

Canadian Financial Diaries Research Project



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**The Finances of Mainly Unemployed and Retired Participants  
Canadian Financial Diaries Research Project, Phase One  
Participants**

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## **The Finances of Mainly Unemployed and Retired Participants: Canadian Financial Diaries Research Project, Phase One Participants**

### **Introduction**

The Canadian Financial Diaries is a multi-year project that seeks to capture the finances and financial experiences of low- and modest-income earners in Canada. CFD collects quantitative data and the financial flows of participants and qualitative information about participants' financial experiences, well-being, and financial decision-making. In phase one, CFD worked with 28 participants for one year. During this year of in-person meetings, we met with participants weekly or semi-weekly to record financial inflows and outflows. Participants recorded their financial data on a weekly basis and then provided a written copy of those flows or talked us through their finances.

This is the third summary in a series that focuses on a sub-group of diaries participants. The participants in this group were selected because of their unemployed status (from the formal economy). The goal of this summary is to provide the reader with a glimpse of the lives and financial practices of ten mainly unemployed participants and three retired participants to better understand both the barriers and opportunities which impacted their financial well-being.

The information included in this report is based on quantitative and qualitative data from participants' financial diaries and from interview logs. An intentional effort has been made to distinguish between the voices of the participants, the researchers, and the writer, and to present accurate stories while attempting to remain aware of any personal bias. The Financial Diaries Team has assigned a pseudonym to each participant to maintain anonymity. Please note that, in some cases the data in a summary reflects only one individual, while in others the data is reflective of the participant's entire household.

### **Methods**

The Canadian Financial Diaries (CFD) research project has been operating since 2017 and began the first of two one-year data collection phases in March 2018. The first phase finished up in October 2019 due to the gradual recruitment of participants for their one-year participation. A total of twenty-eight people participated in phase one and 23 of them completed the 12-month term while the remaining

participants were engaged for less than 12 months. We continued to input, clean, and analyze data through 2020 and into early 2021 as the pandemic began.

The CFD research project uses mixed methodology that involves quantitative and qualitative components. The foundation of the diaries process is the financial diary that participants maintain. This requires the participant to track their income, spending, saving, and borrowing, ideally daily and then, through weekly or biweekly meetings with diaries interviewers, share them with the project. These meetings provide the basis for relationship and trust building with diaries staff and act as informal opportunities to talk with participants about their thoughts concerning their finances. Interviewers kept detailed notes on these meetings. These logs act as one tool for qualitative analysis. More formal interviews were done on a regular basis and the topics of these interviews include experience with the income tax return process, thoughts about financial literacy and wellbeing, and an exit interview that asked participants about their experiences with the diaries process.

## Summary and discussion

The group of largely unemployed diarists have extremely frugal finances. We saw that participants who were of working age and relied on social assistance (in Manitoba called Employment and Income Assistance) had some of the lowest incomes of all the diarists although in some cases comparable to incomes of the precariously, or casually, employed participants (Buckland and Nur, 2021). If participants' income was supplemented by federal government supports, e.g., Canada Child Benefit, then household incomes were less meagre but, with larger families, not necessarily less tight. The incomes were steady (with regular payments of social assistance). Most participants dedicated the lion's share of their budget to basic needs such as housing, food, and transportation.

These diarists, on average, had low level of assets such as finances, physical assets (e.g., a home, a car), human capital assets (training, education, and the ability to find and hold a job), social assets (friends and family who could help with finances).

There was some variation across the unemployed diarist group: some participants' finances are more lean and other diarists' finances are less lean. Annual income varies from less than \$10,000 to over \$40,000 (see Table 1). There was substantial variation in other assets that bear upon financial wellbeing. Some participants had accumulated financial assets, e.g., Rupi's savings for her child and Frida's tax-free savings. These savings were modest and most unemployed participants did not have financial assets. On

the other extreme of this group, Namid, who struggled with addiction, had very few assets and was virtually homeless.

**Table 1: Socio-demographics for Unemployed and Retired Participants**

	Age	Gender	Education (years)	Household size	Home ownership	Internet connection	Household income	Credit card	Net assets
Yes					1	9		8	
No					12	4		5	
Min.	33		9	1			\$4,985		-\$2,956
Max.	63		18	4			\$40,764		\$249,523
Average	48.7		12.9	1.5			\$15,855		\$26,342
Median	47		10	1			\$13,884		\$1,970
Males		2							
Females		11							

Retired participants were, generally speaking, better off than the unemployed participants. This is because they were able to draw on a combination of public and private pensions and had some important assets (including Donna and her home equity loan). But we also noted that for some of these participants, family and friends exerted pressure for loans and gifts, that did not seem to be reciprocated.

The income and assets of the unemployed group were very low. They are some of the poorest, financially speaking, of all 28 the diarist participants. Yet they are resilient as evidenced by how they manage to make ends meet with meagre budgets. As one colleague noted, to the extent that people choose, relying on social assistance generates a lower but steadier income, as compared to engaging at the bottom of the labor market, where income can vary.

But this extreme scarcity does not enable them to invest in new physical, human, and social assets, not to mention searching for employment. Financial vulnerability is therefore self-reinforcing: low assets lead to low income which stalls investment and stifles asset accumulation. Participants with poor job situations and weak finances need a means to move out of this vicious cycle. Since money is so tight and spending is directed towards basic needs, financial literacy training will offer few benefits. Raising income supports and enabling access to better services (e.g., training and education, banking) will be more beneficial for these participants.

## Unemployed Participants

### Sylvie

Sylvie is in her early thirties. When she began participating in the Financial Diaries project, Sylvie was in the process of transitioning out of a recovery program for women healing from abuse and addiction. She was also in the process of regaining custody of her children and was therefore not looking for employment. Sylvie gave birth to her seventh child in spring of 2019 and did not continue with the project for the remainder of the diary year.

### Diaries Project

Sylvie started with the Financial Diaries project in May 2018 and continued for sixteen weeks. She learned about the project from a local Indigenous healing organization. As she was transitioning back to independent living and would now be more actively involved in financial management, Sylvie shared with researchers that she was excited about her participation in the project. Researchers found Sylvie was very organized for their bi-weekly meetings. Sylvie mentioned that it was her practice to keep a rough copy of her transactions over the two-week period and then transfer these to the tracking sheet prior to the meeting.

### Sociodemographic

Sylvie is single and has never been married. She describes her cultural background as Metis. During the project she had six children ranging in age from two to seventeen years. At the beginning of the project, Sylvie's younger children were in foster care, and she lived alone. She regained custody of her youngest child soon after starting with the project and was actively working to regain the custody of the others. Mid-way through her participation, Sylvie's eldest daughter moved in temporarily after giving birth to Sylvie's first grandchild.

Sylvie has a grade ten education and lives in a private rental unit paid directly by Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). Sylvie is not looking for work and shared that her priority was to care for her children. While there is sometimes stigma attached to those who need to rely on support through EIA (this was alluded to by both Sylvie as well as another participant included in this group summary), researchers observed that receiving this income enables Sylvie to dedicate her time to parenting.

### Financial Practices

Sylvie earns an annual income of just under \$8,200. She also receives a weekly purchase order for around \$65 dollars' worth of groceries from a local grocery store. She also receives in-kind groceries when her children (currently in care) come to visit. After her youngest daughter was returned to her care, Sylvie began once again Sylvie receives very little from EIA (only \$280 per month) and lives from deposit to deposit. \$142 of this amount goes toward her monthly cable, internet, and landline bill. Her rent is given directly to her landlord from EIA, but does not cover her Hydro bill, which can sometimes exceed \$100.

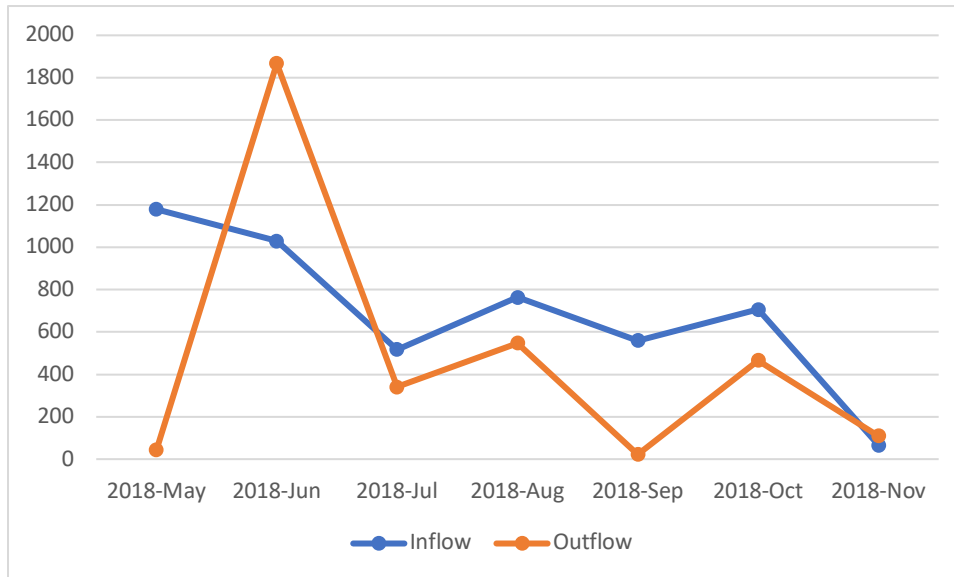
There are no data for Sylvie's assets and liabilities. When asked, Sylvie told researchers that she was "not interested" in completing the forms, but that she might be interested after she had given birth (she was estimated by the Financial Diaries Team to be in the second or third trimester of her pregnancy at the time). Shortly after the birth of her child, another two of Sylvie's children were returned to her care, and she could no longer continue with the project.

### Income and Spending Patterns

The graph below shows Sylvie's Income and spending from May to November of 2018 (Figure 1).

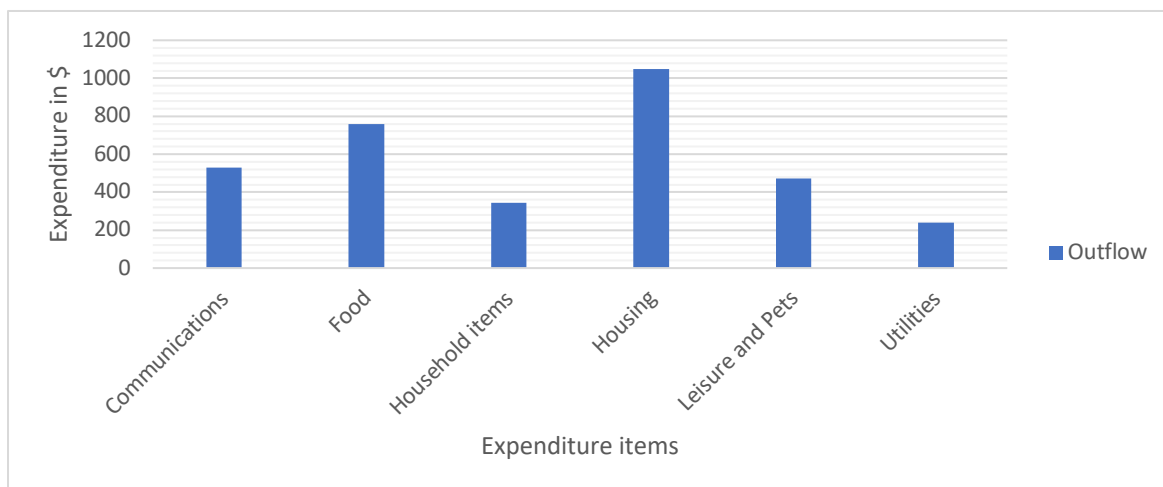
The spike in outflows in June is due to rent and the purchase of household items when Sylvie moved into her apartment. She also spent more money on cigarettes in June. She owns a smart phone and has an internet connection.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month

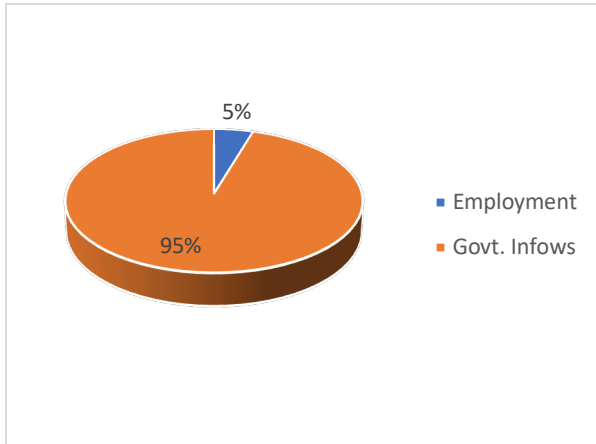


Sylvie prioritizes housing (Figure 2). This is followed by expenditures in the food and communications categories. The spending for the communications category is high because this includes Sylvie's internet connection, cable, and a landline, for which she pays a total of just over \$140 per month.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



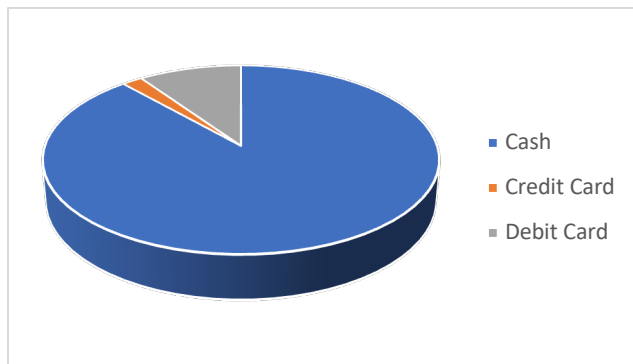
Sylvie's main source of income is Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) (Figure 3). This comprises about 95% of her income. Sylvie earned 5% of her income from casual labor (cleaning, baking, and beading). Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Sylvie uses cash for 88% of her financial transactions (Figure 4). She uses debit only about 10% of the time and rarely uses credit (2%).

Figure 4. Method of Transactions





## Linda

Linda is in her early sixties. Although she had been regularly employed up until four years prior to her participation in the Financial Diaries project, she suffered a workplace injury and is not able to return to regular employment. Linda is currently working on a casual basis and her main source of income is from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA).

Linda shared with researchers that she has experienced multiple traumatic events in her life, including growing up in foster care and the loss of her adult daughter. She had begun a journey of personal transformation (getting fit and quitting smoking) shortly before beginning with the project, however past trauma continues to affect Linda's financial wellbeing.

## Diaries Project

Linda learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. She started in April 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. Linda told researchers that she found the diaries process therapeutic; she really appreciated the 'listening ear' of the interviewer, and these meetings were almost like a financial counselling session for her.

Linda shared that she does not always feel in control of her finances and told researcher that she sometimes delays paying bills because she feels "frustrated". When asked whether she was able to respond to financial emergencies, Linda replied, "No. No. I'm always trying to figure out how to, I mean, I'm always behind the eight ball. I try so hard but I never, even if I put every dime on it, I'm still behind the eight ball."

Linda spoke about wanting to win the lottery. She told researchers that she would love to know what it's like to be able to go out and to have a full fridge, and enough coins to do her laundry without having to worry.

## Sociodemographic

Linda is single. She shared with researchers that although she was born in an Indigenous family, she grew up in foster care with a Dutch family and prefers to identify culturally as Canadian. Linda had only one child, a daughter, who a few years previously had sadly committed suicide shortly after giving birth.

Linda's grandchild is being raised by her sister and, according to Linda, their relationship is therefore not as close as she would like it to be.

Past traumatic events seem to researchers to weigh heavily on Linda. She told the Financial Diaries team that the loss of her daughter caused her to go through a period of depression and that she would never get over this loss. Linda also shared with researchers that she had been sexually assaulted (a main reason why she felt she needed her current cell phone/data plan as a form of personal security).

Linda lives in a private, rented apartment. She completed grade 10 and works casually. Her income is supplemented by Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). She also receives Old Age Security (OAS) benefits. Four years prior to her involvement with the project, Linda had been employed full-time, however she suffered a workplace injury and had to go on disability benefits. She suffers from various health conditions (diabetes and high blood pressure). Linda owns a smart phone and has an internet connection at home.

Recounting to researchers that she remembers frequently going hungry as a child, and that she now wants to help others, Linda told researchers that therefore she chooses to be very involved in her church community and volunteering. She also shared that she is committed to improving her physical health, visiting her local YMCA daily to exercise, and that she has recently lost a significant amount weight.

During her year with the project, Linda experienced some health challenges, including a surgery to improve circulation which was complicated by an infection. She was assaulted in an attempted robbery but credited her recent workouts for her increased physical strength and ability to fend off her attacker and retain her cell phone.

#### Financial Practices

At the start of her participation in the project, Linda estimated her annual income as approximately \$11,400. Her main source of income is from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), which she supplements with casual work (such as babysitting or other odd jobs for people at her church).

Linda shared that she does not track her expenses and finds it difficult to stick to a small budget. She receives barely enough to cover her rent and utilities from her EIA payments. The \$900 Linda

receives from EIA covers her \$600 rent payment and her phone/internet bill, leaving Linda very little for her other expenses.

Linda has a high monthly phone bill (\$70). She shared with researchers that she was sexually assaulted a few years ago, and that she needs the phone/internet connection for her personal security. An outstanding telecommunication bill further complicates Linda's constrained budget. She is paying \$100 per month to clear this debt and must consequently access phone and internet usage via a friend's plan. Linda shared that she does not have access to the detailed bills and feels that her friend is charging for more than her half of the \$140 plan (Linda pays her friend \$100 per month), but since she needs internet and phone service for her security, she has no option but to trust her friend and pay the amount requested. Linda told researchers that her YMCA fitness membership is her only extra spending, but that she regards this as essential for her wellbeing.

