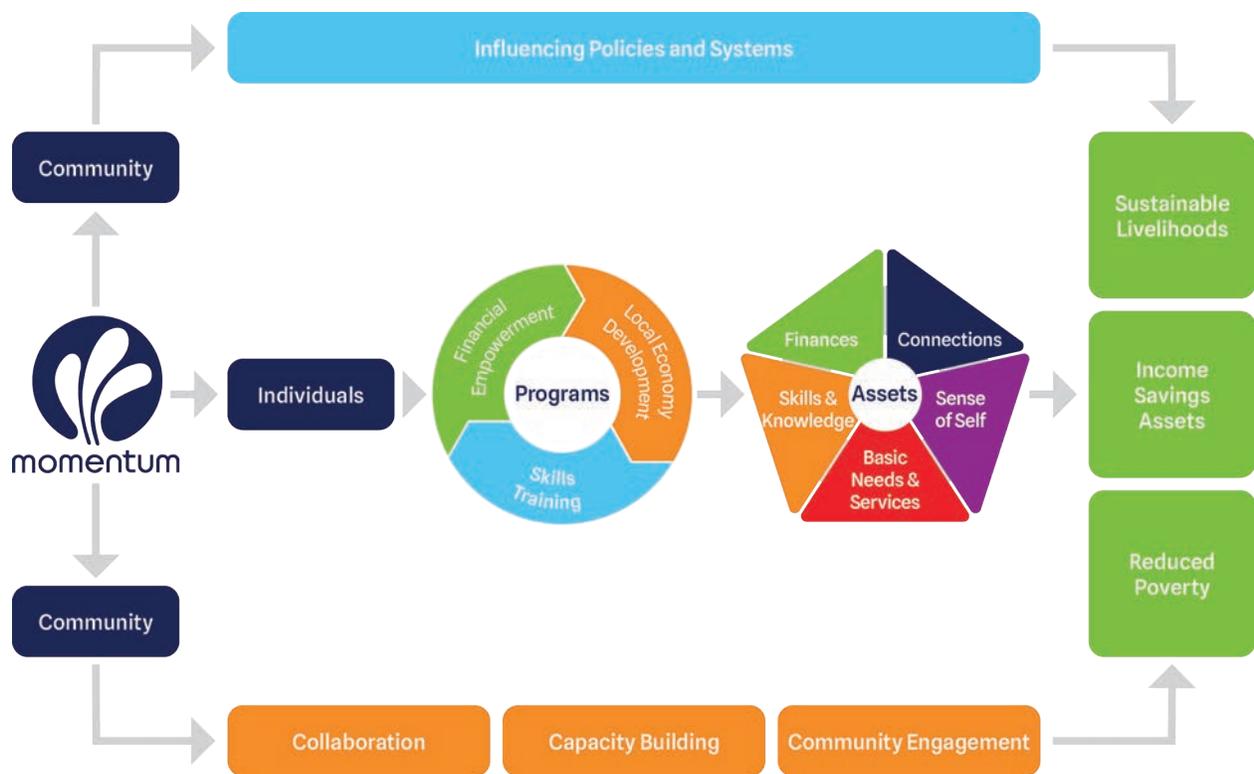
### Momentum Participants

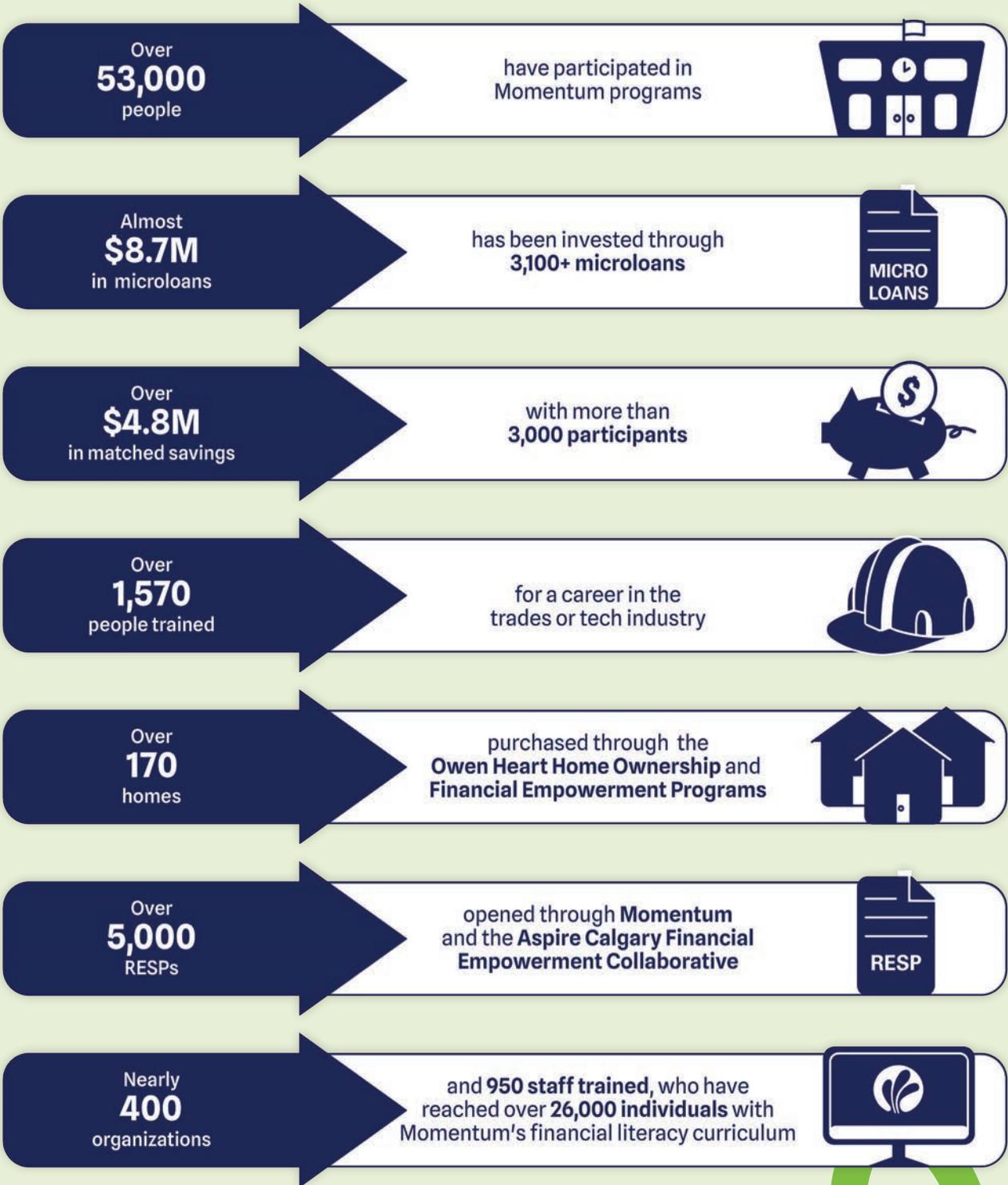
- 23% have a high school education or less
- 38% reported a yearly household income of less than \$20,000
- 63% identify as a woman
- 23% reported having a disability
- 44% were born outside of Canada
- 20% identify as Indigenous

## How We Do Our Work

Momentum’s Theory of Change is to reduce poverty by increasing the income and assets of people living on low incomes in Calgary. Momentum works with participants in our Local Economy Development, Financial Empowerment, and Skills Training programs, and partners in our community to create a thriving local economy for all. By working at the individual and systems levels, Momentum makes a bigger contribution to reducing poverty and building sustainable livelihoods. To evaluate our efforts, the Sustainable Livelihoods framework is used to demonstrate outcomes and learn how participants are transitioning towards a sustainable livelihood.

## Momentum’s Theory of Change





## Momentum by the Numbers



## Lexi's Story

In 2019, Lexi and her wife fled China and immigrated to Canada. They felt it was a good place to make their start. "We took the chance to come to Canada to have a new life together," Lexi says.

When they arrived in Calgary, Lexi saw a poster for Momentum's Trades Training program in Carpentry. She enrolled in the program even though she had doubts about her application.

