

Research & Policy

Youth Labour Shortages in Canada

Essay Contributions from the Youth Ecosystem



Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity
Conseil Canadien pour la Réussite des Jeunes

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Foreword



The Research and Policy team at **Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP)** is pleased to introduce this compilation of essays on lessons learned about youth labour market disengagement authored by our partner organizations: Mentor Canada, OTEC (Ontario Tourism Education Corporation) and NPower Canada. These three organizations actively work in the youth workforce development ecosystem. The labour shortages we have been learning about in the news, relevant as they are to youth employment issues, arise from a confluence of economic factors and qualitative factors like mentorship and career development that feed into those economic factors. The organizations above have made their contributions here after listening to their youth clients and youth advisors on their views about the labour market. In the following paragraphs, CCYP Research and Policy provides the overview to recent youth disengagement in the labour market, to augment the specific contributions of our partners on the subject.

Here are the facts about **youth engagement** in the labour market. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an outsized effect on youth employment from April 2020 and onwards.¹ Youth labor force participation, that represents the 'engagement' of 15 -24 year olds in the labour market dropped during 2020, indicating that upon facing unemployment, youth dropped out of the labour market; they disengaged from the labour market that year. After trending upwards since 2017, youth labour force participation rates dropped from a high of 65% in 2019 to 62% in 2020.²

This continued until late in 2021, when there was some recovery in youth labour participation during which time it rose to 64%. More youth were engaging/interacting with the labour market by then, either by being in active employment or actively looking for a job if unemployed. This stood in contrast to the trough in youth labour participation the previous year, during the throes of the pandemic. But the shortfall in labour force participation by one percent point in 2021 (64%) compared to 2019 (65%) does indicate that there were at least 97,000 fewer participating workers in the 15-24 age category in 2021 compared to 2019.³ Some of those 97,000 *participating-in-the-labour-market* youth might have dropped out of the labour market to acquire education and skills training over that time. However, the inescapable fact is that there were 80,000 fewer youth (15-24 year olds) in Canada in 2021 compared to 2019; i.e. at least 80,000 youth 'aged out' of the youth category by 2021.⁴ These numbers are merely suggestive of the long known trend of aging demographics in Canada.

As of now, with the economy continuing its re-openings after the Omicron variant shut-downs of December 2021, the earlier spoken about labour shortages will continue manifesting in the

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm>

² Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0020-01 Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment, annual

³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501>

⁴ Calculated from Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0020-01 Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment, annual

general economy, but also specifically for youth due to this long-standing demographic trend, which has entailed a rise in unfilled job postings, i.e., job vacancies. The current rise in job vacancies that has been written about widely in the media⁵ is possibly a confluence of two phenomena: i) people leaving the labour force because of pandemic insecurities, or in the case of youth, the acquisition of education and training⁶ and/or ii) people (including young workers) switching sectors and industries. Job vacancy rates in Canada were highest in the third quarter of 2021 since the start of the pandemic at 5.4%, though they varied across industries.

That the hardest hit industry from the COVID-19 shut-down for youth was NAICS 72: Accommodation and Food Services⁷, was tremendously important because around 53% of the total employment in that NAICS sector was below the age of 30 in 2019⁸. In terms of vacancy rates using the third quarter data in the figure overleaf, that very sector which relies so heavily on young workers was experiencing the highest vacancy rates amongst all the two-digit NAICS sectors reported upon here. The high vacancy rates likely come from youth (and other workers) staying away from filling open jobs due to a whole host of considerations, including unwillingness to re-join that sector due to its previous uncertainties, typically poor working conditions, alternative employment and/or education opportunities, amongst other factors.⁹

As the figure overleaf indicates, high vacancy rates characterized many contact

based industries, not just Accommodation and Food Services. Those include Administrative support, waste management and business services, Construction, Arts, entertainment and recreation – industries that are large youth employers as well.¹⁰

The industries that have grown most in terms of youth employment (15-29 years) since January 2020 and over the past 2 years are, Forestry, Logging and Support Activities for Forestry¹¹, Public Administration, Health Care and Social Assistance, Real Estate and Rental Leasing and

“ The current rise in job vacancies that has been written about widely in the media is possibly a confluence of two phenomena: people leaving the labour force because of pandemic insecurities, the acquisition of education and training, people (including young workers switching sectors and industries). ”