Researchers noted that Linda struggled more than the other participants in her efforts to make it month to month. Linda said that she has approximately \$35 left for everything else after paying her monthly bills. She relies on her local foodbank and a community kitchen program through her church to supplement her meagre food budget (Linda receives meals/food in return for her volunteer time). She also regularly eats meals with family or friends. In addition, Linda looks for ways to save, including: buying most items second-hand; hand-washing her laundry in her bathtub; and using senior bus tickets (which are \$0.45 cheaper than regular adult tickets) as often as she is able.

Linda told researchers that she doesn't like to borrow or ask for things that she doesn't have, as she is very independent. She feels that she manages well with the small amount that she is given but admits that this is often difficult. She confided, "I do the best I can, and I come through. I'm even surprised how I come through each month. There are days I just don't, you just can't afford to eat. You just don't eat."

#### [Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project](#)

Linda has a checking and savings account (Table 1). Her net assets are negative, and they did not change through the diary period.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

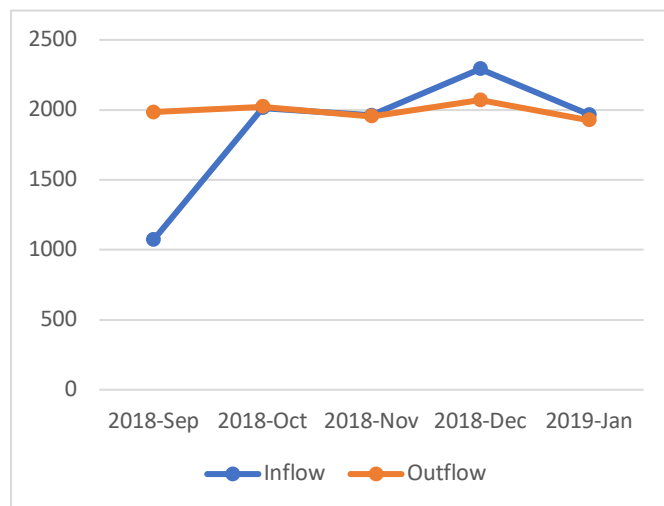
	Start	Finish
Household contents	\$700	\$700
Checking	\$9	\$3
Savings	\$2	\$0
Loan MPI	\$-3,000	\$-3,000
Internet bill	\$-100	\$-100
Total	\$-3,089	\$-3,097

### Income and Spending Patterns

Linda's inflows and outflows correspond very closely (Figure 1). This pattern is logical as she receives very little income and spends the bulk of this on rent and utility bills, leaving little or no discretionary income.

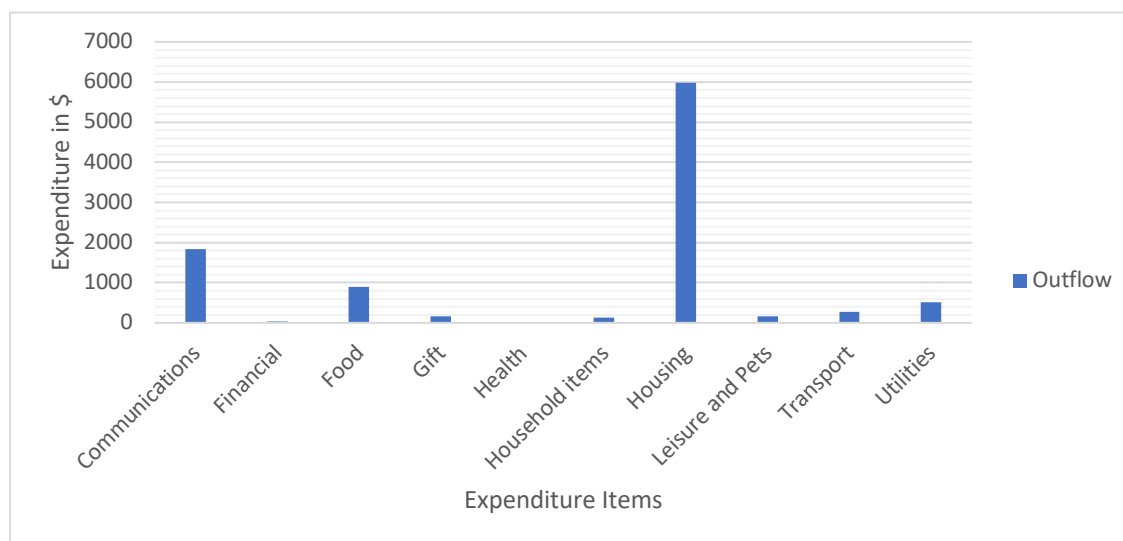
Inflows and outflows were quite consistent from September 2018 through January 2019, with outflows slightly exceeding inflows.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



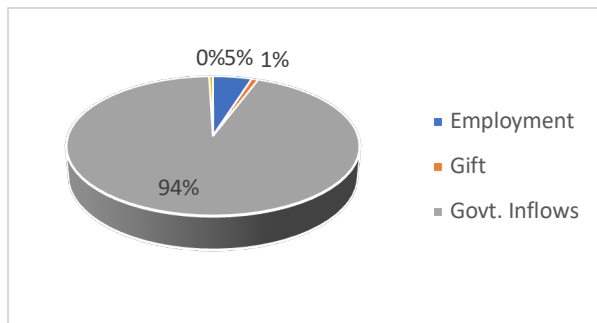
Linda prioritizes rent, utilities, and transportation (Figure 2). Most of Linda's income goes towards rent. She also spends significantly on internet connection (nearly \$1,800 during her time with the project) as she requires this for her personal security.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Linda's main sources of income are Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and an Old Age Supplement (OAS) (Figure 3). This is supplemented by income from casual employment and the honoraria from her participation in the project.

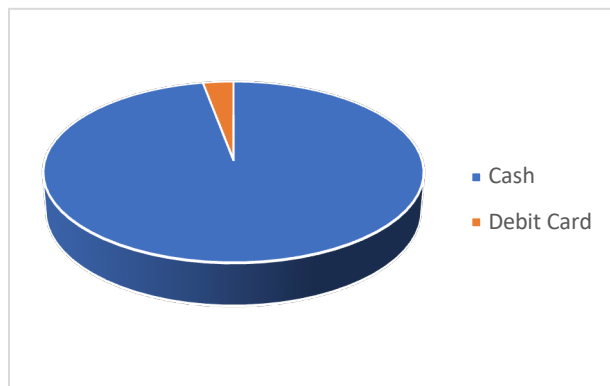
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Linda is one of the few Financial Diaries Project participants that relies on cash (97%) for her transactions (Figure 4). She uses her debit card for only 3% of her transactions and does not own a credit card.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Rupi

Rupi is in her mid-forties. A recent newcomer to Canada, she immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh in 2017. Her year with the Financial Diaries project was her first winter in Canada. Rupi was not employed at the start of the project; however, she later got a job cooking for a local restaurant – work which she noted was challenging due to ongoing health issues. Rupi was actively working to contribute to her daughter's Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP).

### Connection to the Diaries Project

Rupi started with the Financial Diaries project in March 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local non-profit organization. Prior to this, Rupi was not formally tracking her financial transactions, but noted that she is now doing so and has become more aware of her inflows and outflows. Rupi also told the research team that she feels more in control of her spending: "I am more focusing [on] self-control when spending and budgeting and monitoring that, how much I'm spending and how much I'm left with and how much I should control."

Rupi noted that, as a child, she used to have a 'piggy bank' for saving money and that a local Bangladeshi bank opened a savings account for students when she was in primary school. She told researchers, however, that when she was a student, her parents supported her, and when she subsequently gained employment as an adult, she went through a period of less restrained spending. Rupi explained that she had only learned to save after arriving in Canada and finding herself on a limited budget.

When asked about financial wellbeing, Rupi responded, "I think that [to be financially well you [are] self-sufficient, you're already in control of your money, management, finances, inflow and outflow." She explained to the research team that financial wellbeing is also about being able to set short term and long-term financial goals. One of her long-term goals was to own her own home in the future, "But I don't know, I have no clue how to achieve it. But that is my inner dream."

### Sociodemographic

Rupi is single and has one teenage daughter. She describes her cultural background as South Asian/Bangladeshi. Rupi and her daughter live in Manitoba Housing (provincially subsidized housing) for which she pays from her Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) income. She shared that she has had adjustment and health issues since arriving in Canada.

From her conversations with researchers, it is evident that Rupi places a high value on education. Rupi earned both a Bachelor of Business Administration and a Master of Business Administration before she left Bangladesh. She invested in driving lessons and earned her driver's license during the project. Rupi also reports contributing regularly towards a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) to ensure her daughter could realize her hopes of attending university. Rupi owns a smart phone and has internet access at home.

Despite physical health challenges, Rupi feels pressure to earn money to save toward her daughter's future education. She talked about how difficult it is to not have a job. She also revealed that she misses the identity that goes along with having a 'respectable' job. Rupi had earned \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month in Bangladesh working as a deputy manager with the electric company in Bangladesh. She talked about how she was once able to help so many people, but that she is now not able to do so.

At the start of the project, Rupi was working only casually as a school lunch monitor (one hour per day). She later found a job cooking for a local restaurant. Rupi described this work as difficult (due to health issues) and precarious. She was paid informally and noted that she had, at times, to negotiate for her overdue wages.

Although Rupi would like to pursue training and be in a helping profession, she revealed that she faced several employment barriers. Rupi told the research team that that Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) does not consider her to be employable because she cannot work full-time with her various health ailments. For this reason, they will not place her in a training program to upgrade her skills. At one time, Rupi had applied to go on disability, but was not accepted. This would have provided an extra \$100 per month. She noted that she feels that she is on her own and expressed interest in learning about other community supports.

Rupi faces systemic barriers. Her employment situation is like that of other newcomer women, especially those of racialized minorities. Although educated, her skills are not considered sufficient for employment. English training classes which could boost employability are often unaffordable for parents who must work to provide for their children and sacrifice their own opportunities to prioritize their children's futures. Frequently, women in such cases turn to poorly paid jobs in the service sector. Sometimes- as in Rupi's case- these types of jobs are even more precarious and poorly paid as they are 'under the table'.

In addition to her health issues, Rupi also spoke about her poor mental state and her need for more social interaction. Rupi told researchers that she feels that she cannot cry at home because she



needs to be strong for her daughter. She also spoke about how difficult it had been to be a single mother in Bangladesh.

Rupi shared that her marriage to her ex-husband had been abusive, and this introduced trauma into her life. They met only briefly thirty minutes prior to their wedding and were married for only three years before she left. Rupi told the research team that up until the year of the project, her ex-husband had not seen or supported his daughter since she was one year old. He did finally come to Winnipeg to visit his daughter (now sixteen) in the fall of 2018, taking his daughter out for meals and shopping. While he initially agreed to his daughter's request to provide \$200 per month in support, he later reneged on this promise. Rupi shared that she is not even certain that the divorce is final, and although her daughter was born in the United States and is a U.S. citizen, she is uncertain about her entitlements.

#### Financial Practices

At the start of her participation in the project, Rupi estimated her annual income at approximately \$8,800. This amount does not include her Canada Child Benefit (CCB) payments. Rupi brought \$20,000 of savings with her when she first came to Canada, however this has since been depleted. In addition to her Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) income, Rupi receives a nominal income from her job as a lunch monitor. She receives less than minimum wage for her part-time restaurant job in the informal economy.

Rupi regularly saves to contribute to a Registered Education Savings Program (RESP) for her daughter and a Tax-free Savings Account (TFSA). She is cautious with credit and avoids debt, using her credit card as a debit card mostly to avoid going over her twelve free transactions for her debit card. She does not spend much money on eating out, noting:

Most of the time we cook at home. So that's how we save. And I don't go out often to order food and restaurants and all that. We don't go outing. Our life is very simple, Monday to Friday, I wake up in the morning, I make food and I'm at home and I go browse around to look for a job.

#### Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Rupi has one checking account and one savings account (Table 1). She also has a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for her daughter and a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA). She owns approximately

\$6,900 in household contents (including a computer). Rupi's net assets increased negligibly over the diary period.

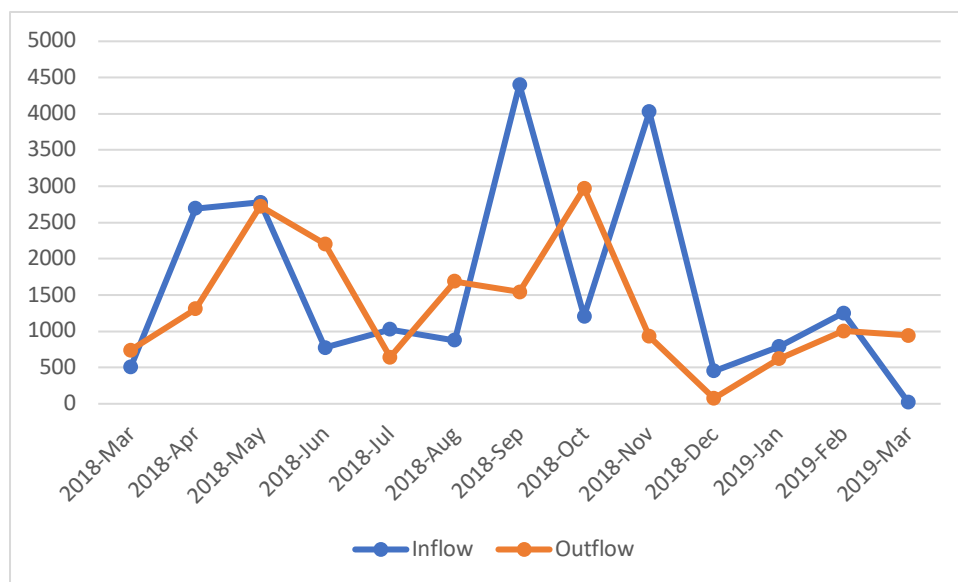
Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

	Start	Finish
House contents	\$6,900	\$6,900
Checking	\$2,362	\$1,400
Savings	\$90	\$20
RESP	\$3,805	\$4,600
TFSA	\$1,361	\$1,600
Credit cards	\$488	\$300
Other	Child Benefit pay back (undisclosed amount)	Resolved
Total	\$7,618	\$7,620

#### Income and Spending Patterns

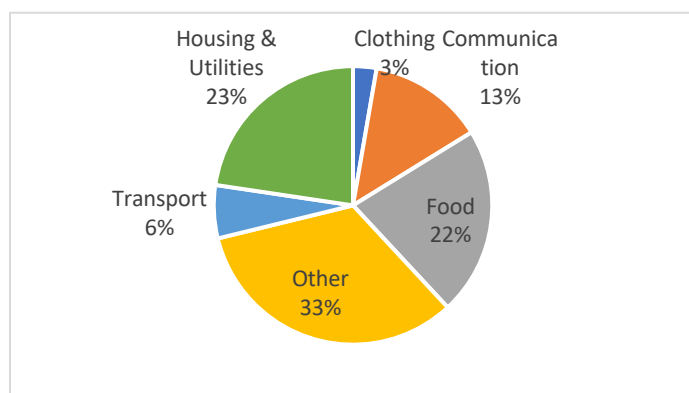
Rupi's outflows generally follow her inflows (Figure 1). The spike in outflows in May was due to Rupi sending \$650 to her uncle in Bangladesh to help Rohingya refugees. She also paid for lodging for an upcoming trip to Toronto and train tickets between Toronto and Ottawa. There was a spike in inflows in May when Rupi received \$1,000 for a Goods and Services Tax (GST) rebate and \$327 from a tax return from a previous year. The spike in inflows in September was due to a lump sum payment of \$3,300 of her Canada Child Benefit (CCB), which had been cut off a few months prior and was reinstated.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



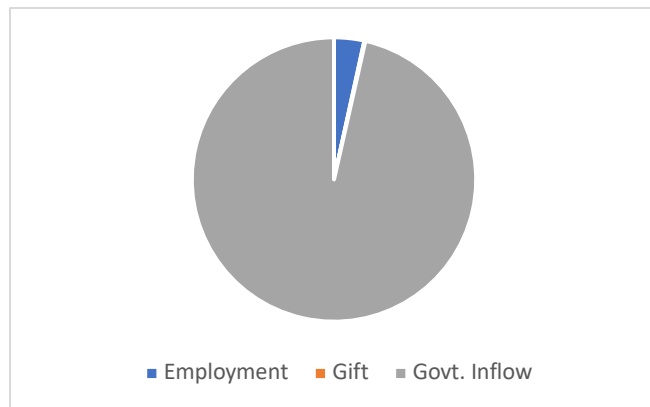
Rupi prioritizes housing and utilities, food, and saving money for her daughter's Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RESP) (reflected in the 'Other' category). She values healthy eating and shops for her groceries selectively, prioritizing quality rather than price. In this regard, Rupi is like Donna, who also tends to spend more on food than the other participants.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Rupi's main source of income is Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) (Figure 3). She also earns a small amount from her part-time position as a school lunch monitor.

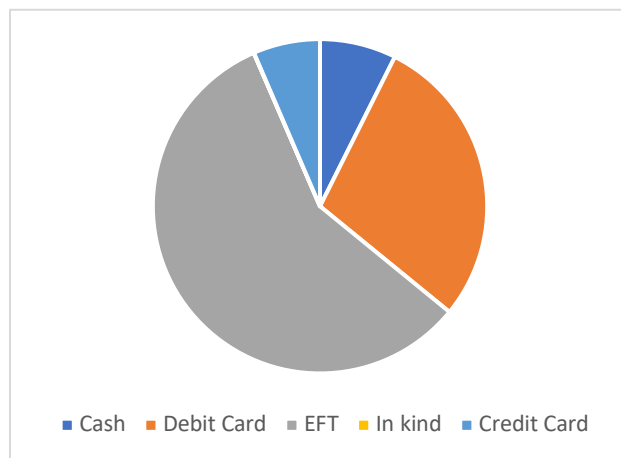
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Rupi makes about 58% of her financial transactions using electronic funds transfer (EFT). She uses her debit card for 29% of her transactions. She uses cash and credit infrequently.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Mia

Mia is forty years old and has five children. Like Sylvie, Mia began participating in the Financial Diaries project while in the process of transitioning out of a recovery program from women healing from abuse and addiction. At the start of the project, Mia was pregnant with twins and still living in the healing center, however she transitioned to second-stage living early in the diary year. Her income while living at the women's program was meagre, however this improved after she gave birth to her son and daughter and started receiving Canada Child Benefit. Mia shared with researchers that tracking her finances was stressful for her.