"I have a small stature and I was concerned because I didn't do [carpentry] before," Lexi says. "I decided to make this change, that's what makes life interesting! It's a new adventure for me."

Though Lexi was nervous to start at Momentum, she was worried about her English skills, but her fears were quickly allayed on her first day of class what she found a supportive and caring community. "I am good at math, so we traded! They helped me with my English, and I helped them with math problems," Lexi says.



Upon completion of Momentum's program, Lexi was offered full time employment by Zero Squared Tiny Homes, the same company that hosted her work placement, as they were sufficiently impressed with her skills, even though her work placement was cut short due to COVID. Lexi is currently working towards becoming a journeyman carpenter while she continues to build experience working with Zero Squared Tiny Homes.

**Lexi says her work feels meaningful.  
"I build houses for people."**

### Endnotes

- 1 Eko Nomos. (2001). Women in transition out of poverty: An asset-based approach to building sustainable livelihoods. The Canadian Women's Foundation Women and Economic Development Consortium. Retrieved from: <http://ekonomos.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Women-in-Transition-out-of-Poverty.pdf>
- 2 Eko Nomos. (2010). Beyond Survival: Helping Women Transition Out of Poverty. The Canadian Women's Foundation Economic Development Collaborative Fund. Retrieved from: <https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PDF-Beyond-Survival-Report-FINAL-EN.pdf>



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