⁵ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/business/labour-shortages-continue-as-quarterly-job-vacancies-reach-all-time-high-1.5718167>

⁶ Youth in Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions through the Pandemic: Challenges in 2021/22 and beyond, CCYP State of Sector Report. (January 2022) CCYP_8.5x11_Report_WINTER_2022-JAN_ENGLISH.indd (wildapricot.org)

⁷ Impact Covid: Walking through the Effects of Youth in 'Youthful' Industries, CCYP Report (July 2020), ESDC ESSAY ENG Final (wildapricot.org)

⁸ Youth in Canada: A Profile (wildapricot.org)

⁹ Over 200,000 workers left restaurant industry during pandemic | The Star

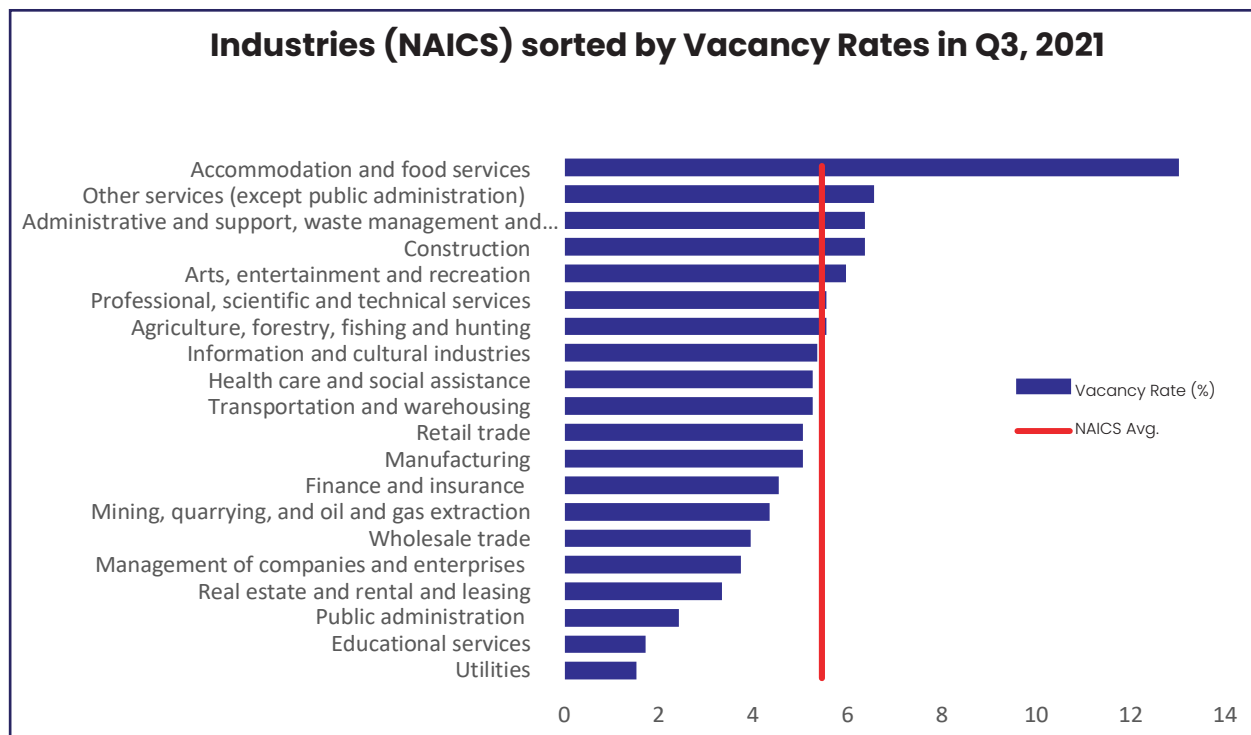
¹⁰ Youth in Canada: A Profile (wildapricot.org)

¹¹ Youth jobs in this sector grew from a 6,321 jobs in Jan 2020 to 15,637 jobs in Jan 2022, more than double in 2 years. In Jan 2020, jobs in this sector represented only 0.14% of all youth employment (15-29 years); by Jan 2022, it represented 0.4%, despite the fact that total employment for youth fell by 2.1% over that time.