## Diaries Project

Mia learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local Indigenous healing organization. She started with the project in April 2018 and continued for twenty-two weeks. Mia's is a personal diary, however it appeared to researchers that Mia's finances were still intertwined with those of her ex-boyfriend (the father of her eldest three children).

Mia began participating in the project while she was still living in supportive housing. Initially, she was interested in knowing where her money was going but would become stressed talking about money. She shared that she found the diaries process helpful and appeared to researchers to be committed to tracking expenses, but she was not always able to be consistent. Mia shared that she would become overwhelmed with the tracking process at times.

Members of the Financial Diaries team noted Mia's experience of becoming overwhelmed seemed to relate to being more intentional about her finances during a season of many changes (giving birth to her twins and moving through various stages of transitional housing). Mia dropped out after struggling to complete the diaries for several meetings. She explained to researcher that this was a stressful period of life for her and that she was busy and needed some time "to not think about money".

## Sociodemographic

Mia describes her cultural background as Metis. She is currently in a relationship with the father of her twins. Mia also has three older children. They were in foster care at the start of the diary process, but two of these children later moved in with their dad; Mia has weekly visits with them.

Although Mia began the diary year while living in supportive housing for an addiction issue, this was not something she explicitly discussed with researchers. She has a grade ten education and stated that she is technologically and digitally knowledgeable. Mia has a smart phone and access to an internet connection at home. She is currently not looking for work outside of the home.

### Financial Practices

Mia's main sources of income are the Canada Child Benefit payments (CCB) and Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). At the start of the project, Mia estimated her yearly gross income at approximately \$2,600, however she received additional funds from EIA after the birth of her twins. After an initial lag caused by the reapplication process, Mia also began once again to receive a CCB payment, which was a major boost to her income. Mia's supportive housing in both the first stage and second stage were fully subsidized. Researchers noted that it didn't appear to them that Mia's parents contributed financially.

An avid smoker, Mia spends about \$45 per month on cigarettes which she buys at a reduced rate from her parents, who purchase them in the United States. She was also re-selling cigarettes to others, however Mia told interviewers that she was only selling them at cost. She also purchased diet cola in large quantities.

Mia practices money-saving habits, such as buying her prescription medication from a local store which would reward her purchases with a \$10 gift card toward grocery purchases. She participated in a matched saving program with a local non-profit organization, and saved \$250 which was matched to become \$1000, all which Mia spent on household items for her children. Mia shared about wanting to save for a car, furniture, and a vacation in the future, however her diary showed that she had not been able to actively save toward these goals.

Mia reported that she would spend income, such as her CCB, very quickly after she got it—something which Mia shared that she found both puzzling and disappointing. Researchers noted that Mia expressed a desire to reign in her spending but was unsure of how to accomplish this, and that this was an emotional process for her.

### Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Mia has one checking account and one savings account (Table 1). She had very few assets at the beginning of the diary period. Mia purchased some furniture during her time with the project through a local asset-building program, but her net assets did not change substantially. Mia dropped out the project early and was not willing to do a 'post' assets and liabilities interview.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

	Start
Household contents	\$240
Checking	\$70
Savings	\$1,000
Loan (Mb Housing)	\$-1,500
Total	\$-430

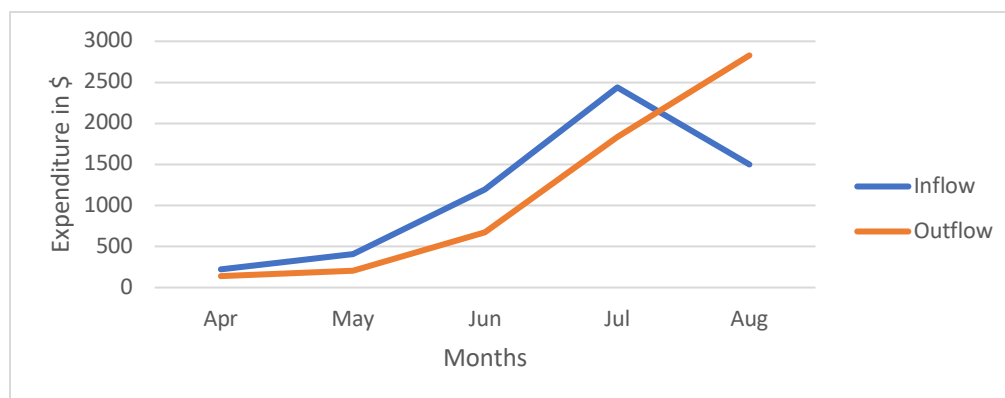
### Income and Spending Patterns

Mia's income and spending patterns over the year show a steep increase in income and spending from the April-May period to the June-August period (Figure 1). This because Mia moved out of supportive housing to have greater independence - a major transition, in terms of her children's care, accommodation, financial independence, and inflows/outflows. Mia now needed to set up a furnished home and kitchen. In addition, Mia had to buy a tablet during the diaries, after losing her old one at a bus stop. She also needed to replace her cell phone (purchased second-hand online) after it stopped working.

From April to July, both inflows and outflows continued to increase, with inflows remaining higher than outflows. The spike in July was due to a higher Canada Child Benefit (CCB) payment. Mia's spending in July also increased because she purchased shoes for her eldest son.

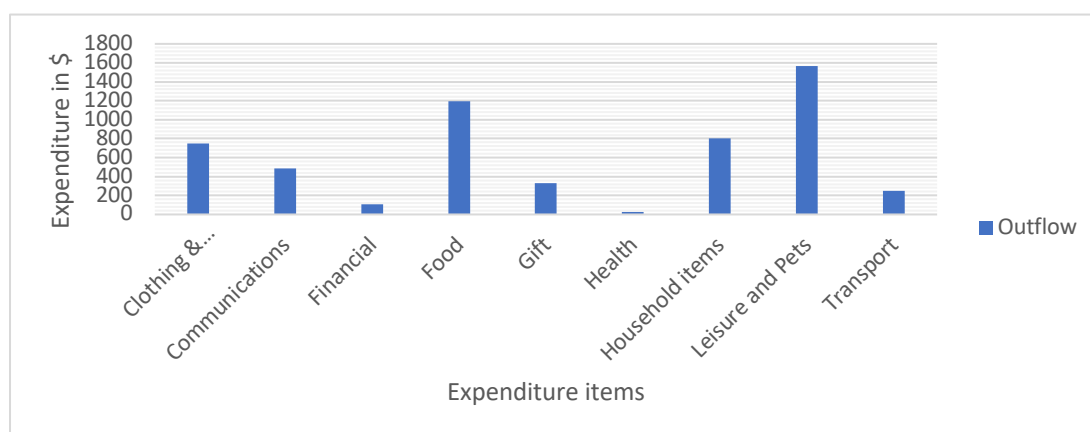
In August, however, there was a dip in income due to a lower amount of Canada Child Benefit (CCB) received compared to the previous month.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



Mia spends the most on items on leisure, food, and clothing (Figure 2). The high spending in the leisure category reflects Mia's expenditure on cigarettes and diet cola. While her spending on cigarettes is only \$45 per month, this nevertheless consumes a large portion of her income. Food and clothing costs are higher because this category includes spending on formula, clothing and diapers for her new-born twins. Spending on communications costs (cell phone) also comprise a large part of Mia's budget. Mia's housing costs, on the other hand, are not reflected below, as her housing is completely subsidized.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending

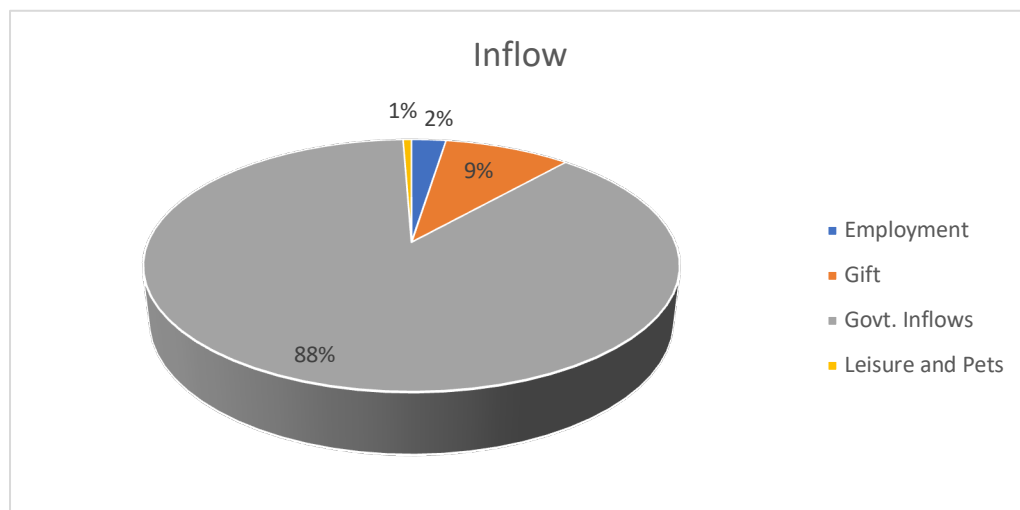


Most of the Mia's income (79%) comes from government inflows, such as Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) benefits and Canada Child Benefit (CCB) payments (Figure 3). Mia also receives cash



gifts from family and friends, as well as shopping loyalty rewards (9%). Mia received 2% of her income from casual employment (cleaning, baking) and occasionally receives income from the sale of cigarettes.

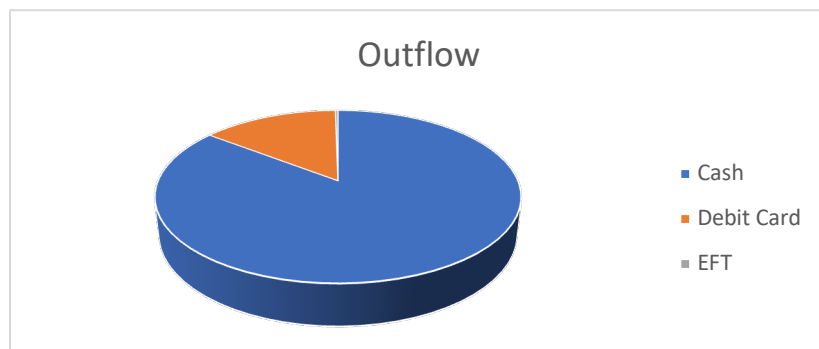
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Mia makes 85% of her transactions using cash (Figure 4). She uses debit 14% of the time and rarely uses electronic funds transfer (EFT). Mia does not own a credit card.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Frida

Frida is in her late thirties. She came to Canada from Nigeria in 2016. She is single and has one son. At the start of the Financial Diaries project, Frida was a student and was casually employed. Much of Frida's time and energy is devoted to caring for her son, who is severely disabled and requires constant care. She is pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in social work.

### Diaries Project

Frida started participating in the Diaries project in March of 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project through a local non-profit organization. Frida shared that keeping a detailed financial diary helped her to be more mindful of her spending habits and more deliberate about her choices. "I was questioning my spending and try to refocus on things that are really needed".

As did other participants, Frida told researchers that the combination of keeping a financial diary along with meeting members of the Diaries team to talk about her finances became a therapeutic experience for her.

I think for me, what was enjoyable was for me, before now I used to have maybe issue with my finances. Like it wasn't enough. I'm alone, single mom with a special need child. There was so much going in terms of finance, but there was nobody to, to share that burden with. ...and you were providing me that listening ear... It was like a financial counselling this year.

Frida also shared with researchers that "the challenge initially was trust. During her last meeting with researchers, she described how at the beginning she was not sure how much that she wanted to share about "questionable" expenses like the lottery or alcohol. "How do I just go and tell somebody, maybe I'm spending so much on a lottery ticket for instance, or I'm spending so much on eating out, right?

Frida told researchers she felt that the Diaries process was an especially valuable one for newcomers like herself. She also indicated that these meetings helped her understand parts of her credit card or debit card statements as there was an opportunity for her to look at her expenses together with a researcher.

I wish it could be part of orientation, something like that within the first six months of coming, just so that we understand how these things work, how credit card works out. It will just help them

track because sometimes people come and we are filled with so much excitement at the beginning and before you knew her in debts and all that. So, it should be part of first six-month orientation in Canada and all that. I think it will be, it will put people, help people monitor their finances, so and get more people involved. Yeah.

### Sociodemographic

Frida holds a BA from Nigeria and is currently working on her second BA (Social Work). She expressed to researchers how difficult it is for her to find time to do her studies. Frida is not only a student but a single parent to a young son whose disability requires that he receive extensive assistance with feeding and mobility. She shared with researchers that she is that she is finding it physically draining to be the sole caregiver for her son. Frida receives only four hours of respite per month.

At the beginning of the project, Frida lived in a private rental accommodation with her son and a few roommates. During the project, she qualified for and moved into a provincially subsidized apartment (Manitoba Housing). Frida told researcher that she makes purchases via Kijiji or FB Marketplace and likes to treat her son to McDonalds.

She is working on getting her driver's license and would like to have a car but now she travels by bus- a hardship especially during the winter when she is pushing her son's stroller/wheelchair in the snow. She has tried to enrol for Handi-transit (subsidized transportation for those with mobility issues) but was told that her son was not eligible.

At one point the project, Frida told researchers that her refugee status had lapsed and that she and her son were without health coverage. In March, however, Frida and her son received their Permanent Resident (PR) status- a fact for which she expressed relief as this placed them both back in status to be able to access health care.

### Financial Practices

Frida's total yearly income is approximately \$12,000/year, mostly from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). She also works casually for a local non-profit organization (approximately 1-5 hours per month).

Frida told researchers that she spends more on groceries from an African food shop where she can purchase familiar/traditional items for meals. She also has high expenses for medications for her son.

During her time with the project, Frida took in the son of a colleague from Nigeria. She explained to researchers that as he is a close colleague of hers from Nigeria, his son will live with them for 3-6 months, and as she is following the cultural traditions of Nigeria to help this person as they begin university, she will therefore not ask him for rent or money for food. In return, he will be able to her Frida with some of the care needed for her son.

Frida indicated that she has two banks—one for her debit card (TD Bank) and one for her credit card (CIBC). She pays off her credit card with cash and pays at the bank. She pays rent at the end of each month and pays for her phone at the beginning of the month. Researchers also noted that she told them about a loan of \$500 to a friend but she did not seem to want to give other details about this.

Researchers found that Frida's outflows tended to exceed her outflows. They also noted more expenditures on eating out as compared to other participants receiving EIA.

#### Assets & Liabilities

At the start of the project, Emilia was renting her home and was not receiving any subsidies (Table 1). She has both a chequing and savings account. By the end of the project, she had reduced her credit card debt, and her net assets had risen slightly.

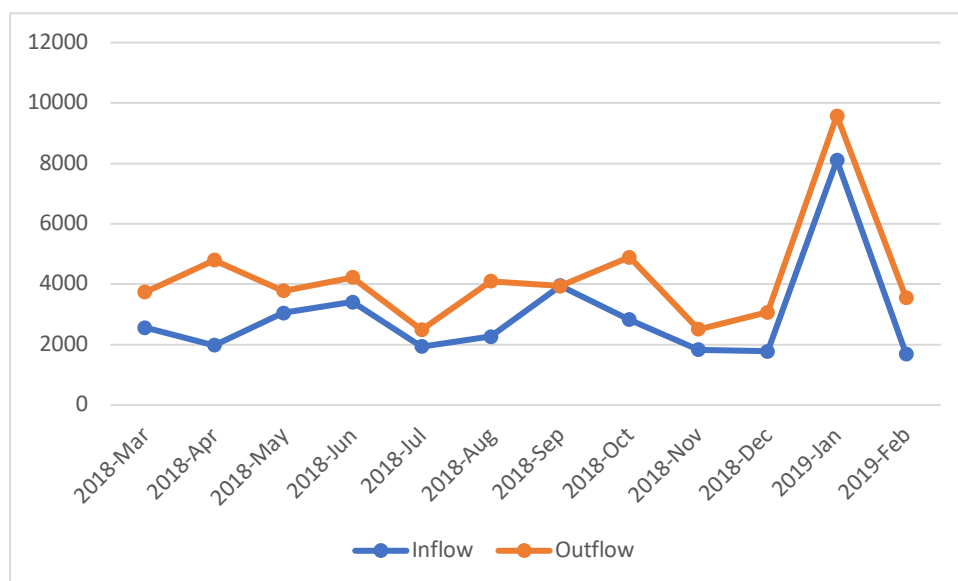
Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

	Start	Finish
House contents	No info provided	No info provided
Checking	\$998	\$769
Savings	\$3,250	-
RESP	-	-
TFSA	-	\$4,062
Credit cards	-\$1,283	-\$589
Other	Owed \$994 (loan to friend)	Owed \$1000 (loan to friend)
Total	\$4,248	\$5,242

