

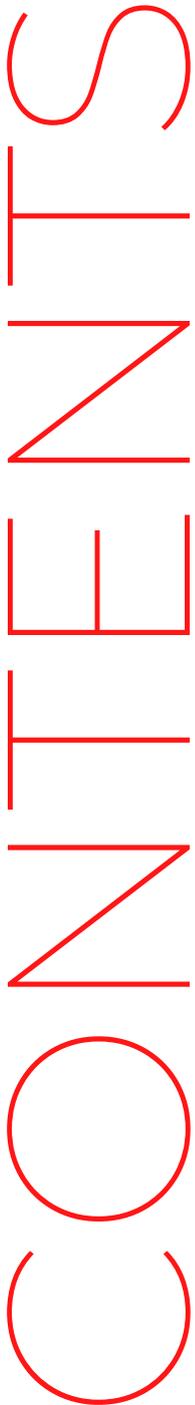


THE HALIFAX
HELPERS

Program Assessment

2021

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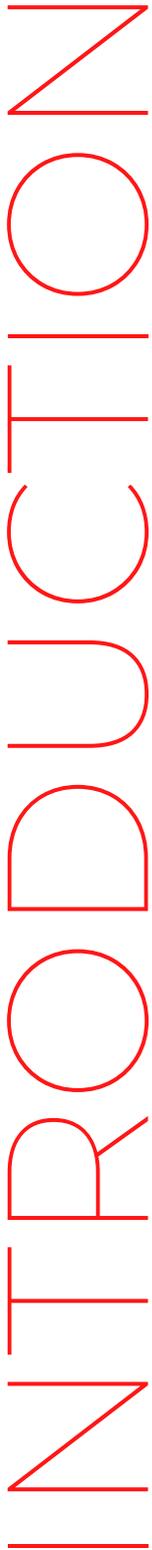
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The Halifax Helpers was established to deliver free, virtual, online tutoring services to marginalized youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia. They now operate as a registered non-profit organization offering approximately 400 one-on-one tutoring sessions a month with the help of over 80 volunteer tutors.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach involving survey and semi-structured interviews, this study examined the efficacy of The Halifax Helpers, a pilot program designed by youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia to deliver free virtual tutoring sessions to marginalized students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study aims were (1) assess service users' perceptions of The Halifax Helpers, (2) identify areas for development and (3) provide recommendations for future services. Findings indicated that service users and their caregivers reported highly positive tutoring experiences and an increase in positive outcomes, specifically in the areas of confidence and academic achievement. Results also highlighted an underrepresentation in service provision for Black, Indigenous, and low-income families.

Recommendations to reach these groups and reduce barriers for other marginalized populations, such as New Canadians, are also discussed.

ASSESSMENT DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this report is to assess service users perceptions of The Halifax Helpers, identify areas for development and provide recommendations for future services.

The following evaluation of The Halifax Helpers will aim to provide a comprehensive review of the organization's activities throughout the 2020/2021 school year. This project will assess the degree in which the organization has achieved its annual targets. In addition, recommendations for the 2021/22 school year are also included and will be presented to the board. The principal investigator conducting (PI) the review is Rebeccah Raphael, the executive director at The Halifax Helpers. Other members of the project team include trained research assistants from The University of Toronto and the project supervisor Dr. Julia Forgie. The following review is being conducted in order to ensure that The Halifax Helpers is meeting targets set by the board and stakeholders and that the services provided by the organization are meeting the needs of its users. Through this evaluation it is the goal of the PI to identify areas of improvement for The Halifax Helpers and provide recommendations for development based on current best practices. A mixed methods approach is used to cultivate data consisting of both demographic and quantitative surveys as well as 20-30 minute semi structured interview. The following evaluation was completed with approval from The University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (REB).

PROGRAM GOALS

01

Accessibility

Increase the accessibility of tutoring services and academic support for youth in Nova Scotia, specifically in marginalized communities.

02

Positive Relationships

Support youth in fostering a positive relationship with learning and schooling.

03

Efficient and Effective Program Model

Develop an efficient model for the large-scale recruitment of high quality tutoring volunteers which can serve as a template for similar organizations.

MEASURING PROGRESS

The following section describes the outcomes achieved by The Halifax Helpers in the 2020/2021 school year. Please note; all analytics in the following section are calculated using data only from March 1st 2021 - June 27th 2021 when The Halifax Helpers's virtual analytics tools came into use.