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Educational Services.¹² Besides, the jobs in all of these industries listed above, (except for Forestry, Logging and Support Activities for Forestry) were those in administrative occupations, educational occupations (like teaching assistants, vocational instructors or primary/secondary teachers) and community service, that could be and were performed remotely. In Forestry, Logging and Support Activities for Forestry, the type of work that saw expansion was in supervisory and technical occupations that often

require experience and/or licensing and certifications. So here we see that the type of youth employment that saw expansion over Jan 2020–22 was either in services work that could be performed remotely, or work that required on-site certifications/licensing in natural resources and related production, i.e., forestry and logging, mining, oil drilling, etc.



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0326-01 Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by industry sector, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality

¹² Calculated from the LFS monthly series microdata. Estimates can be provided upon request.

¹³ Calculated from LFS monthly series microdata.

Lastly, over the past two years since the initial pandemic phase of shutdowns, we have seen more youth move away from participating in the labour force (although improved from the early stages of the pandemic), towards participating in education. In January 2020, before the pandemic, around 77% of 15-29 year olds (1.65 million youth) who were out of the labour force (2.16 million youth) were students, part-time education increased over Jan 2020-2021 for enrolled youth, but as has been the norm. That share of students increased by January 2022 to 78% or 1.67 million students out of 2.15 million youth not in the labour force.¹³ **Part-time education** increased over Jan 2020-2021 for enrolled youth, but that has since dropped to 3% of all youth in education in Jan 2022, with 15-29 year olds continuing to enroll in **full-time education** and skills training.

In summary, the larger forces driving existing youth labour shortages in Canada are: a) demographic change (aging) reflected in declining labour force participation, b) expansion in online work opportunities and other on-site opportunities requiring specialized training and certifications, c) youth disengagement from entry level work in contact based industries d) lowered labour force participation or disengagement due to youth pursuing education and skills training. These are economy-wide forces.

“Over the past two years since the initial pandemic phase of shutdowns, we have seen more youth move away from participating in the labour force (although improved from the early stages of the pandemic) towards participating in education.”


Evidence supporting the general trend of the shift by youth towards digital training and employment economy wide exists in the information gathered by individual companies like NPower. Youth disconnection and disengagement from labour market participation, especially from contact based work economy wide appears symptomatic of other qualitative gaps, according to our other two partners, Mentor Canada and OTEC (Ontario Tourism Education Corporation) featured here. They see those gaps as

inadequate preparation for careers and inadequate mentorship. It is difficult of course, for us to be sure, due to lack of evidence that these qualitative gaps are as important as more material considerations like low wages or working conditions associated with entry level contact based work. Suffice it to say that that coupled with material considerations, these factors might be significant.

Both Mentor Canada, the umbrella organization that offers mentorship resources to the youth ecosystem and OTEC that delivers skills training and consulting for the hospitality and tourism sector in Ontario, perceive youth disengagement from the labour market as a long standing problem, primarily because of the lack of mentorship, conflicting information and confu-

sion about sustainable career development. Mentor Canada commissioned a comprehensive study on mentorship in Canada which reinforced the importance of mentorship as a factor of tremendous importance in youth career development, youth labour market engagement and youth well-being. OTEC commissioned the development of automated pathways software that helps youth who are having difficulty finding sustainable careers zero in on options. NPower, the organization targeting skills training towards marginalized youth, views the youth lack of participation in the labour market as qualified disengagement. They suggest that youth workers have simply moved on from the typical youth jobs – customer servicing, entry level jobs (that are often non-standard jobs) – to getting trained for digital job opportunities, where remote work is likely possible.

All three organizations indicate that the solutions to easing youth labour market entry reside in encouraging different aspects of career development through mentorship or technology services that reach those who have not benefitted from in-depth career development advice or direct re-training into in-demand fields. Our partner organizations have arrived at their conclusions about youth disengagement from the labour market by hearing from youth clientele directly, and so have initiated and delivered programming formulated with some solutions discussed in their essay contributions.



“ There was a time when trucking and transportation, for example, was a path to the middle class! So improving work standards and wages would go a long way towards improving entry into such labour deficit industries. ”

At CCYP, we believe tackling youth disengagement from the labour market requires a multipronged strategy because each of these insights from our partners feeds into the larger economy wide factors as youth continue staying away from entry-level contract-based work. Economy wide solutions lie in the following.