### Income and Spending Patterns

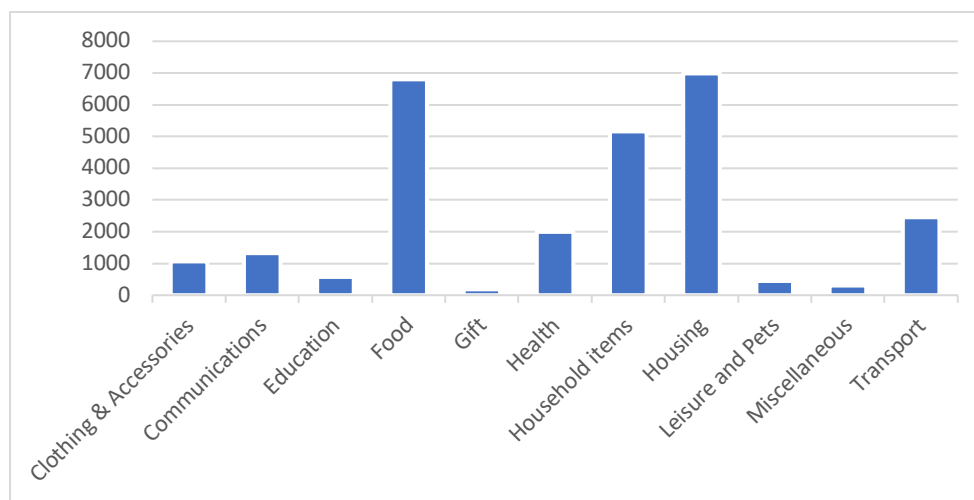
Frida's income and spending were quite steady and tracked one another for most of the year. It is noticeable that outflows are almost always higher than inflows which suggests growing debt, declining savings, or consistently under-reporting her inflows. The spike in January had to do with receipt of student loan and the payment of accumulated rent that was in arrears.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



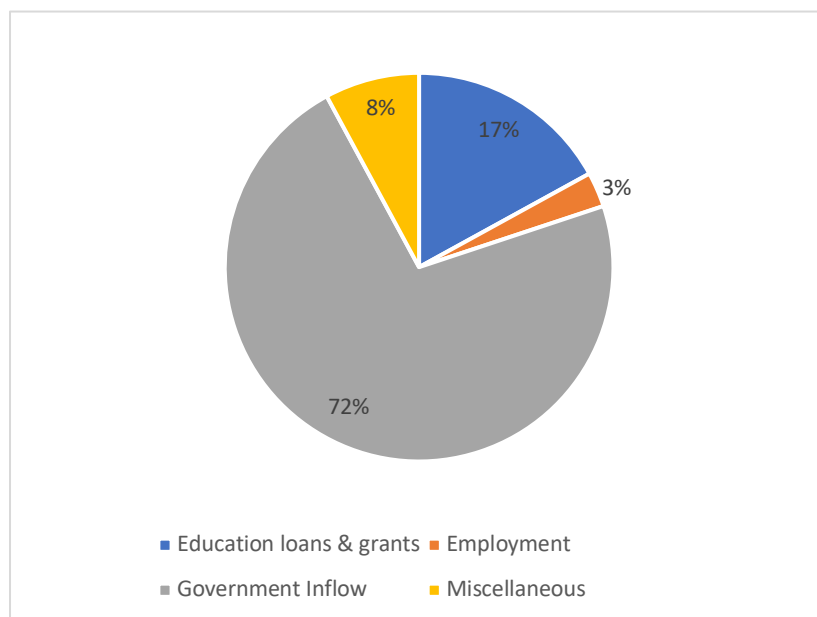
Frida allocates the bulk of her budget on basic needs including housing, food, and household items. Health and transport spending were also significant.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Frida relies for most, 72%, of her inflows from government sources, i.e., social assistance and Canada Child Benefit. Seventeen percent of her inflows come from educational loans and grants and 3% comes from employment activities.

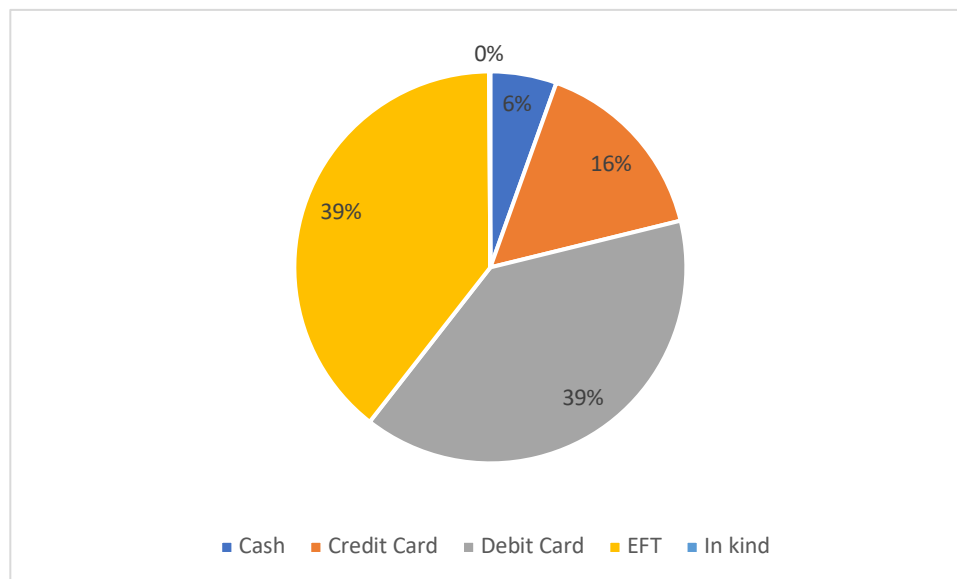
Figure 3. Sources of Income



### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Frida relies heavily on electronic funds transfer, for receiving inflows, and her debit card, for payments. She does also rely on her credit card and, to a small extent, cash.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



### Namid

Namid is in his early thirties. When he first began participating in the Financial Diaries project, Namid's financial situation was already precarious. He was looking for work and receiving income from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) benefits, but this was insufficient to meet his basic needs. The instability of his circumstances was further compounded by his active struggle with an addiction. Like some of the other participants in this group, Namid has suffered various traumatic experiences throughout his life. This seemed to researchers to have impacted both his financial choices as well as the overall health of his finances.

### Diaries Project

Namid learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. He started in April 2018 and participated for 21 weeks. He shared with researchers that he had not been in the habit of tracking his

finances prior to the project. On one occasion, Namid expressed his surprise regarding the discrepancy between what he thought he had spent and what he had in fact spent, remarking that he had much less money left over than he had thought.

In September, Namid did not meet with researchers for a few weeks. He later informed the Financial Diaries Team that he had been hospitalized for an illness. In late October, Namid enrolled in a rehabilitation program for sixty days. After an extended absence from the project, the research team determined that there would be too much missing information, and Namid's participation in the project ended.

### Sociodemographic

Namid describes his cultural background as Anishinaabe-Sioux. At thirty-three years old, he is single. He shared with the Financial Diaries team that he had had a family in the past, but that his wife and child died while Namid was serving a prison sentence.

Namid is unemployed and is working with a provincial agency to gain employment. He spoke about the potential for a year of training with this agency in order gain employment skills. Namid had some undergraduate education and shared that he hoped to continue with his university education. He owns a smart phone but does not have an internet connection at home.

At the beginning of the project, Namid's housing situation was teetering on homelessness. Living in a rooming house paid for by Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), Namid shared with researchers about fights with other tenants and not being able to prepare meals in his room. At one point, Namid lost the key to his room and did not have the required \$25 fee to get a new key. He ended up staying with his mother for a short period. In the fall, Namid lost his room in the rooming house and began staying alternately at his mother's and with a friend.

Namid shared with the Financial Diaries team about some traumatic losses he had experienced in the past. Namid's wife and child had been murdered during the time he was serving a jail sentence. Upon hearing about their deaths, Namid was placed on suicide watch. He mentioned that his brother had been murdered as well, something which his mother, Nita, had similarly shared with researchers. He was open with researchers about his ongoing struggle with addictions.



### Financial Practices

Prior to starting, Namid estimated his annual household income to be approximately \$10,000. This was mostly from government inflows in the form of Employment and Income Assistance (EIA).

Namid spends \$365 a month on rent. He shared with researchers that he normally does not keep track of his finances. Instead, he plans his expenditures in advance and spends only after receiving his payment. Namid mentioned that he would require a new laptop for upcoming fall university courses. However, since he was not able to cook in his rooming house, he liked to eat out when he had money (as opposed to utilizing various community resources for free meals). Buying a laptop would not be possible because of this.

In-kind gifts of food and groceries play a significant role in Namid's financial situation. He shared with researchers that when he runs out of money, he can borrow cash from his mother, and sometimes borrows her credit card as well. He frequently eats meals at his mother's home.

A researcher noted that Namid "seems to live in the moment and at the same time be distressed about the moment." Namid talked about how money seemed to go very quickly. He shared that he drinks heavily a couple of times per month. Namid also told researchers that he enjoyed gambling and had once won the jackpot. Researchers noted that during one month, during which Namid had recorded the majority of his transactions, he spent nearly all of his Employment and Income Assistance cheque (EIA) within 24 hours, mostly on cab fare and beer. When asked about this, Namid responded, "Well cabs are faster and when I have money, I think it is easier."

Namid's financial decision-making might be understood better through a trauma-informed lens. Research points to the complex intersection of trauma and financial decision-making, offering the theory that seemingly impulsive financial spending patterns by those who have suffered trauma might be attempts to compensate for trauma and satisfy deeper needs (Ross and Coombs, 2018).

### Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Namid has one savings account and one checking account (Table 1). He started the project with outstanding debt - a \$3000 loan from Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) and a \$50 bill for his cell phone. Namid shared with researchers that the amount owed to MPI included regular payments for his license, as well as another debt, the details of which he did not disclose. Namid had very few household assets at the start of the project. His net assets did not change significantly during the diary period.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

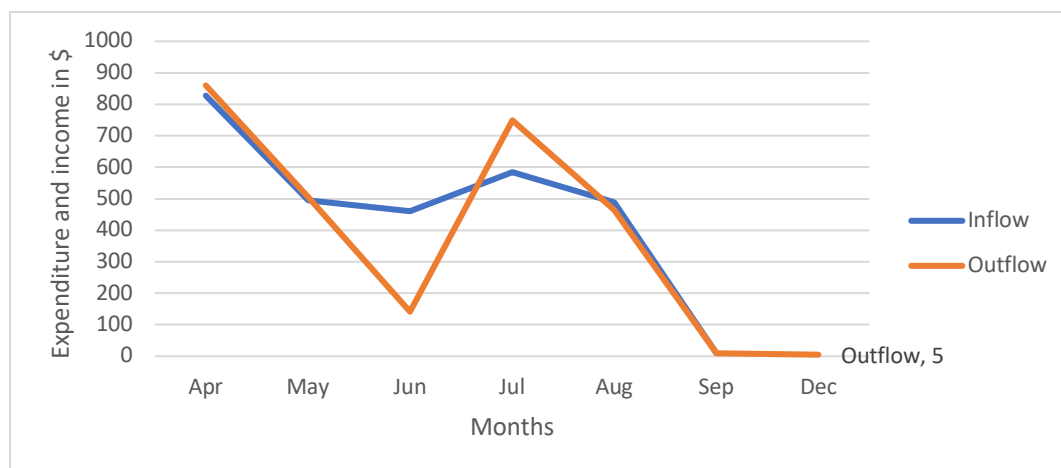
Item	Start
Electronics	\$20
Checking account	\$0
Savings	\$74
Owed gov't disability pay	Uncertain as to amount
Loan MPI	\$-3000
Phone bill	\$-50
Total	\$-2,956

### Income and Spending Patterns

Figure 1 shows Namid's income and spending over the diary year. Outflows normally mirror inflows for Namid, as he bases his spending on his income.

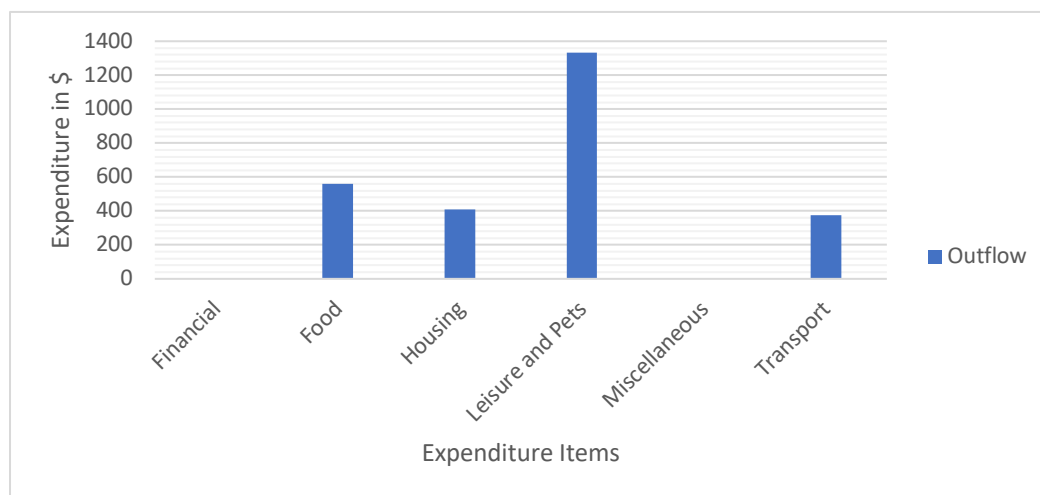
The dip in spending in June was due to a period of illness, where Namid was not spending as he normally would. There was a sharp spike in spending in July. This was due to increased spending in the leisure category (spending on alcohol and cigarettes). Namid also borrowed \$40 from his mother (Nita) during this period.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



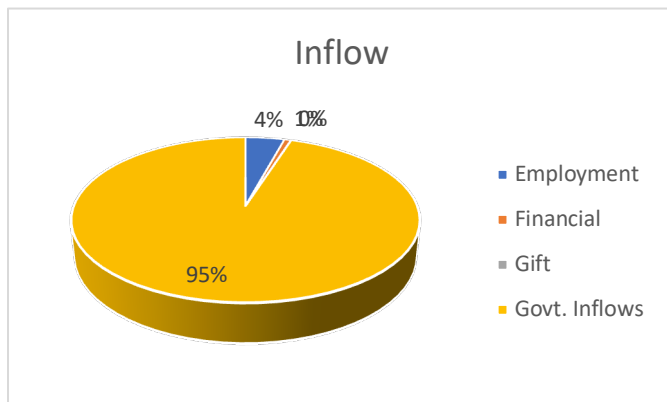
Namid spends the most on the leisure category (Figure 2). This is followed by spending on food, housing, and transport. The high spending in the leisure category is due to purchases of cigarettes and alcohol. Namid's food expenses are higher because he doesn't have a space to cook in his rooming house accommodation. Namid also shared with researchers that he preferred to use taxis for transportation when he had the available finances, a factor which contributes to his higher transportation costs.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Ninety-five percent of Namid's income is derived from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), as indicated from the government inflows category (Figure 3). A small amount of income was earned from research project honoraria.

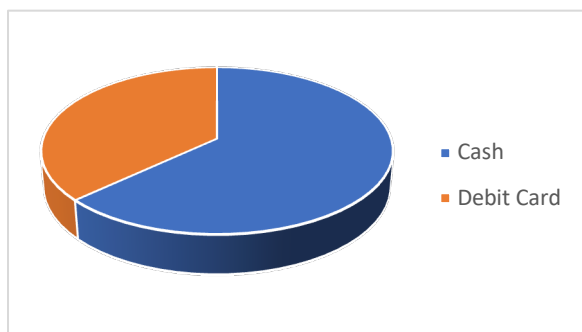
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Namid uses cash for 63% two-thirds of his transactions and debit for 37% (Figure 4). He does not own a credit card.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Amy

Amy is single and in her late thirties. She leans on family support about finances and financial guidance. Amy was not employed during her time with the project but did hold a volunteer office position with a not-for-profit organization which she enjoyed.

## Diaries Project

Amy began participating in the diaries project in May of 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. Amy tracked her expenses prior to her involvement with the project, however this was less detailed, and it included only amounts spent. She shared that she used the budget letter provided by EIA as a loose guide for her spending. What she most liked about the diaries project was the \$10 weekly income from her honorarium, and that she found it easy to record all her inflows and outflows.

## Sociodemographic

Amy has no children and was never married. She describes her cultural background as Canadian. She has some post-secondary education.

Amy's mother passed away in 2015. She shared that she was still processing her mom's death, and that this was difficult for her. Amy's mother was the person she leaned on for financial decisions and support, but now she would ask either her aunt or her stepdad. Her aunt is the guardian for her trust money but does not know any much about Amy's day-to-day finances about the money she receives from EIA. Amy did not disclose to researchers whether she has a disability; she shared with researchers that she has an assistance worker.

## Financial Practices

Amy's annual income is approximately \$14,000. This is mostly from government inflows in the form of Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and from the proceeds of a trust fund. Amy receives her income once a month, on the third last business day and she told researchers that she allocates it, by week, over the month.

Amy mostly walks and sometimes uses the bus for transportation. Her cell phone is paid for by her dad on the 'buddy plan', and she is not aware the monthly cost. It used to be paid for by her mom before she passed away.

Amy doesn't buy many groceries, aside from items such as pasta and sauce, but rather buys and eats her meals from day to day. She also sometimes has meals with her aunt.

Researchers found Amy's diaries to be very detailed with regard to daily inflows and outflows. She shared that she has always tracked finances so carefully and that it was her practice to carry a notebook with her and keep track there. Amy focused on budgeting rather than on her overall finances. Researchers noted that she had little awareness of the details of her banking package- she did not know about her monthly account fees or whether she had a limit on her monthly transactions. Amy expressed that she is very comfortable with her finances and does not have plans for the future.