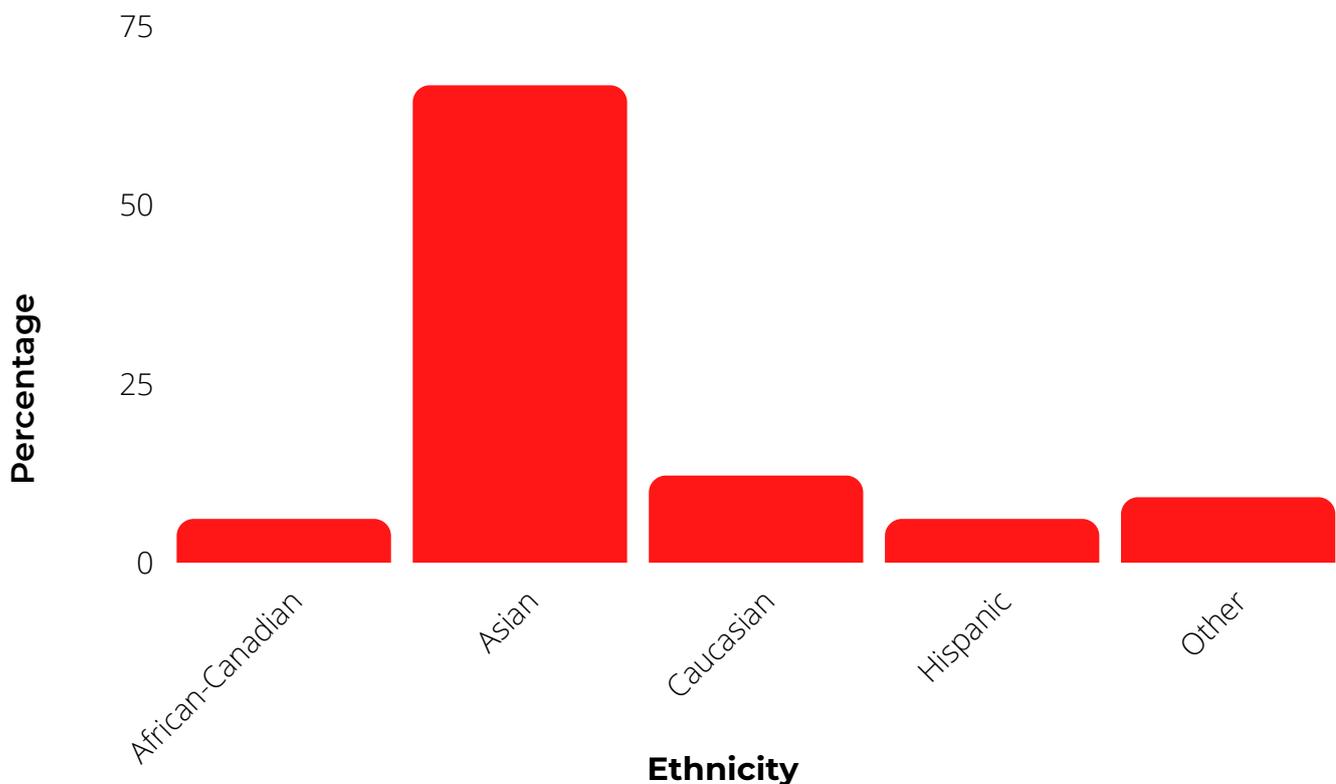
Key Indicator	Activity / Project	Data / Outcome
Provide accessible academic support	One-on-one academic and EAL courses were offered as well as an EAL conversation group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total sessions offered 1704 Individual students supported 139
Reach marginalized populations	Sessions remain free to support low income families. More can be done to reach racialized groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 44.12% of users resided in a low income household
Efficient and Effective program model	A youth centred, youth run approach. utilizing social media and targeted outreach was employed to engage and recruit the desired demographic of volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer tutors involved 79 Volunteer executive team members 5

Demographic Reports

The following section presents data relating to the demographics of The Halifax Helpers user base. Findings should be used to inform the board of the organizations progress in reaching target populations, specifically low income and racialized groups.

Forty-eight participants completed the demographic survey. Thirty-five of the participants were caregivers of students who used the service and thirteen of the participants were students. All participants provided informed consent. Recruitment was completed via email with the study information being shared to service users who had agreed to receive information from The Halifax Helpers. The online survey was completed by service users and caregivers who had, or who's child had, participated in the program for at least three months.