Firstly, improving the terms of employment in deficit industries like trucking and transportation or food services and accommodation will go a long way in creating incentives for youth to

enter. There was a time when trucking and transportation, for example, was a path to the middle class!¹⁴ So improving work standards and wages would be useful towards improving entry into such labour deficit industries. Such improvement could lead to returning the dignity of labour to manual/labour intensive work.

Secondly, investment in career development for youth and lowering costs for upskilling and switching fields. For example, working in the Accommodation and Food Services industry as entry

¹⁴ <https://www.thestar.com/business/opinion/2022/02/05/lets-talk-about-the-real-problems-facing-truck-drivers-safety-low-wages-gig-work-and-fatalities.html?rf>
Declining terms of employment in an industry, lack of worker protections, etc. has a lot to do with industry de-regulation.

level work for youth, should not imply a 'career dead-end' for youth as has been characterized by employment services providers informally. It should instead be seen as a stepping stone to further opportunity, to be augmented through investments in on-the-job training for career advancement. OTEC's activities are a good example of such within-industry investment in skills training for career advancement. However, more ubiquitous employer investment for on-the-job training, especially by and for small businesses, would be of use in creating incentives for youth to enter and stay, especially in labour deficit industries.

Thirdly, effective career development at earlier stages in schooling than at secondary levels only, as currently offered, would encourage youth interest in many fields that are possibly not as popular but can be lucrative careers. Mentorship and allied strategies suggested by Mentor Canada can provide effective support to career development. NPower's direct approach into employer demanded skills training could inform a possible strategy for downloading into secondary school in the form of apprenticeships.

Lastly, increased immigration- for example by continuing to allow international students to work with the expansion of open work permits or more specifically expedited licensing for foreign trained nurses, - are strategies that target labour shortages. However, the central concern surrounding revising and relying on immigration as an answer to labour shortages is to avoid perpetuating the process of immigrants performing the 'least wanted jobs', which results in declining immigrant incomes.¹⁵


Of these approaches to resolving labour shortages, some are already manifested in the specific programs our partners have engaged in and have written about in the following pages. The insights presented here and ahead, come from what we have learned about the economy, demography and from the youth that CCYP and the three featured organizations have engaged with over the past few years. Our hope is that the ideas and insights put forth by our partners be adopted widely over the next few years.

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¹⁵ Warman, C. and Worswick, C. (2015), Technological change, occupational tasks and declining immigrant outcomes: Implications for earnings and income inequality in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économie*, 48: 736-772.



Why there have been shifts in youth participation in labour markets during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

By Carly Dwyer & Emilie Jones
NPower, Canada

POST-COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many industries to suspend operations and/or layoff staff due to the massive economic fallout it triggered. Several sectors were also unable to offer a safe remote work option to their employees. Although initial calls were made to stay at home for a few weeks to flatten the curve, no one could have foreseen the long-term consequences of the pandemic on the labour market. With long-term hiatuses in retail, restaurant spaces, and other in-person domains, young adults looking to propel their careers looked elsewhere. When restrictions eased, many had already moved on.

Marvin V., who graduated from NPower Canada's Junior Security and Quality Assurance program in September 2021, is one individual who made the switch from the events sector, a largely in-person industry, to tech. *"COVID-19 affected me and my family in a lot of ways. I was previously working in the events industry and when COVID hit, the industry was heavily affected... I ended up losing my job in January 2020."*

Marvin is an example of a young professional who switched careers and entered the tech workforce as a result of the pandemic. While other industries were struggling to survive amidst lockdowns, the tech industry boomed, particularly in Canada. According to CBRE, an investment firm that leverages market intelligence, Toronto ranked first in North America for high-tech software job growth in 2019–2020. Vancouver ranked third, and Montreal sixth. Although Marvin knew that one day the events industry would recover, he wanted to move into a career that was more stable.

Marvin shares a similar story to Marcos Chumacero, who was featured in a Toronto Star article. Marcos, a 2020 NPower Canada graduate, moved away from hospitality in light of the pandemic and now works in tech. Emira Refai-Grey (2020 graduate) who used to sell Blue Jays' merchandise, also capitalized on the opportunity to switch careers during the pandemic. She did not want to wait around in hopes that the lockdown would be over soon, and took her future into her own hands by enrolling in NPower Canada's program.