#### Assets & Liabilities

Amy has few personal assets aside from her home contents, which included only furniture and a TV and stereo equipment (Table1). She has a trust fund but does not know the details. Amy has a checking account and a savings account, but no credit cards or other liabilities. Her assets remained the same over the course of her participation with the diaries project.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

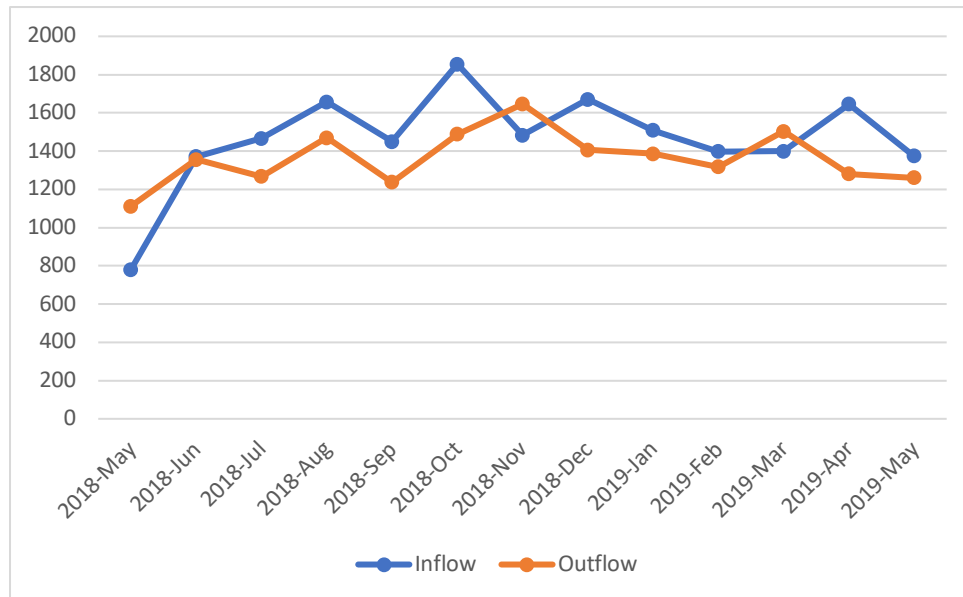
	Start	Finish
House contents	\$1,800	\$1,800
Checking	\$245	\$159
Savings	\$18	\$14
RESP	-	-
TFSA	-	-
Credit cards	-	-
Other	Trust Fund- she does not know the details	Trust Fund- she does not know the details
Total	\$2,063	\$1,973

#### Income and Spending Patterns

Amy's inflows and outflows are quite steady and her inflows exceed her outflows. This might mean that she has been able to save money over the diaries process, but she has not shared that with interviewers. More likely she has not been able to track all her outflows so that the data shown is not comprehensive.

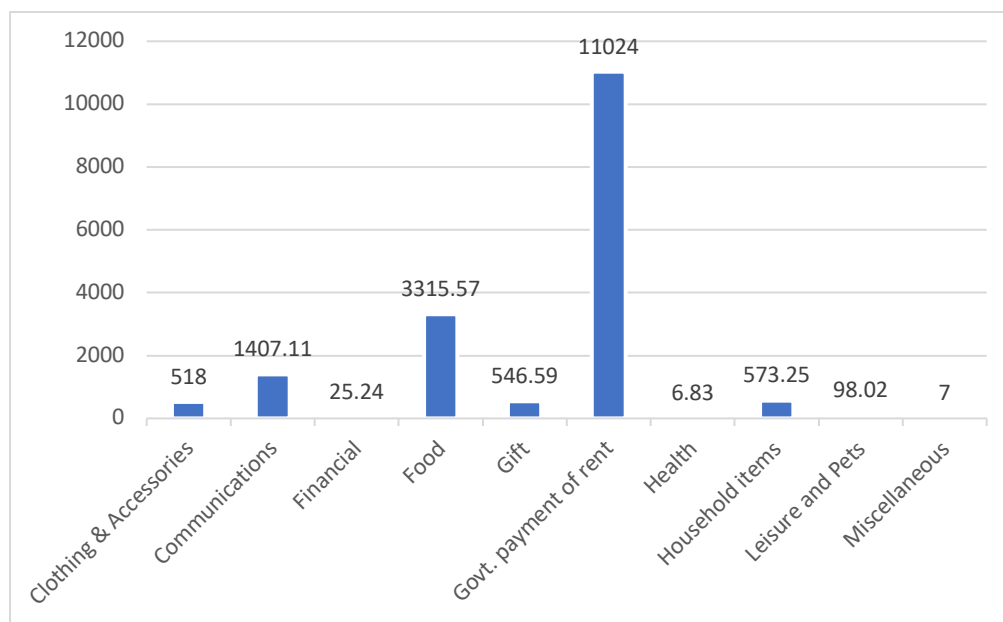
Researchers noted that Amy received a few automatic payments. Her housing payment of \$848 per month (\$561 from Manitoba Housing and \$287 from EIA) goes directly to the landlord, Cityscape, at beginning of each month. She also receives \$15 towards her Hydro bill, which goes directly to Mb Hydro.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



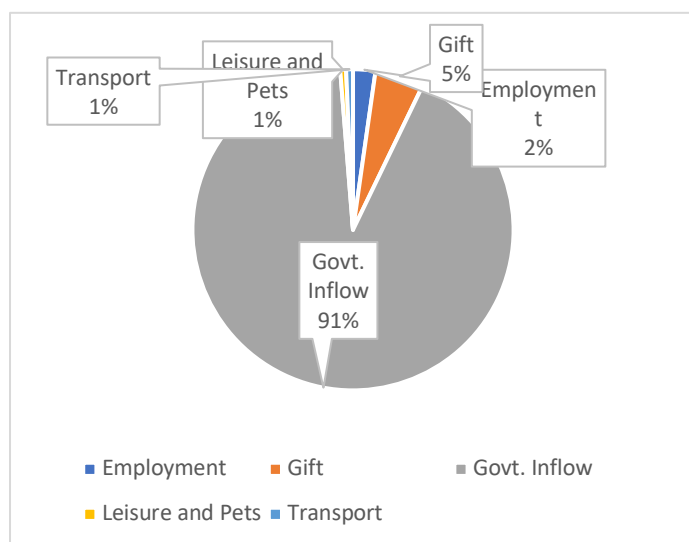
Amy's budget is very much focused on meeting her basic needs including housing, food, and some funds for communications (e.g., cell phone). Amy's rent is paid directly between the government agency and the landlord.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Most of the Amy's income is from government inflows, specifically social assistance. There are other source of income including some money from employment and gifts in cash and in-kind.

Figure 3. Sources of Income

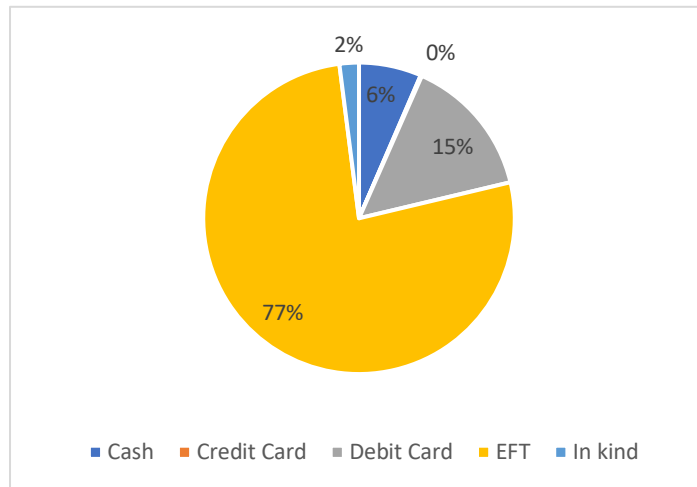




### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Amy's transactions are done via electronic funds transfer and debit card. Cash plays a small role in her transactions.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Annette

Annette is in her early fifties. At the start of the Financial Diaries project, Annette volunteer nearly full-time at a local non-profit. She is on permanent EIA disability and receives only \$100 per month for this volunteer work. Annette's income is very limited, and she is unable to accumulate savings for the future. She shared with researchers that she has concerns about her financial future once she becomes a senior citizen.

## Diaries Project

Annette started with the Financial Diaries project in March of 2018 participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local non-profit organization. Annette told researchers that she felt fairly knowledgeable about her finances. She shared the following definition of financial wellbeing with researchers:

Not having to worry about where food is going to come from. Being able to actually eat properly instead of processed foods. Being able to afford to have fruit and vegetables in your fridge and meat. Never having to worry about bills, although I don't really worry about them anyways cause I usually have them paid...

Unlike some participants, Annette did not extend financial help to her adult children, however she shared with researchers that she would like to be able to do so. "Being able to help my kids when they, when they really need help, that would be huge because right now I can't help them out if they're in trouble. And that bothers me. I'd like to be able to help them up."

Annette shared with researchers that she learned about financial management through "the school of hard knocks". She expressed an aversion to using credit cards. "Around about [age] forty, I decided that's it for credit cards, stuff like that. Don't want to have anything to do with them. I'm done. You know, they only get you into trouble and it's too easy. It's too easy to access."

## Sociodemographic

Annette emigrated from to Canada from Germany in 1965 and describes her cultural background as 'Canadian'. She is divorced with three adult children- two sons and one daughter.

Annette told researchers that she is not in communication with two of her children, who live in another province, however one son lives in Winnipeg. She told researchers that her eldest son had a stroke a few years ago and lost his long-term memory and she is not able to see her grandchild, who

lives overseas. She does, however, have two young step grandchildren through her relationship with her current partner.

Annette shared that she enjoys strong community support – she is involved with a local church, has friends who live near her, and benefits from a good relationship with the landlords of the rooming house in which she lives. She also told researchers that she previously spent many years in abusive relationships.

Annette has been on disability for the last fifteen years and has been working as a full-time volunteer for the last 1.5 years. She told researchers that she used to suffer from agoraphobia (fear of leaving her house). It was about sixteen or so years ago she began to learn how to deal with this fear. She then talked about how the church has been so important in her development of self-confidence, along with her work volunteering at the food bank and soup kitchen. Whereas she previously had difficulty looking at other people, with these supports she gradually she gained more confidence and loves helping and interacting with others.

#### Financial Practices

Annette receives a yearly gross income of \$9,000 from disability EIA. In addition to this, she receives only the \$100 which EIA pays her for her volunteer work. Annette's housing expenses are minimal. She lives in a rooming house where she has her own kitchen for which she pays just under \$300 per month.

Annette expressed to researchers that she feels confident about controlling her outflows. She explained that she normally pays bills first and then allocates what is left over towards her food budget. She told researchers that is often insufficient to purchase healthy options. As Annette has such a limited income, once she pays her rent and utilities, she is often without money until the end of the month. At one interview, she mentioned that she had only \$50 in her account (\$15 of which remains in her account to pay for an insurance policy which covers herself and her daughter, who is unwell) which was to last two weeks until her next EIA cheque.

Annette described frugal financial practices. "I know where I spend my money and I know what bills need to be paid. I paid my bills first. I do my, you know, my groceries with whatever I got left." She has very few indulgences. She shared that she smokes 1 cigarette per day, a half at a time, and that she likes to spend her honorarium money on a fast-food meal. She occasionally buys chickens from her landlords who purchase in bulk from the Hutterites and receives occasional in-kind meals in return for volunteering with a local organization.

Annette expressed guilt about spending on herself, such as buying a top or pants for \$10, and told researchers that money for such items would need to come out of her food budget. Annette also shared about wanting to eat nutritiously with fresh fruits and vegetables, which her current situation does not allow her to. Though Annette spends very little on herself, researchers noted that she shared about freely spent on purchasing items for her boyfriend who is ill with cancer. She also spent a lot on transportation to and from the hospital to visit him.

Annette shared that she worries about when she turns 65 and her EIA benefits stop. At this point, she will receive less money than she does at present but has no financial plan to navigate this.

#### Assets & Liabilities

Annette has few assets (Table 1). At the start of the project, she owned just over a thousand dollars' worth of appliances, furniture, collectables, and jewelry. She had one checking account. She also had an outstanding telecommunications bill. Her assets improved slightly by the end of the project; she was able to repay debt, open a savings accounts, increase her bank balance, and add some items to her home contents.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

	Start	Finish
House contents	\$1,085	\$1,685
Checking	\$14	\$4
Savings	-	\$9
RESP	-	-
TFSA	-	-
Credit cards	-	-
Other	Telecommunications bill \$600	-
Total	\$499	\$1,698

#### Income and Spending Patterns

Annette's inflows and outflows are quite steady, and, like Amy, her inflows are higher than her outflows. But since there is no evidence of savings, we assume that some spending was consistently missed.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month

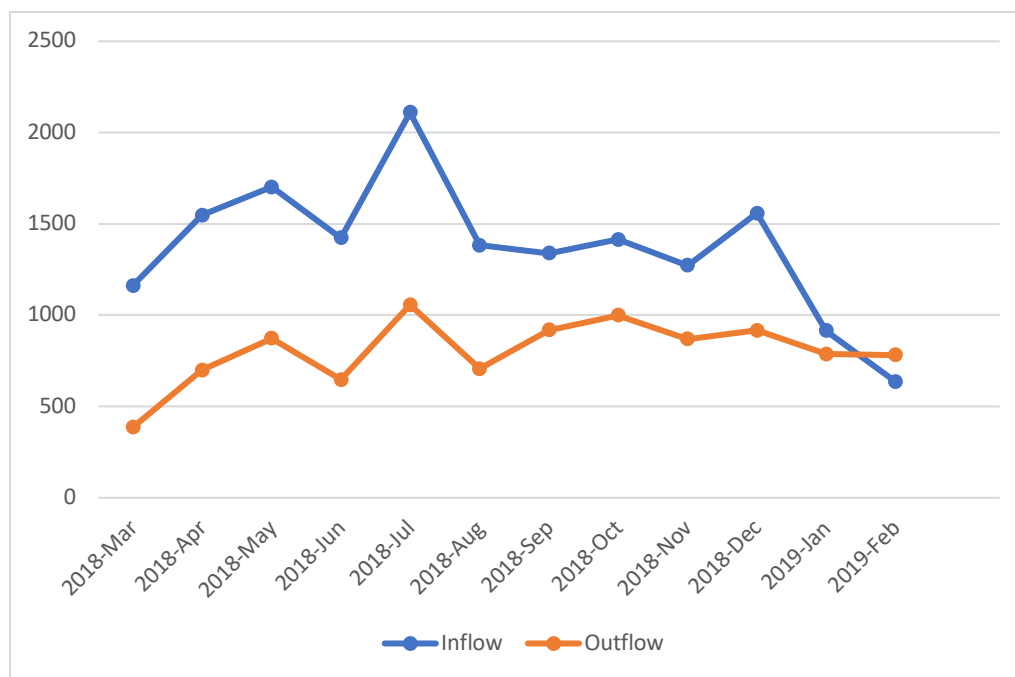
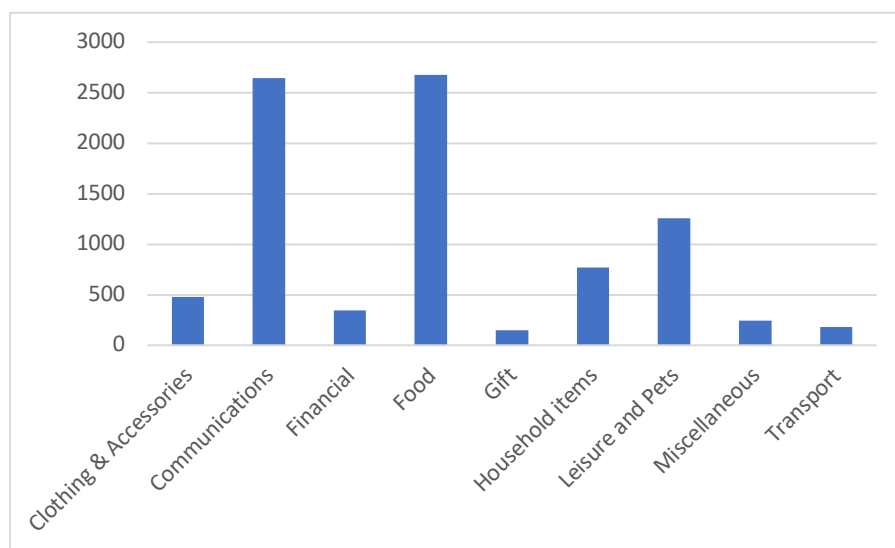


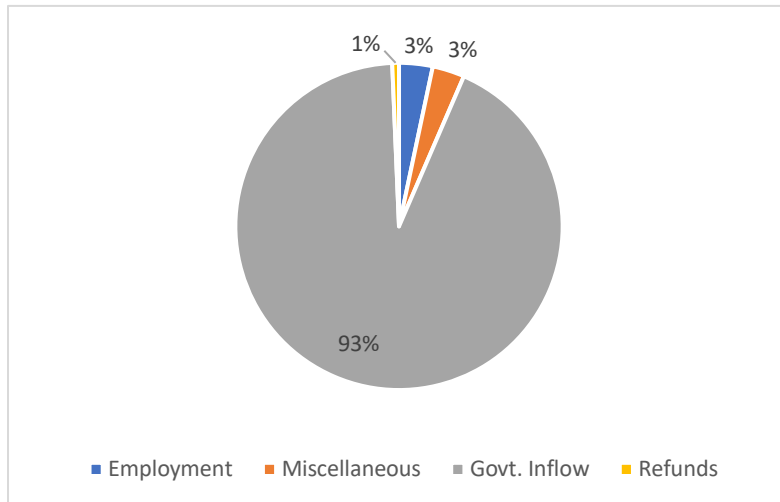
Figure 2. Allocation of Spending

Annette spends the bulk of her income on food and communications. Note that her housing, \$285/month is paid directly from the social assistance office to her landlord.



Annette's principal source of income is social assistance.