Proportion of Survey Respondents by Ethnicity

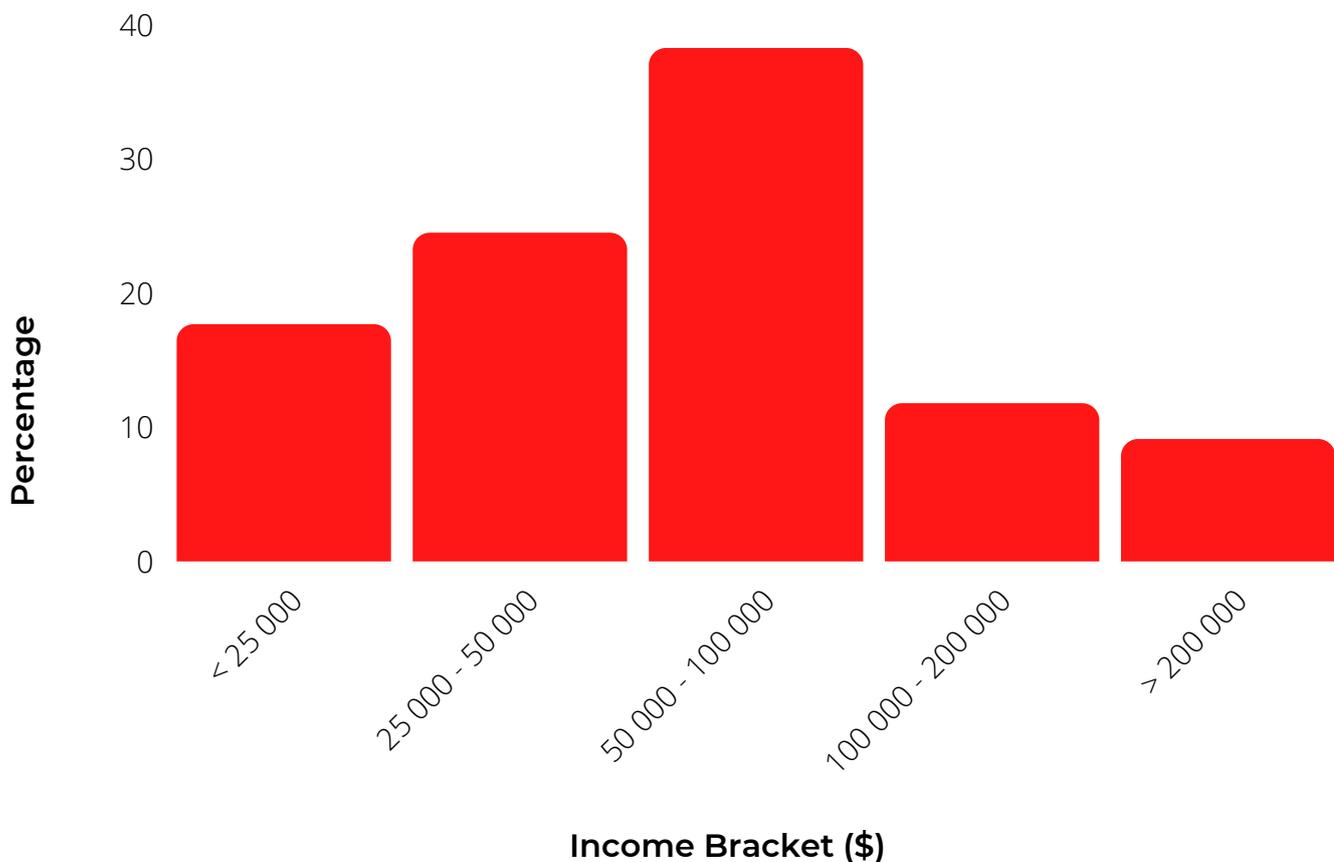


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Percentage of Survey Respondents Based on Income Bracket