These young adults sought out opportunities that would equip them with in-demand tech skills and certifications required to enter the tech field. In 2020, 24% of NPower Canada enrollees were from the hospitality sector, and another 11% came from retail. Many individuals used the pandemic as an opportunity to enroll in education or upskill to be able to launch a sustainable career and move away from survival jobs once the economy picked up again. As Marvin stated, *"a lot of employers look to see if you are educating yourself aside from professional career experience," so he took the opportunity to gain micro-credentials.*

“Many individuals used the pandemic as an opportunity to enroll in education or upskill to be able to launch a sustainable career and move away from survival jobs once the economy picked up again.”

At NPower Canada, our enrollment increased by 51% in the first year of the pandemic. In response to COVID-19, we pivoted from our in-person, five-days per week format to a virtual program delivery model. We adapted to the new normal and began recording all live webinars and labs to provide more flexible, asynchronous options for youth to participate in skills training at their own pace and on their own schedule. Our increased flexibility and accessibility provided by this shift broke down barriers to entry for some of the organization's most vulnerable participants, such as youth with childcare responsibilities, youth with challenging home circumstances, and youth with disabilities.

For example, Alex A., a May 2021 NPower Canada graduate, is legally blind and *"so transportation and large amounts of texts were barriers to overcome."* Alex was able to join our Junior IT Analyst

program from the comfort of his home and watched the webinar recordings if he had missed something during synchronous sessions.

Our shift to virtual program delivery also allowed us to expand the geographical region that we offer our programs in. Delivering our programs virtually and being able to work from home has opened opportunities for young people outside of city centres – and saves the hours-long commute they would have faced pre-pandemic. The discovery that our program’s skill training, wraparound supports and employability coaching interventions have proven just as effective when delivered virtually instead of in-person, suggests that NPower Canada can continue to scale its programs to remote areas, smaller urban labour markets, and Indigenous communities.

Not having to commute to a brick-and-mortar establishment removed the common barrier of distance and transportation for many underserved job seekers. Natasha Graham, a September 2021 graduate from our Junior IT Analyst program, had heard about NPower Canada years ago but felt that juggling a part-time job and having to dedicate the time to commute to class was too much. Virtual program delivery changed that for her – she said, *“I found myself with all the free time in the world during COVID, and I was very sad about that. I didn’t like feeling so directionless. I decided*

to check back at the website, and I learned that a new cohort was beginning soon on Zoom. It was the perfect time.”

“Not having to commute to a brick-and-mortar establishment removed the common barrier of distance and transportation for many underserved job seekers.”

Going forward, NPower Canada intends to continue offering flexible delivery options to participants while scaling its programs nationwide to serve greater numbers of unemployed and underemployed youth,

including youth who have lost employment as a direct result of the pandemic and those whose employment is at risk of obsolescence due to automation and other disruptive market forces.

Across industries, people are realizing that work-from-home is a viable option that can expand opportunities. Although NPower Canada had initial concerns about whether youth would remain sufficiently motivated and engaged to complete the program online, 82% of our 2020 enrollees ultimately graduated from the program and earned industry certifications, modestly exceeding our 80% target. Despite an initial decline in employment outcomes immediately following the onset of the pandemic, NPower Canada has since recovered from these setbacks, achieving our target of placing at least 80% of graduates in full-time IT-related employment and/or enrolled in higher education within six months of completing our program.

Additionally, many youth have expressed that the virtual delivery model helped them prepare and get comfortable with remote work roles. Mid-sized IT managed services have hired growing numbers of NPower Canada graduates, largely for remote IT support services roles for their clients across sectors and industries involving virtual troubleshooting and configuration, cloud

solutions, web-based support and digital customer care. Many of our employment partners continue to employ graduates who work remotely even amidst reopenings and we anticipate they will continue to recruit for the types of remote IT support and developer roles required to help businesses deploy their workforce online.

Tom H. who graduated from our Junior IT Analyst program in May 2021 and then enrolled in our alumni

Google Project Management program was unable to work regular jobs when sanitization became frequent (due to chemical damage on his hands and arms). He needed a remote work-from-home option, and tech seemed like the right fit. *“A lot of research into work-from-home has changed the perspective of what a workplace can look like. I can do just as much from home if not more than I could do at an office. I think [work] has changed for the better, it just took something bad to happen for us to realize it was an option,”* Tom had to say about how COVID-19 has impacted work culture.