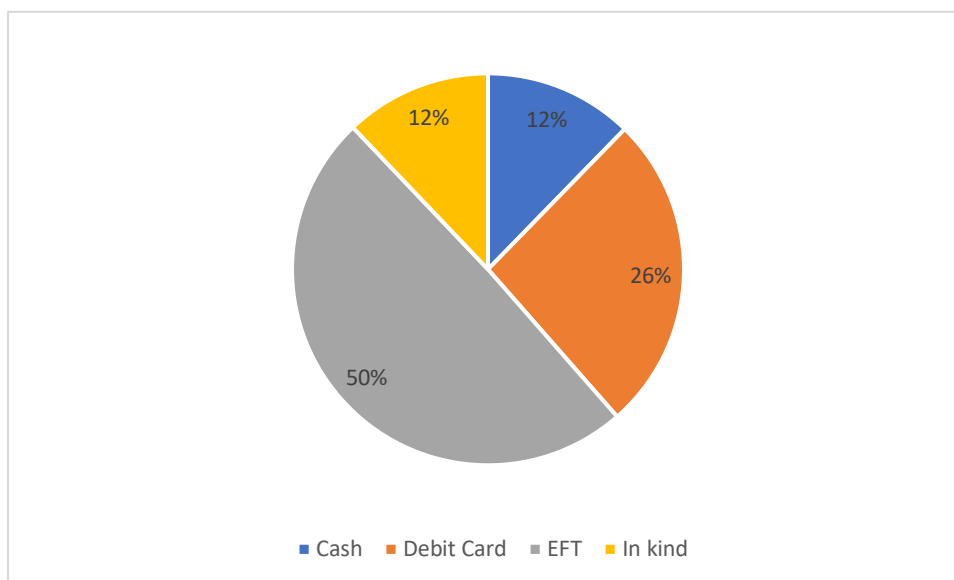
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Annette relies on electronic funds transfers and debit card for most of her inflow and outflow transactions.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Ochieng

Ochieng is in his late fifties. Originally from Uganda, Ochieng came to Canada in 1991 to receive medical treatment for injuries sustained after he lost his leg in an explosion. He had been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo as a cargo truck driver when the truck he was driving triggered a land mine. After his treatment, Ochieng decided to stay in Canada, and applied for citizenship. He worked for a local furniture company for sixteen years, however at the start of the project, Ochieng was relying on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and looking for work.

### Connection to the Diaries Project

Ochieng began participating in the Financial Diaries project in March 2018 and continued for twenty-nine weeks. He learned about the project through a local non-profit organization. Ochieng noted that he normally does not track his expenses and does not save. He pointed out to researchers that there was no point in his tracking or saving as his income was very meagre. Instead, he simply paid whatever bills he could when he received his Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), saying, “cause me, a person who is getting less, I care less about finishing my \$200 and wait for another pay cheque.”

Ochieng told the research team that he has attended financial education classes in the past but finds them discouraging. He feels that they are more helpful for those with more disposable income and who therefore must make decisions about discretionary spending. Ochieng shared, he has so little income, that he does not really have any money to save in the first place. He told researchers that he thinks the diaries process is better for those with more income or for young people as he is set in his ways and has not wiggle room. He commented,

I took almost three sessions not only here, but I came to find out, those kind of sessions needs people who are making more money, who have no way of tracking their finances, but that person like me, who are right now not employed, are on EIA, sometimes I don't find that I have even \$10 to budget. ... I don't have even 10 cents in my account, so I'm finding out, I'm sorry to tell you, it was kind of wastage of time to tell you the truth.

The Financial Diaries team found that Ochieng provided better qualitative data than quantitative data, noting that he would often arrive to the meeting with hastily written list of expenditures, few groceries, and utilities, and very few income sources.

### Sociodemographic

Ochieng is single and one of only six male participants in the project. He describes his cultural background as Ugandan. Ochieng communicated that he has two sons- an older son in the Congo, who later joined Ochieng in Canada, and a younger son with his now ex-wife after he arrived in Canada. Ochieng also shared that he has experienced considerable conflict with his ex-wife, including legal disputes over property/finances.

Ochieng disclosed that despite his family conflicts, he has a strong social network. He spoke about the support he receives from his church and his pastor, including the fact that he has them listed as his emergency contact. Ochieng expressed confidence in knowing that he could reach out to them for help or support if needed, relating an incident in which he was injured while he was volunteering and after which his fellow volunteers had rushed to his aid. Ochieng emphasized to the research team that he valued social connections more highly than finances:

The friendship is more than a million dollar because you may die with the, this cupboard is full of million here. Like, this heart attack you get here in this chair, this million dollars is not going to pick up the phone and phone for 911 but the friend who like (Ochieng) will come.

Ochieng has a grade nine education. He lives in a rented apartment which is subsidized by Manitoba Housing. He owns a smart phone and has access to an internet connection at home. Unemployed, Ochieng occasionally looks for casual work. He volunteers extensively for his local church and local non-profits because, as he explained to researchers, this brings him joy and fulfillment.

Ochieng shared about experiencing several hardships, which linked him to this report examining trauma and personal finances. He described encountering racism as a newcomer to Canada. He also experienced two separate work-related injuries. While a truck driver in DRC, Ochieng not only lost his leg driving over a land mine, but also, he was subsequently imprisoned and tortured by authorities who wanted information about the incident. More recently, Ochieng sustained an injury to his eyes while volunteering. He told the research team that he still suffers from damage to his eyes.

Ochieng also told researchers that he is rebuilding a relationship with the adult son he sponsored to come to Canada in 2004. This son, according to Ochieng, had an affair with his wife and



together they accumulated a high debt on Ochieng's credit cards, which led to the dissolution of Ochieng's marriage and to the loss of his home and assets.

Ochieng has accepted relying on an extremely low income. He expresses contentment with his current situation and seems to manage well with the small means he has. He has a strong support network in the form of his local church and his volunteer positions- a network in which he has invested very deliberately. This seems to act as a buffer for his lack of family connection.

Although Ochieng has expressed acceptance of, and even contentment with, his financial situation, those observing this might challenge that his acceptance might actually be a form of denial- a display of present-focus which might actually be necessary coping mechanisms in his case.

Additionally, the circumstances leading up to his financial losses are fairly traumatic in and of themselves. Ross and Coombs (2018) note that in trauma therapy, there are four recognized phases of recovery through which victims generally move: unawareness, discovery, recovery, and restoration. They suggest that individuals who exhibit forms of financial denial might concurrently still be repressing personal trauma as well (Ross and Coombs, 2018, 42).

#### Financial Practices

At the start of the diaries process, Ochieng's estimated his annual income at \$9,000. He described very frugal spending habits, highlighting rent, and hydro, and then only using what was left for his food budget. Ochieng focuses on purchasing simple staple items such as beans, sugar, cornmeal in bulk, and bulk-cooking meal. He does not subscribe to cable, saying his source of entertainment is the internet.

Ochieng noted that he prefers to rely on social assistance and volunteer rather than take on casual work. He explained that EIA de-incentivises recipients from engaging in casual work by deducting earnings from their benefits.

So, it is like they are forcing you to work to get rid of you. But even when you work, you make whatever you make, because I did it once, then you have to take the slips and they cut it all. And they give you less from EIA. And if you keep it, it will show on your statement. Then that is another big problem that you're going to fight with those people. So, we are scared to find a job, but we want still to work, you understand.

Ochieng told the research team that he enjoys working as a volunteer, explaining that he saw this as an opportunity (especially for newcomers) to learn about Canadian culture and find friends. Ochieng told the research team that he considered volunteering to be a way to develop references for potential future job applications. He noted, “Some of the people, they don't know how to deal with other people, but the volunteering, yes, you go there, you may think you're working for nothing, but you gather information which would it be in your mind. To know, you get friends.”

Given his limited income, Ochieng told researchers that he does not save as he has nothing left after spending on necessities. He stated that he owes his bank almost half a million dollars and that he receives phone calls about repaying this debt. Ochieng commented that he approached an agency that could potentially help him apply for bankruptcy; however, he needs to pay them \$2,000 to begin the process, money he does not have now.

#### Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Ochieng’s assets are minimal (Table 1). He owns furniture (a bed and a couch donated by a local church) along with two computers- a desktop and a laptop. Ochieng shared that he has a \$500,000 debt owing to his financial institution due to a credit card issue, but he did not share more about this. There was minimal change in Ochieng’s assets and liabilities over the diary process.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

(Excluding major debt to financial institution)

Item	Start
Furniture	\$700
Computers/electronics	\$1,050
Checking	\$0
Savings	\$163
Money owed to him	\$1,000
Credit cards	None
Total	\$2,913

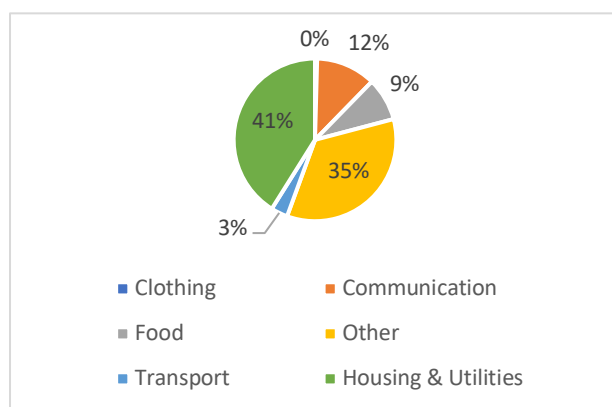
### Income and Spending Patterns

Because Ochieng's income and spending were so limited he did not provide a regular financial diary.

Both income and spending were low and consistent. There was little or no money left for discretionary expenditures. Ochieng has no access to credit, and he tends to prioritize his bills.

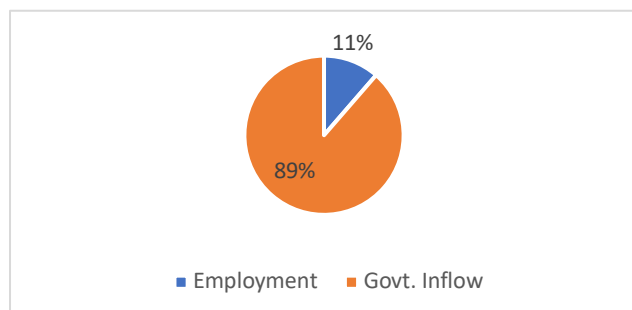
Ochieng prioritises rent, hydro, and food (Figure 1). He relies on the food bank, and only shops for those items not given out by the food bank. When shopping, he does not buy fresh produce and saves money by shopping at inexpensive grocery stores, buying and cooking in bulk.

Figure 1. Allocation of Spending



Ochieng's main source of income is Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) (Figure 2). He also makes a nominal amount (11%) from casual employment.

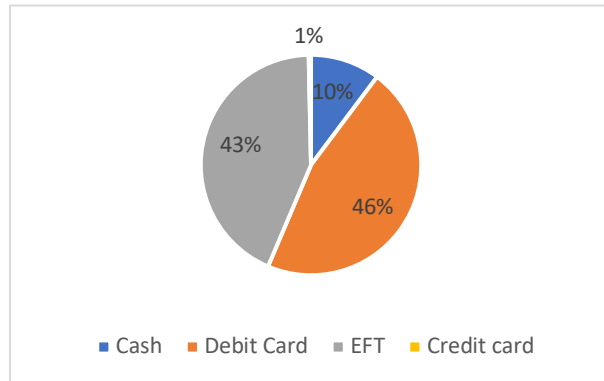
Figure 2. Sources of Income



### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Ochieng makes about 46% of his transactions using a debit card (Figure 3). He also frequently receives income with electronic funds transfer (EFT) (43%). He uses cash for only 10% of his transactions.

Figure 3. Method of Transactions



## Melissa

Melissa is in her late forties. A single mother of a teenage son, she lost her husband (her son's father) when her son was only an infant. Melissa receives Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and disability benefits. She also regularly volunteers for various organizations and receives an honorarium amount for her volunteer commitments. Melissa's financial goals are to avoid debt and to save money for her son's future.

### Connection to the Diaries Project

Melissa began participating in the Financial Diaries project in May of 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local non-profit organization.

Melissa told her interviewer that she has tracked her expenses ever since she became a parent sixteen years ago. Melissa kept mental notes about her finances, but her written diaries were not always complete. She sometimes mentioned about spending that was not included in the diary, on one occasion mentioning that she gave five dollars to a homeless man-an outflow that had not been recorded in her diary for that week.

Melissa reported being very deliberate about her financial decisions. She revealed that she had learned to start saving at the age of five, when her dad encouraged her to begin by saving her small change. "My dad said if you want something to save all your nickels cause you're five, right, so nickels are worth five cents." When asked about financial wellbeing, Melinda responded:

It means that I am pretty financially stable, knowing where money is coming in and going [out] and why it's coming and going and stuff that I could, documents that I could back- it- up-wise. How much is coming in and how much is coming out.

In addition to stability, Melissa shared that financial wellbeing also included being able to save for her son's future. She told researchers that she feels confident about her financial management skills and that she considers self-control to be vital to good financial decision-making.

### Sociodemographic

Melissa is a single parent with a teenage son. She describes her cultural background as Canadian.

Melissa lives with a disability and tells the research team that she receives seven hours of in-home support care each day, including help with housekeeping and cooking for her son. Melissa has a grade 12 education. She disclosed that her parents had not saved for her education in the same way that they had done for her siblings, as they had assumed she would receive funding for her education because she had a disability. Her siblings are supportive of her.

Melissa has supportive and accessible housing which is paid for by Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). She has relied on disability/EIA for her entire adult life. Melissa volunteers extensively and obtains occasional casual employment.

Researchers found Melissa to have a detailed sense of her finances. She shared that she would be co-facilitating an upcoming class on money management at a local non-profit. Melissa told the research team that she knows what is in each of her accounts to the penny. She explained that she has learned to advocate for herself, noting that she was the only person living with a disability to receive 24-hour care for herself and her son when he was a baby.

Like other participants, Melissa communicated several difficult or traumatic life events with the research team. Her parents were divorced when she was fifteen and her father subsequently moved to another province. Melissa shared that she had been close to her father and spoke to him at least once a week until he died approximately fifteen years ago. When Melissa was seventeen, she was hit by a car and broke her collar bone. She spent an extended period first in a children's hospital rehabilitation centre. Melissa felt that this separation occurred because her mom did not want to take care of her at home. Their relationship remains strained.

Melissa lost her husband to cancer when their son was just eight months old, leaving her a single parent. She has had to advocate for herself since then, and she disclosed that she continues to suffer a lot of ableism as an adult. One example she noted was that she has a boyfriend in another city, but she is not accepted by his mother because she cannot care for her son as an able-bodied person would be able to do.

An additional hurdle Melissa faces is that Handi-transit (subsidized public transportation for those with mobility constraints) will not provide regular rides as she is low on the priority list as an unemployed person.

Melissa is remarkably resilient. Financially, she saves consistently, plans for her son's future and for her own. She budgets and uses various ways to economize. She is an example of someone who has been able to make gains in their financial wellbeing despite the barriers she faces. She comes across as fiercely independent.

#### Financial Practices

At the beginning of the process Melissa expressed to the Financial Diaries team that she was not comfortable sharing her annual income. Her main source of income is from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA).

Melissa noted that a major priority for her - after paying her regular bills - was to save money for her son's Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP), which she does on a consistent basis (she deposits 95% of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) into her son's RESP). She also shared that she has begun to contribute regularly to a disability savings account. As travel is difficult for Melissa, she saves up several months' worth of contributions at home and then makes a larger deposit. Melissa told researchers that she is concerned about the future because she will cease to receive disability benefits once she turns sixty-five.

Melissa communicated some of her savings' habits with the research team. She buys food in bulk and does not need to do grocery shopping very often. She indicated that she has three freezers full of food. Her transactions revealed that she does not tend to buy snacks for herself or go out for food. Melissa did share that a higher expense for her was transportation- in particular, her periodic trips to visit her boyfriend in Brandon. She also told researchers that she regularly played the lottery. Having experienced credit debt in her early twenties (and subsequently having had to work to pay it down), Melissa noted that she is adamant about avoiding debt.

I actually lose sleep over debt, and it actually makes me like nauseous...It makes me physically ill to think that I owe people money. It bothers me...Even if somebody bought me something, for example, my boyfriend bought me a ticket or whatever. He said you don't have to pay me back. My conscience won't let me do that. I gave him the money back as soon as I saw him.

### Assets & Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Melissa has one checking account and one savings account (Table 1). She also contributes actively to a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for her son. Melissa's net assets increased by just under \$2,000 through the diary period.

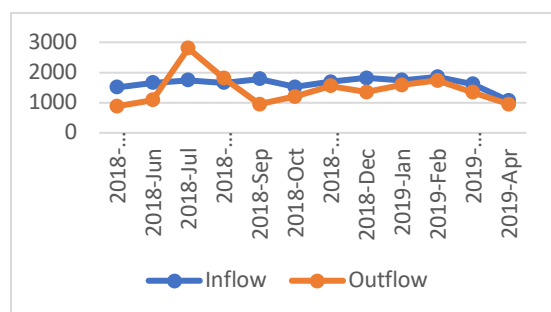
Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

Item	Start	Finish
House contents	\$8,450	\$8,776
Checking	\$150	\$1
Savings	\$685	\$440
RESP	\$46,800	\$48,900
Drawer	\$850	-
Total	\$47,635	\$49,341

### Income and Spending Patterns

Melissa's outflows mostly mirrored her inflows, and she spent less than her income. The spike in outflows in July was due to a trip to visit her boyfriend in Brandon. She mentioned to the research team that she had saved \$800 towards this trip, which explains the lower spending levels prior to this spike in July. The dip in outflows in September may be attributed to the fact that Melissa's boyfriend paid for her trip to Brandon to see him that month. Melissa's income remained constant over time (EIA and disability benefits).