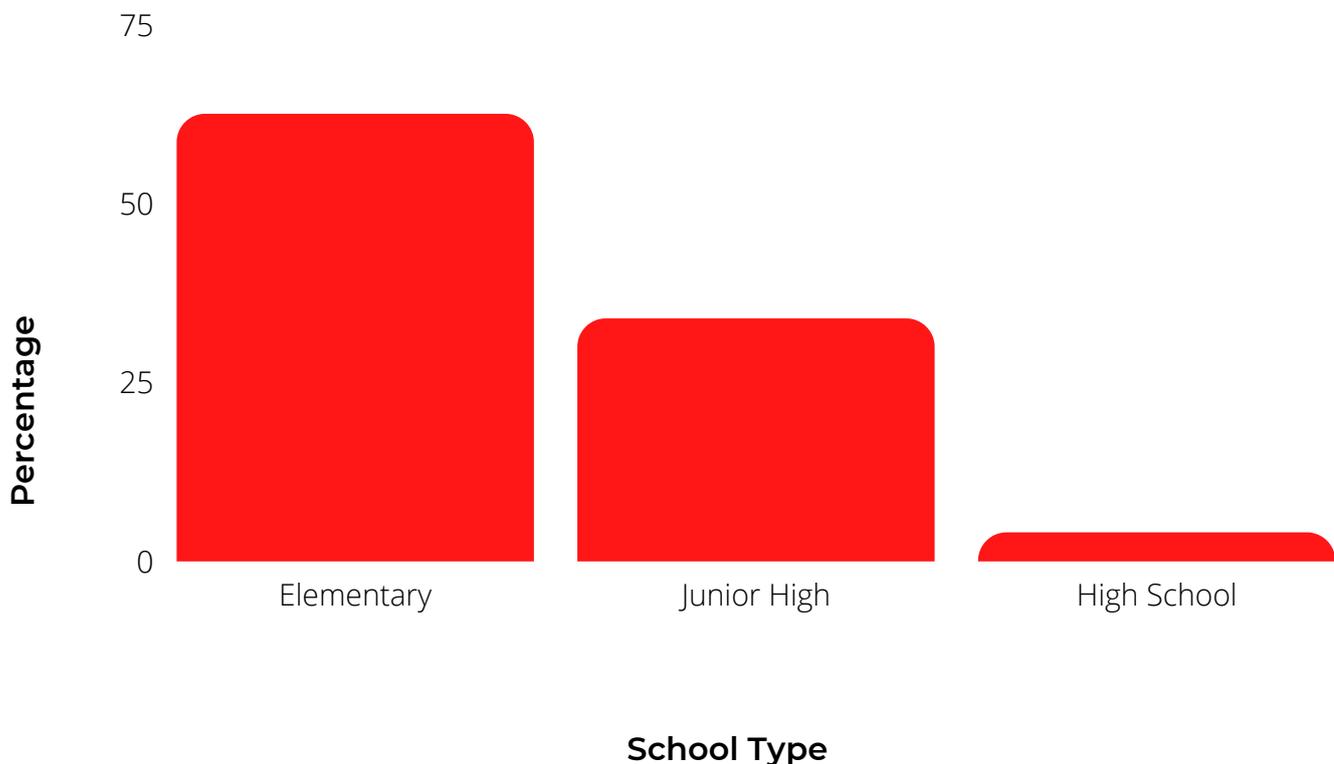


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Percentage of Survey Respondents Based on Age



User Experience Reports - Quantitative

The following section presents data relating to experience of the The Halifax Helpers user base. Findings should be used to inform the board of the organizations progress in providing high quality services to participants.

Forty-eight participants completed the user survey. Thirty-five of the participants were caregivers of students who used the service and thirteen of the participants were students. All participants provided informed consent. Recruitment was completed via email with the study information being shared to service users who had agreed to receive information from The Halifax Helpers. The online survey was completed by service users and caregivers who had, or who's child had, participated in the program for at least three months. *The survey utilized 7-point Likert scales items to explore users' experiences. Mean scores were calculated from the Likert scale responses to gain insight into areas of service strength and areas for improvement.* Below are selected responses from the Likert scale questions. The full table of means and standard deviations can be viewed in Appendix A.

Did tutoring sessions increase my/my child's academic success?

6.27/7

6.23/7

Tutoring sessions increased my/my child's confidence.

My/my child's tutors were effective.

6.40/7

6.58/7

I was satisfied with my/my child's tutoring sessions

User Experience Reports - Qualitative

The following section presents data relating to experience of the The Halifax Helpers user base. Findings should be used to inform the board of the organizations progress in providing high quality services to participants.