Many young adults beginning their careers in tech share Tom’s positive and optimistic attitude towards the nature of work post-pandemic. Ruchita D. expects that working-from-home will continue, and she doesn’t see why it shouldn’t, *“I don’t feel the need to go into the office and there are no tasks that can’t be completed virtually. I feel like Zoom and [Microsoft] Teams are great environments to interact with colleagues.”*

Other NPower Canada alumni expressed that flexible and hybrid work models are beneficial for their personal lives as well as their career. Ravina L. feels that the pandemic made people realize that work isn’t everything, and that *“we need to take a step back, work, but focus on mental health, take time for your family, take time to enjoy your life,”* which she feels is easier to do while working remotely. Marvin echoed these sentiments, suggesting that the pandemic made people value things they took for granted and he is hopeful for the future of work where *“work-life balance is a top priority for both workers and employers.”*

Young IT professionals remain optimistic about the future of work and the changes that COVID-19 has made with regards to workplace norms and business operations. These drastic, but impactful and important shifts have enabled them to be prepared for opportunities in growing industries. While youth have become more hesitant to join the labour market in survival jobs or in industries which could continue to face instability, they are eager and prepared to participate in the tech labour market and launch themselves into meaningful future-focused careers.

“ The discovery that our program’s skill training, wraparound supports and employability coaching interventions have proven just as effective when delivered virtually instead of in-person, suggests that NPower Canada can continue to scale its programs to remote areas, smaller urban labour markets, and Indigenous communities. ”

About NPower Canada

NPower Canada is a charitable organization that launches underserved young adults, including people with disabilities, BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ youth, into meaningful & sustainable careers in technology. Through its free in-demand digital and professional skills training programs, NPower Canada connects young adults to employers who are looking for junior IT/tech talent. NPower Canada has grown from enrolling 87 learners in 2015 to 1,700 in 2021, scaling within the GTA and expanding nationally to Calgary in 2019 and Halifax and Vancouver in 2021.

To date, more than 80% of NPower Canada's 2910 alumni have secured in-demand tech jobs such as Help Desk Analyst, QA Specialist and Information Security Analyst with industry leaders such as Accenture, CGI, CIBC, Cisco, Deloitte, IBM, RBC, Softchoice, TD and TELUS.



Carly Dwyer is the Senior Manager, Communications & Partnerships at NPower Canada. With seven years of experience in the non-profit sector in Toronto, Carly is committed to NPower Canada's mission to launch digital careers that transform the lives of its participants and their families. With a BA from Wilfrid Laurier and a post-grad diploma in Corporate Communications from Seneca@York, Carly has a wide range of experience in communications, event coordination and development with a strong interest in storytelling, engagement and partnerships.



Emilie Jones is the Communications Coordinator for NPower Canada, working with her team to effectively transmit their mission to help underserved young people. She came to NPower Canada after completing a Masters degree in English from the University of British Columbia.

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Advancements HR Technology Enable Youth to **ALiGN** their unique personalities with jobs best suited to them

By Sarah Fox & Shelagh O'Donnell
Ontario Tourism Board

With the help of sophisticated psychometric technology, Lynn Manary forged a path to success – harnessing what she once viewed as weaknesses into unique strengths. This shows that improving access to such technology can help youth to make good career choices, encouraging their engagement in the labour market.

Choosing a career path has always been a challenging task for young people. With so many different potential directions, finding the right fit early in life can make the world of difference in someone's future. Studies have shown that determining jobs well-suited to personality can contribute to productivity and job satisfaction.