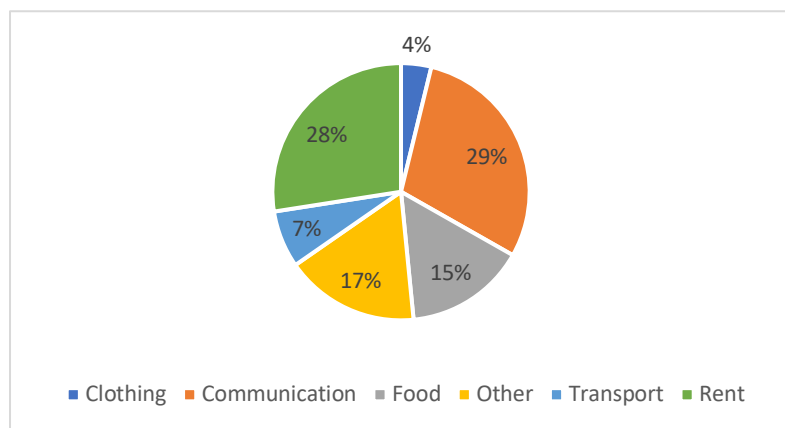
Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month





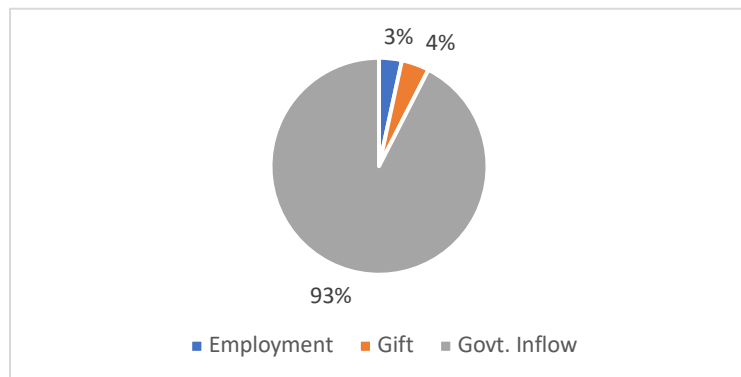
Melissa spends the most on communication (Figure 2). She prioritizes communication, rent, and saving towards her son's Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP). She also contributes regularly to her disability tax credit account. (Savings plan contributions are included in the 'Other' category.) Melissa's food expenses are not high. She tends to buy her food in bulk and stores it in freezers, and so she can minimize her grocery shopping.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Melissa's main source of income is from her disability Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) (Figure 3). She also received a small honorarium for her volunteer roles and a small honorarium for her participation in this project.

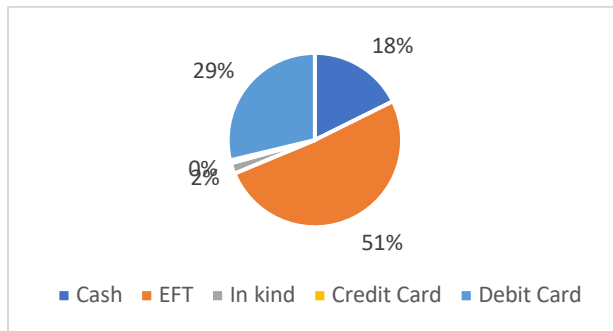
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Melissa predominantly uses electronic funds transfer (EFT) (51 %) for her financial transactions (Figure 4). She uses her debit card 29% of the time and cash 18% of the time. Melissa rarely uses her credit card.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Retired Participants

### Nita

Nita is in her late fifties. She is not formally employed outside the home; however, she has been a full-time, long-term foster parent to three children. Although her income did not increase during her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Nita shared that she felt that her finances had improved.

### Connection to the Diaries Project

Nita joined the Financial Diaries project in June 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the diary project from her son, Namid, who was also a participant.

Near the start of the project, Nita told the Financial Diaries team that she felt knowledgeable about her finances- she had a business administration certificate from a local community college and had observed her father's financial practices as he managed the family farm. In addition, Nita said that she had taken a course on financial tracking through a local non-profit organization. Despite this knowledge, however, Nita did not feel that she was in control of her finances. She had a small notebook where she noted down financial transactions, however she did not do this consistently. "I think at this point the finances are in control of me because I haven't really had time to sit down and look over all the, the bills, et cetera."

Interviewers found that Nita's quantitative diaries consisted of a general list of transactions, and that there were discrepancies between the written data and the verbal accounts. Interviewers therefore frequently needed to ask additional questions regarding the details of these transactions to gain a more complete picture.

When asked about her definition of financial wellness, Nita said that her definition included having sufficient income for necessities, such as food, clothing and shelter, and transportation, but that financial wellness went beyond such necessities and included saving for the future and for things such as family vacations.

By the end of the project, Nita had become more mindful of her spending. She shared that what she found most helpful about the project was the opportunity to discuss her finances with someone else. "It gives me a chance to talk about my expenses every week or every two weeks. And I think about it after I talk and then I go home and contemplate. It's always on my mind, expenses now."

### Socio-demographic

Nita is divorced with three surviving adult children. She describes her cultural background as Sioux.

Nita's children do not officially live in her household; she is currently caring for three foster children. Her son (Namid) also frequently stays with Nita for extended periods. Nita is also very involved in caring for her grandchildren and helping with transportation to childcare.

Nita comes from a family of ten. Her parents struggled with alcoholic abuse, Nita was placed in foster care as a child, and she attended residential school as a part of the Sixties Scoop.<sup>1</sup> She is expecting a settlement payment as result of the Sixties Scoop Class Action. One of Nita's adult children also struggles with alcoholism, and another son was tragically murdered a few years ago. The effects of residential school and other colonization processes are evident in the trauma some of our participants have experienced. Like Donna, Jaquelyn and Sarah, she gives her finances and time beyond her ability and suffers personally as a result. For instance, she disclosed that her son used her credit card without permission. This self-sacrifice leaves her to eat takeout or frozen dinners which are not healthy for her.

While her main source of income is currently derived from her role as a foster parent, Nita shared with the research team that she has recently earned a Bachelor of Arts in Aboriginal Governance. She told researchers that one barrier she faces to employment is a past criminal record. This has caused her to lose what Nita viewed as a good and stable job. Nita was hired to work as a maintenance worker at a facility a few years ago but was let go upon the discover of her criminal record from three decades ago.

Nita and her foster children live in subsidized housing. They are waiting for a three-bedroom unit to become available through Manitoba Housing (provincial non-profit housing program), as Nita's foster son is turning five, and will need his own bedroom after that point. Nita has a smart phone but does not have an internet connection at home.

### Financial Practices

At the start of the project, Nita estimated her annual income at \$41,400. Her main source of income is from foster parenting.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sixties Scoop refers to the child welfare practices from 1960-1990, where Indigenous children in care were removed from the care of birth families and placed into the care of white, middle-class families across North America, a practice now recognized as extremely deleterious to the cultural identities of these children.

Nita frequently lends money to family members but does not keep records. These loans are more like gifts, as they are mostly not repaid. This is particularly true for loans to her son, who has a drinking issue. Nita also helps her children financially in various ways, such as: letting her adult son live with her periodically, paying for her daughter's cell phone bill, frequently giving her daughter rides, paying for daughter's traffic ticket (she drove through a red light), and paying for her son-in-law's parking ticket. Nita used to give loans to friends in the past but ceased to do so during her participation in the project.

In addition to sharing financial resources with her children, Nita spends a lot of time helping her adult children by driving them to places they need to go and caring for her grandchildren, often at the expense of her own self-care. She often resorts to take-out food or frozen dinners after spending time helping her children and subsequently being unable to take the time to prepare food from scratch.

Nita also stated that she is not a saver. She said that although she felt her income was modest, that she could potentially save if she became more intentional, saying "I know if I were to save, I could save." Although Nita regularly saves \$50 per month towards the \$900 fee required to apply for a pardon for her criminal record, most of her financial transactions are very immediate -paying bills, lending money she can't afford to lend, eating out- demonstrating a very present-orientated focus.

Through the diary process Nita held just one credit card. She was leery of credit card debt, as she had accumulated a substantial balance owing on her cards in the past which took several years to clear. When she purchased a vehicle in the spring, she got a second card. Nita communicated to the research team that she was not completely comfortable having the additional credit cards.

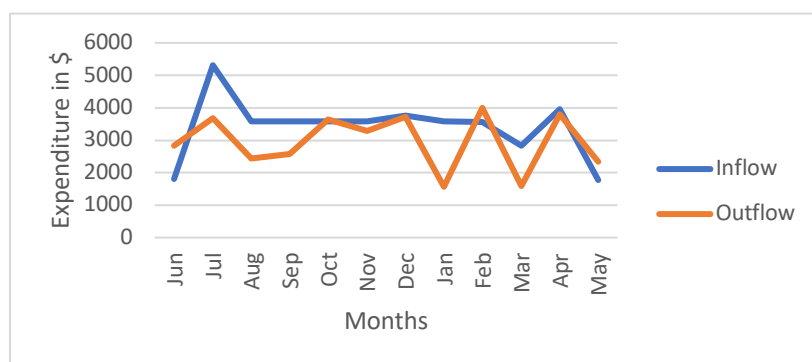
Nita commented that she would like to buy RRSPs with her portion of the Sixties Scoop Class Action Settlement. She also noted that the reason that she wanted to work outside the home was to save money for later in life, as her children already had enough to worry about in supporting themselves, and she did not want to place expectations on them.

### Income and Spending Patterns

The graph below shows Nita's income and spending patterns from June 2018 to May 2019 (Figure 1). Her monthly outflows and inflows track one another quite closely. The income spikes in June and April occurred when Nita received more income as a foster parent. The spike in outflows in July was caused by an increased expenditure on food and on communication (cable TV, internet, and mobile phone).

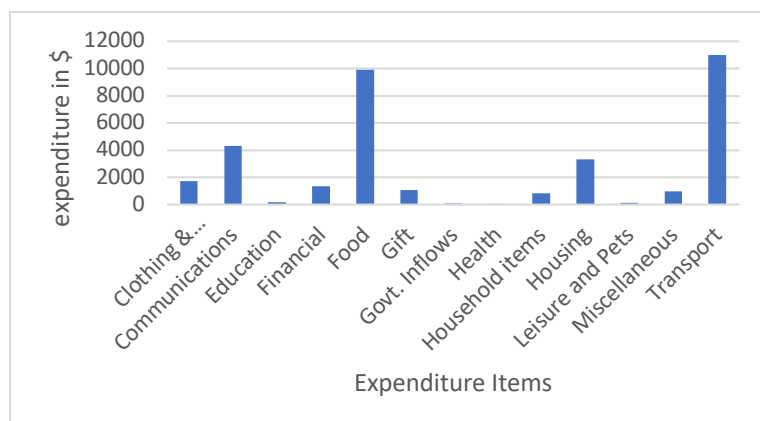
Similarly, in October, there were increased expenditures on food and transportation including car insurance, gasoline, and car payments. Nita also had higher court hearing fees (triple the usual amount) in October. The dips in outflows in September, January and March were due to lower food, communication, and transport expenses. The dip in outflows in August was due to lower expenses on communication and transport.

Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



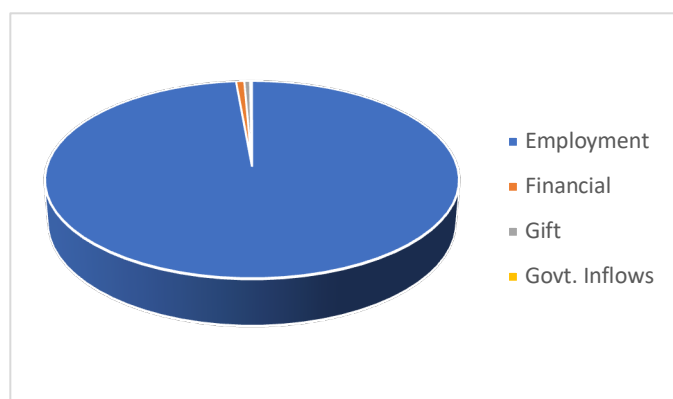
Nita mostly spends on food, transport, and communication (Figure 2). Nita spends more on food because she is often too busy to cook from scratch, and so must rely on take-out and ready-made foods for her household. She also purchases food for her adult children and grandchildren. Her high transport costs are due, in part to the purchase of a new van during the year she participated in the project. Nita's housing costs are low because she lives in subsidized housing.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Nita earns 97% of her total income as a foster parent and the remainder is derived from gifts and government inflows (Figure 3).

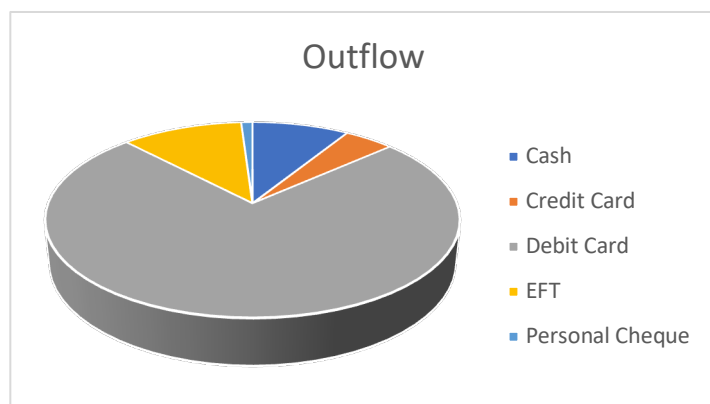
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Nita relies primarily on debit for her transactions (74%) (Figure 4). She uses electronic funds transfer (EFT) for 11% of her financial transactions and cash for 9 % of her transactions. Nita rarely uses her credit card.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



### Donna

Donna is a single woman in her early fifties. Now retired, Donna is reliant on a small pension and lives well below the poverty line. Although she owns her own home, Donna's net assets declined during the project as she drew on her Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC) to lend money to her adult children.

### Connection to the Diaries Project

Donna learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. She joined the project in March of 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks.

Prior to starting with the project, Donna monitored her expenses regularly because, as she revealed, she wants to know where her money goes. She keeps a small book where she logs her financial transactions. Donna would read from this book during meetings and the research team noted that she often would justify certain purchases. This caused researchers to ponder whether there might be some shame attached to these transactions.

The Financial Diaries team observed that Donna was a unique participant in that she preferred to continue using her own method of recording her transactions instead of adopting the project's system. Researchers found Donna's transaction records to be detail-oriented and she even included the bank account balances. They noted that this made their task of calculating Donna's outflows against her inflows very easy and that Donna seemed to enjoy doing this, as she shared that it was like getting paid to share what she has been doing already.



Donna pointed out that participating in this project did not inform her daily finances or change the way she thought or acted on her finances, but that it did, however, make her more conscious of how much she was spending in certain categories, such as her pets.

When asked about how knowledgeable she felt about her finances, Donna responded: “Maybe 50%. There's a lot of things that I don't know, but a lot of things I've learned just from having to through experience.” She explained that she learned how to budget out of necessity when she became a single parent to four children in the late 1990’s. Donna disclosed that her personal definition of financial wellbeing was to “not owe anything and maybe not to have a lot in the bank, but at least to break even and not owe.”

#### Sociodemographic

Donna is divorced and lives alone. She describes her cultural background as Canadian. Donna has four adult children: two live in Winnipeg; one lives in another country; and the fourth lives in another province. Donna also has several pets.

Donna shared with the Financial Dairies team that finances in her marriage were challenging and that her divorce had been tumultuous. She told the research team that twenty years ago, she became a single parent to four children and had to choose “to either live in her car or live in a house”. She chose to sell her vehicle. These challenges suggested that Donna has experienced significant trauma which may affect her finances.

While married, Donna had owned a home with her now ex-husband. She revealed that when they separated, she left the home with the children with the understanding that her ex-husband would continue the mortgage payments. He failed to do so, however, and this left Donna in a financial crisis. The bank subsequently took all her savings (\$5,000), and Donna’s phone and Canada Child Benefits (CCB) were cut for a period of several weeks. Donna disclosed that the bank eventually forgave her this debt and with the help of her parents (towards a \$25,000 down payment), Donna was able to purchase a home once again.

The researcher team asked Donna how these events affected her financial wellbeing/management of her finances. She replied,

It made me a lot stronger. Because before I left, he was saying that I could never afford a house and the kids without him. And I believed that, but when I had to, I did. And so, it made me very strong to know that. I couldn't imagine myself and the kids being homeless or on the street, so I knew that wasn't going to happen. Yeah. And I knew it was up to me to make sure it didn't happen. So, I gained a lot of...strength to know that it can be done, and I can do it.

Donna has faced very hard choices and difficulties, e.g., house or car, single mother with young children, and little income. Today she often spends beyond her income, on her pets and her children. Researchers note that Donna experiences shame/guilt over her expenses. When asked by researchers about how the diaries process impacted her financial decision-making, Donna responded, "Apart from having to confess how much I spend, [my spending] hasn't changed. I kind of bite the bullet and say, I spent this, but it hasn't changed the way that I do spend." The embarrassment over her spending might be due simply to spending over her ideal budget, however researchers did not ask further questions at the time. The literature does point to a connection between "unprocessed emotions of shame/guilt and/or anxiety around finances" (Ross and Coombs 2018, p.48).

### Financial Practices

A retired educational assistant, Donna now depends on her private pension income and Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Her annual income is approximately \$18,000: she receives regular a monthly income of approximately \$1260 (\$813 from pension, \$330 CPP, and \$123 from a RIF). Donna's income level puts her around \$4,000/year below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup>

Donna shared with a researcher that she pays the utilities first and then buys pet food for her three dogs and her cat. The researcher team noted in their filed notes that Donna's pets present a significant, ongoing expense in her life, as there are also vet bills. Donna's third priority is her groceries, and her fourth is her savings. She told the research team that she tries to set aside \$250/month which

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<sup>2</sup> The Market based measure (MBM), used as Canada's official poverty line for Winnipeg using the 2018 base for a family of four is \$44,030. Adjusting for family size (the square root rule the OECD uses), the figure for a single individual would be half that or \$22,015, which is close to the old Low-income cut-off (LICO) figure.

she will later use to pay for her annual home taxes and house insurance, though she is not always consistent. Donna also regularly gives \$41/month to a children's charity.

Donna uses her two credit cards like debit cards; she purchases items on her credit cards, and then pays off the balance daily. She has a Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC), on which she drew during the diaries period. One reason Donna provided for doing this was that she wanted to contribute to down payments for her children's houses. She also dips into her HELOC when her spending outpaces her income.