Qualitative assessments consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a subsample of participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of service users' impressions. Interview questions such as "What are the barriers you've seen/felt in regard to accessing services that support you/your child's academic needs?" were posed. Interview transcripts were coded using a grounded theory approach where thematic codes were extracted from the interview transcripts. Four parents of participants completed interviews. The following section highlights the themes that emerged upon analysis.

01

Student Success

This section describes participants perceptions on the ways in which The Halifax Helpers contributed to student success.

02

Program Success

This section describes participants perceptions on the ways in which the structure and organization of Halifax Helpers program was successful.

03

Areas for Improvement

This section describes the ways in which participants believe The Halifax Helpers could improve to increase accessibility and inclusion. Recommendation for improvement are provided based on these findings.

User Experience Reports - Student Success

Participants who completed the interview seemed to notice success in three main areas:

- Improvement in their child's grades
- Improvement in their child's understanding of the subject
- Increase in confidence and curiosity

The following data also corresponds with survey results where, after tutoring sessions;

- 92% of participants noted an increase in their/their child's grades*
- 96% of participants noted an increase in their/their child's confidence levels*

It is important to note that no survey questions were asked in relation to student understanding (Appendix A).

*On the 7 point Likert scale, all scores that were a 5 or above were included in this interpretation.

“

Improvement in Grades

"Like her math mark went up in two months when she was working with her [tutor], the teacher noticed it and I got a lot of great feedback from the teacher."

Improvement in Understanding

”

"So if there was say a unit or whatever she was working on, if she didn't understand, I mean, and then [Tutor's Name] was able to break it down so that she could understand, like see it in a different way and was able to then work through it. Um, I mean that's a huge success, you know, being able to then understand the concepts."

“

Increase in confidence

"You know what, I think for me, just seeing her confidence in being able to talk about it with me and with her mother. Just even her day-to-day, looking forward to going to school, she didn't miss a day, you know what I mean?"

User Experience Reports - Program Success

Interview participants seemed to notice success in three main areas;

- Effective method of instruction
- Efficacy of one-on-one support.
- Accessibility of the online format

The following data also corresponds with survey results where:

- 96% of participants noted that their tutoring sessions were effective

“

Effective method of instruction

“You know, she met with her weekly and then, you know, I guess broke everything down so that [my child] could understand and, you know, it really changed how, um, I guess, you know, otherwise [my child] would've really struggled in math.”

”

One-on-One Support

“I want to say that the one-to-one class is the best way to speak English, to Improve English.”

“

Online Format

“Maintain the online format because it works perfectly. It works great, even without COVID It works great, you know? I mean, like it's just a quick Zoom, you can do a Zoom for an hour, two hours, three hours, whatever and it just, it works great!”

User Experience Reports - Areas for Improvement

Interview participants suggested three main areas for improvement:

- Demand exceeded supply - increase session availability
- Difficulty learning the online format
- Increase exposure to decrease the the means required to find the service

The following data also corresponds with survey results where the second lowest average likert scale score was related to difficulty in learning the online format (6.21/7).

“

Increase supply

“Yeah, everyone was using it, so, it's just, um, yeah, uh, I guess it's just hard to find somebody 'cause it was used so well.”

”

Learning the online format

“I think that's [online's] one of the, you know was one of the major barriers at first. I mean it's a learning curve as far as you know getting used to using this type of service you know whereas in the past it would be you'd apply for a tutor, somebody would call you, then you'd meet face to face.”

“

Increase exposure

“Bridge The gap between services and help us [service providers] to better identify families that could use your service.”

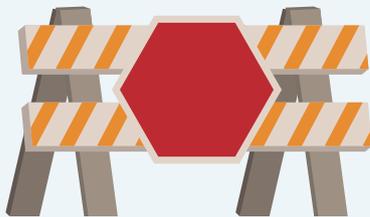
CONCLUSION

Based on data pertaining to the number of sessions run and user feedback, The Halifax Helpers pilot program has been successful in its first year. The method of instruction, specifically taking personalized approaches and breaking down and scaffolding material was effective in helping students deepen their understanding and increase their confidence in course material. This method of instruction is consistent with what is supported by the literature. Nevertheless, participants remarked that more could be done in regard to setting clear expectations with tutors around how to set up sessions with their student, i.e when the tutor should send a zoom link, how much notice should be given before the tutor cancels a session. With respect to reaching the desired target demographics a moderate amount of service users were from low income households (44%) while the organization was less successful in reaching individuals from a variety of racialized backgrounds with the vast majority of respondents identifying as Asian. Trends also emerged regarding the relationship between age and engagement; as age went up, service use went down. In addition to supporting more low income and racialized communities, The Halifax Helpers should attempt to increase participation in older grades. In the interviews, participants commented on two main barriers to service access (a) difficulty using the website (b) the inability to find session times that suited their needs. One participant suggested that, in order to support students and parents who are having trouble using the required technology, video education sessions should be run and broadcasted in multiple languages to support both families with low literacy and families of language learners. To increase scheduling flexibility, the baseline number of volunteers required at any given time should be increased. This can be through recruitment campaigns using social media and targeted outreach to university programs and high schools that require students to complete volunteer hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections provides recommendations for improvement based on user feedback. Recommendations are broken down into two sections; suggestions to decrease barriers to services access and areas within the organization that have been highlighted throughout the report as a strength and should be emphasized further in the 2021/22 school year. Results are to be used by the executive board throughout the 2021/22 school year to improve programming. The 2021/22 program assessment will include summaries on how these recommendations have been addressed.

Reducing Barriers to Access



- Streamline expectations for tutors in regard to setting up sessions
- Increase the size of the volunteer base
- Provide education sessions in multiple languages for parents and students on how to use the website
- Optimize SEO to increase organic reach
- Implement accurate website translation
- Engage in partnerships with community agencies and target populations to tailor services and increase reach

- Scaffolding instructional method
- Creating a nurturing and supportive environment during sessions
- Open communication with parents in regard to session progress
- Engagement with teachers concerning areas the student requires support in

Highlighting areas of success



FINAL THOUGHTS

This section provides users overall impressions of The Halifax Helpers.

"I am truly grateful for you guys, service is I'm truly, I bow down, It is it was amazing for [Child's Name], I can't wait for next year for her to start and knowing that she has somebody in her corner that can actually help her through this stuff It's been nothing but Aces for me as far as dealing with you guys. I will be singing your praises until she graduates from high school."

"Once I did find [Tutors Name] for [My Child], um, for math help, um, I couldn't ask for better"

"He needs opportunity to study English and then I found out the good system like Halifax Helpers and it helped a lot and he is going to take the sessions in the future."

"Thank You doesn't adequately express our gratitude for the help Halifax Helpers have provided to us. My daughter is in a French Immersion school and both me and my wife do not speak French. Since the start of the pandemic we could not help our daughter much in French reading and we could see her getting uncomfortable with reading. We found Halifax Helpers in September and since then 30 min reading with [Tutors Name] almost every other week has brought the consistency that was needed. A very big shout-out to [Tutors Name] for making the sessions welcoming for our daughter with her read and play approach. We see the change in our daughter, she is much more involved and comfortable in reading books with her Helper, at School and also with us at home"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the individuals and institutions that sponsored and worked on this report. Below, are the names of those committed to the project:

Rebecca Raphael - Principal Investigator

Dr. Julia Forgie - Research Supervisor

Elena Manzella - Research Assistant

The University of Toronto - Sponsor and Grant Funder

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to develop The Halifax Helpers.

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APPENDIX A

Combined Likert Scale Means

	<u>Mean (SD)</u>
Did tutoring sessions improve my/my child's grades?	6.23 (.99)
Did tutoring sessions increase my/my child's academic success?	6.27 (.91)
My/my child's tutors were knowledgeable.	6.44 (.92)
My/my child's tutors were effective.	6.38 (.84)
The quality of the tutoring sessions met my expectations.	6.40 (.91)
The booking system was easy to use.	6.21 (1.50)
My/my child's tutors arrived on time.	6.62 (.76)
My/my child's tutors were prepared.	6.54 (.74)
My/my child's tutors were helpful in assisting my/my child needs	6.52 (.79)
Tutoring sessions were available at the times I required.	6.40 (1.22)
I was satisfied with my/my child's tutoring sessions	6.58 (.91)
Tutoring sessions reduces my/my child's stress.	6.26 (1.28)
Tutoring sessions increased my/my child's confidence.	6.23 (1.10)
Tutoring sessions made me/my child more excited for school.	6.04 (1.24)
Tutoring sessions helped me/my child gain useful skills	6.28 (1.19)
I would recommend The Halifax Helpers to other families.	6.71 (.71)

Note: Maximum score on the Likert scale is 7