Donna communicated that she could borrow up to 80% of the total value of her home. She told the research team that she does not pay her debt religiously and that she is aware that she pays more interest because of that. She also expressed some concern to the research team about drawing on her HELOC to cover expenses; the research team wondered whether she felt some shame about this practice. While Donna shared with researchers that she engaged in this borrowing behavior to provide her children with down payments for new homes, she was subsequently left with an ongoing debt on her HELOC. This might be viewed as a sacrificial act of a mother trying to assist her children. However, the literature does point to instances where those with limited resources tend to focus on their immediate needs (in Donna's case, the desire to help her children) and make credit choices which can have negative impacts in the long term (Sendhil and Shafir 2013).

#### Assets & Liabilities

Donna has one checking account and two savings accounts (Table 1). She also has a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) and a Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF). Donna owns her house, valued at \$220,000, and has a Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC). She used her HELOC to borrow against her equity during the diaries process. Her net assets declined over the diary period.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

	Start	Finish
Home	\$220,000	\$220,000
Checking	\$134	\$413

Savings	\$2,613	\$2,193
TFSA	\$192	\$194
RRIF	\$43,831	\$38,378
Credit cards	\$5,000	\$0
HELOC	\$-11,500	\$-13,675

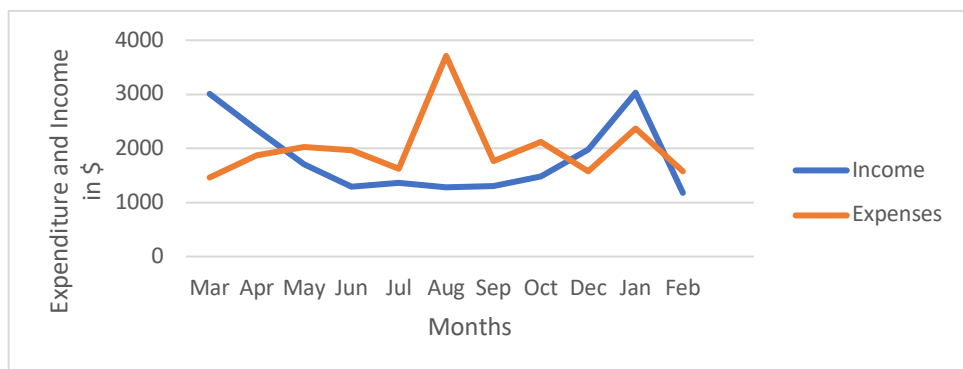
### Income and Spending Patterns

Donna's income and spending patterns were smooth except for August and January (Figure 1). She mostly spends more than she earns and supplements her income by withdrawing from her Home Equity Line of Credit (HELOC). In March, April, December, and January, Donna's inflows exceed her outflows. In the other months, it was the opposite; her outflows exceeded her inflows.

The inflow spike in March was due to an income tax refund of \$1,726. The income spike in January was due to the receipt of Goods and Services Tax (GST) rebate. Donna also had more income in November (she received cash gifts for her birthday) and December (she received cash gifts as Christmas presents).

The large spike in expenditure (outflow) in August was due to the purchase of furniture (\$2,540) and expenses, and costs associated with a trip to Japan to visit her son and his family. While she was in Japan, Donna needed to leave her three dogs at a kennel. She reported that the total cost of the kennel was about \$1,000. Donna also took her dog for veterinary visits beforehand to get the appropriate immunizations required for them to stay at the kennel. This cost about \$400 total for all three dogs.

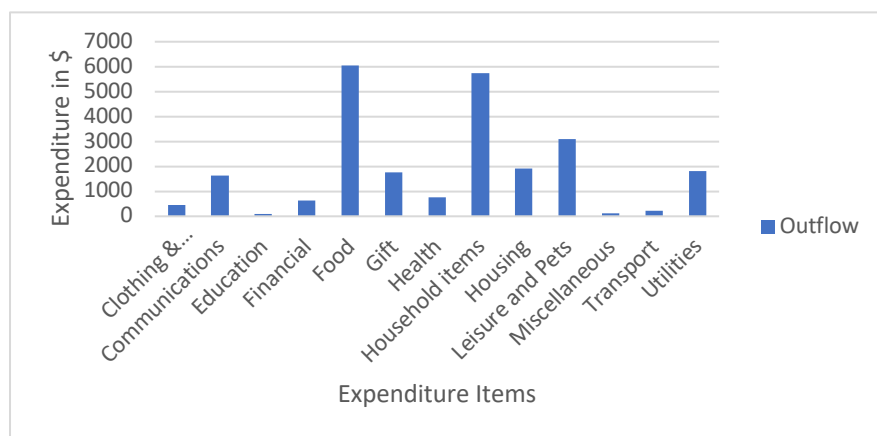
Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



Donna spends the most on the food category (Figure 2). This is followed by spending on the household items and leisure/pet categories (Donna has four pets - three dogs and a cat). The high food costs are due to Donna's purchase of more expensive food as she is a vegan. The increased cost in the household item category was due to the purchase of furniture (\$2,540).

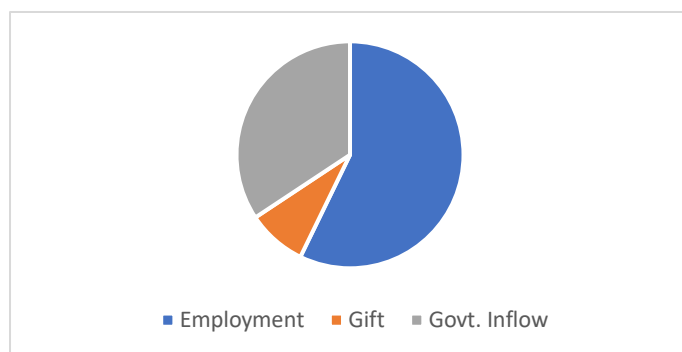
Spending for the finance category includes account fees, interest charged for the HELOC (approximately \$42/month for the six months August through January), overdraft fees, and other fees. Spending in the transportation category reflects the cost of bus tickets. The miscellaneous category represents expenses on hardware and tools.

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Donna's main source of income is pension income from work (under 'employment' in the diagram) and income from Canada Pension Plan (CPP) (Figure 3). Employment income also includes honorarium that Donna received for being a participant in the Financial Diaries Project. She also earned smaller amounts in the form of cash gifts, from a brother. The miscellaneous category reflects the reimbursement that Donna earns from her savings.

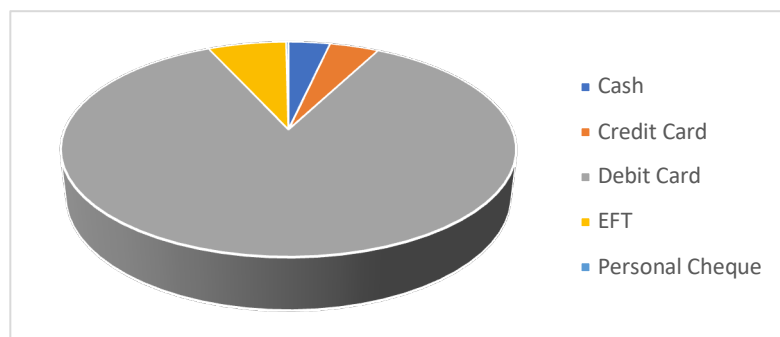
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentages of Transactions and Method Used

Donna makes 85% of her transactions using debit (Figure 4). This is followed by electronic funds transfer (EFT) (7%) and then –quite closely– by spending via cash and credit card. Donna rarely uses personal cheques. Donna shared with the research team that she uses her credit card to make purchases because she wants to earn points, but that she pays the balance after each purchase. For this reason, Donna informed the research team that she reported her credit card transaction as debit transactions in her diary.

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



## Emilia

Emilia came to Canada as an immigrant in 1980. She is divorced, with an adult daughter and a granddaughter who live in Canada and an adult daughter who lives in Argentina. In her early sixties and living with a disability, Emilia was not employed nor was she looking for work during her time with the diaries project. Emilia receives significant support from her daughter, who regularly prepares meals and helps with transportation. She also has extended family living in various countries, including Australia.

## Connection to the Diaries Project

Emilia started with the Diaries project in May 2019 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local tax clinic.

## Sociodemographic

Emilia describes her cultural background as Spanish. She has a disability and health issues (eyesight, heart condition), and is very health conscious. She prefers using natural or ayurvedic medicines and spices in her cooking to promote health. Emilia shared that she stopped eating non-vegetarian foods when she was 17 and sometimes finds she has limited options.

Emilia shared that she studied fashion design in Buenos Aires and was a co-owner of a shop that opened in 2000 in Winnipeg. She told researchers that she still does crafts and sews, but this is limited now due to her visual impairment. She mentioned that the extreme cold in Winnipeg had been challenging recently.

Emilia has a computer and a smartphone, but she does not have internet or cable at her apartment. She goes to the library to use the internet about twice a week.

## Financial Practices

Emilia has an annual gross income of \$23,726. She prioritizes expenses on rent (\$900 monthly), medication and food. Emilia receives \$696 as CPP, \$630 as Pension and \$671 as Health Employment Benefit (HEB) per month.

Emilia shared very few outflows—groceries, medication and rent. Emilia lives a very frugal lifestyle. She always prepares food at home. She prioritizes health and spends more on vegan groceries. She avoids going out to eat, because vegan food/salad is expensive, and it is not worth the money.

Emilia also spends quite a bit on medication- around \$90/month on prescriptions. She shared with researchers that this causes her some concern. She would like to stop some of her prescriptions to save money. Emilia also has significant costs related to her eyesight- she requires a yearly eyesight procedure for which she usually pays for out of pocket as it is not covered by healthcare. She spends little on transport, as she seldom goes out, she enjoys spending time with her granddaughter, and takes her to the movies on a regular basis.

#### Assets & Liabilities

Emilia has one checking account (Table 1). Her savings increased through the diary period, but the value of her house contents value dropped.

Table 1. Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities (\$)

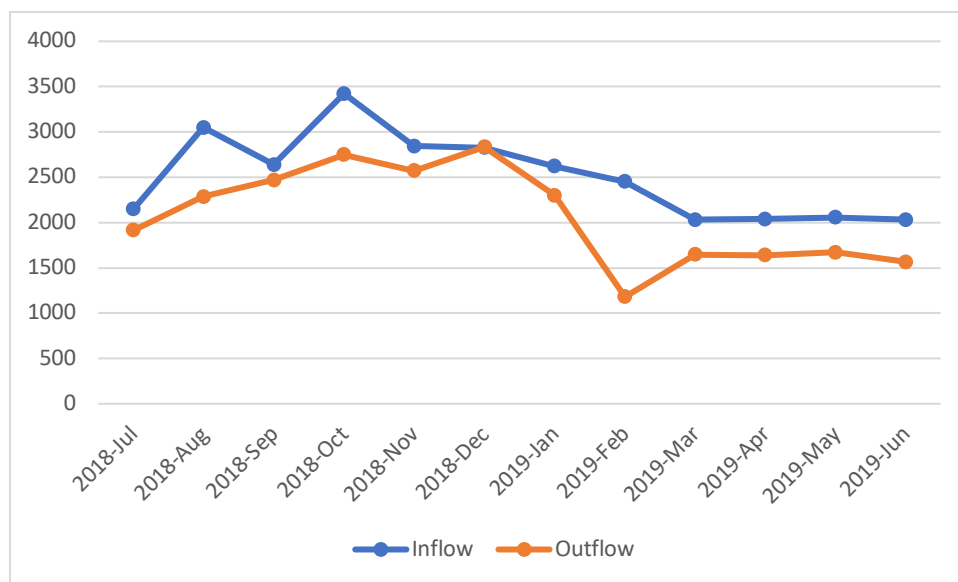
	Start	Finish
House contents	\$3500	\$240
Checking	\$0	\$70
Savings	-	\$1,000
RESP		
TFSA		
Credit cards		
Other		
Total	\$3,500	\$1,310

#### Income and Spending Patterns

Emilia's inflows and outflows are quite steady and track one another closely for most months. The dip in spending in February partly reflects the outcome of an interview with her about financial wellbeing. After that interview, she told her interviewer, she endeavored to spend less and save more. The lower spending rebounded, in March, and then stayed at a new level, lower than the first part of the diary process.

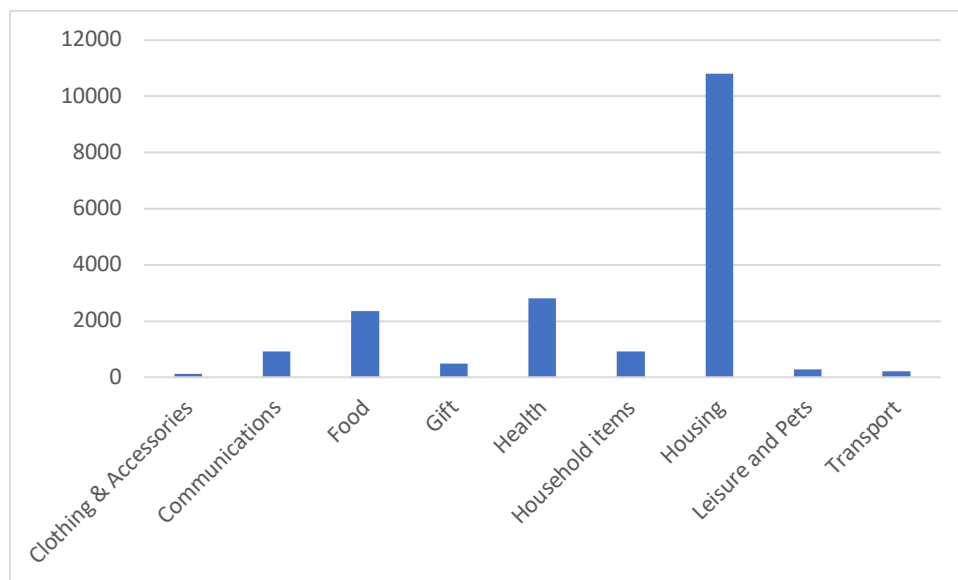


Figure 1. Income and Spending by Month



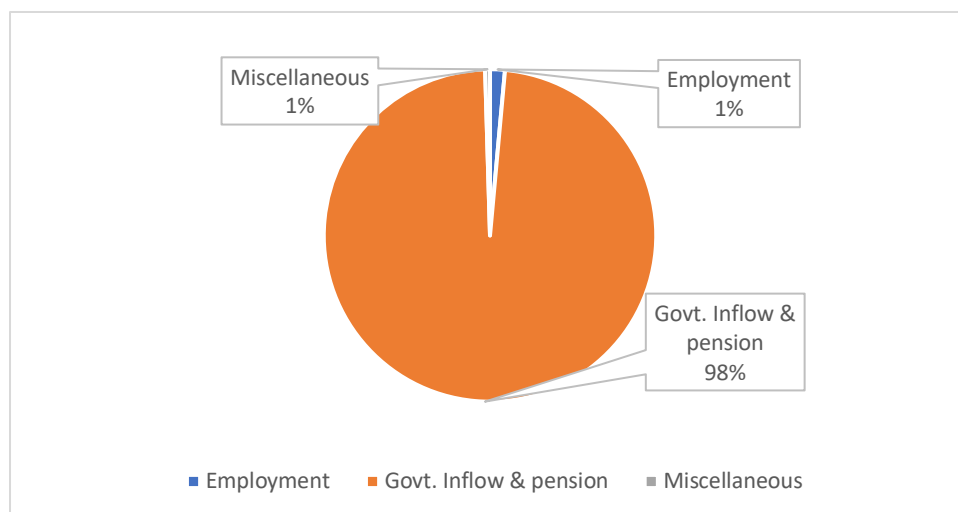
Emilia spends the bulk of her budget on housing and food. Health is another item that takes considerable spending on her part (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Allocation of Spending



Most of Emilia's income comes from government and pension sources including Canada Pension Plan and private sources of pension income (Figure 3).

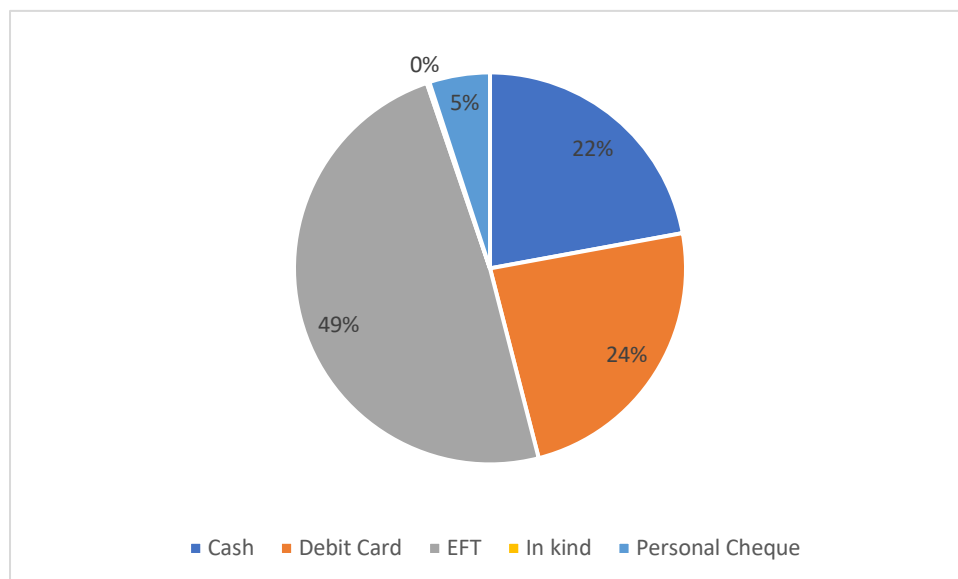
Figure 3. Sources of Income



#### Percentage of Transactions and Method Used

Emilia relies for 49% of her transactions, by value, on electronic funds transfer and then also relies on cash and debit card (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Method of Transactions



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