Today more than ever, Canadian youth are struggling to plan their future careers, given the devastating effects COVID-19 has had on employment. Digital workforce development platforms could play a pivotal role in allowing youth to interact with the labour market at a time of uncertainty. In 2019, OTEC, a not-for-profit Training, Consulting, and Workforce Development organization delivering innovative solutions for the development of a skilled workforce, together with a coalition of partners including First Work, MaRS Data Catalyst Centre and the Canadian Council for Youth

Prosperity, began working with The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) to test an innovative, evidence-based, approach to skills development for the new economy. The initiative, known as **Project Integrate**, tested the potential impact and feasibility of a single technology-enabled employment and training pathway for youth. Working with employment service provider (ESP) networks across Canada, the project conducted systems research and field testing with a range of promising employment-related technologies in each of the following three phases in the employment pathway: Engagement, Systems Navigation and Career Laddering. Job seeker, organizational and systems-level factors were evaluated to determine the potential impact and implications of a single, user managed, employment pathway.

ALiGN is a sophisticated psychometric assessment tool developed from decades of research in human personality, and it can make all the difference for youth job seekers. After completing an online assessment, users receive a 12-page report with a customized portrait (Lumina Spark) providing a unique personality portrait designed to increase self-awareness of strengths and hidden potential, and to suggest meaningful career options they may not have previously considered. The report can also be used to prepare resumés and cover letters, to prepare for interviews and to open conversations with employers. Personality assessments are private and are shared with users directly through the online system.

Prior to 2020, Employment Service Providers (ESP) were the primary channel to provide youth jobseekers an opportunity to experience the ALiGN assessment tool. However, to support youth

job seekers during the pandemic, the tool was recently made directly available to all youth 15-29 years of age across Canada (instead of via ESP facilitators), through OTEC's participation in the FUTURES youth conference, as well as a B2C/peer influencer national marketing campaign. You can watch the ALiGN campaign videos on [OTEC's YouTube channel here](#).



“For job seekers, new labour market technologies can help individuals to better understand their marketable skills and how they can be applied to different sectors and geographic markets.”

Lynn Manary's story is just one example of how ALiGN can support youth in their

career journeys. Since graduating high school, Manary struggled to choose the right path. She tried two different college programs but couldn't find the motivation to finish. Grappling to find her focus, she turned to self-medicating – in an effort for the 22-year-old to “feel something.”

“A lot of people work their whole lives, never acting on their purpose,” Manary says. “I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder a few years ago and recently with ADHD. Throughout high school, I didn't get good grades. I couldn't pass tests. I tried to focus, I tried to understand and learn, but I just couldn't.”

When Manary's mother suggested she attend the Youth Job Connection (YJC) program at the

Multi-Service Centre in her hometown of Tillsonburg, Ontario, she was apprehensive – worried it would be like school, something she hadn't had much success with in the past.

With assurances in place, Manary took the leap. In the three-week program, she tapped into an area of knowledge she hadn't before: herself. The program's assessments helped her to discover her own personality and where her unique skills and talents lay.

"Before, if someone asked me about myself, I wouldn't know what to say," she says. "Now, everything is clear."

Manary credits one assessment used by the YJC as making the most significant impact on her life: the ALiGN psychometric assessment tool. It helped to identify personal characteristics, qualities and strengths that she had been unable to pinpoint on her own. For example, she learned that she's extroverted, people-focused, a big picture thinker, and discipline driven.

"The ALiGN assessment was so customized to me personally, instead of generalizing," she explains. "It was interactive, detailed and there were so many different things I could read. For me, it was so accurate."



“Digital training, employment and career navigation platforms are becoming increasingly integrated into the workforce development sector in Canada.”

"For job seekers, new labour market technologies can help individuals to better understand their marketable skills and how they can be applied to different sectors and geographic markets," says Adam Morrison, OTEC President and CEO. "They can better identify specific micro-skills that they need and focus on the most efficient pathways into new opportunities."

Through her work with ALiGN, Manary recognized that she had the abilities and skills to develop a successful career. Learning that she could use her personal experience with mental health to help others was a true game-changer.

"I realized I'm meant to help people. I think I always knew that, but I couldn't pinpoint it and that I could actually get a job for it," she says.

Having struggled to hold a permanent job in the past, Manary is finally feeling confident in her career path as a Social Service Work student. Most importantly, she has found purpose. Although her new trajectory brings challenges, Manary's newfound confidence is helping to make her school experience manageable.

For anyone struggling to find their purpose, Manary suggests exploring the benefits of ESPs in their community: "You have to be willing to branch out and network to know the resources in your community. It opened up a whole new door I didn't even know was there."

Digital training, employment and career navigation platforms are becoming increasingly integrated into the workforce development sector in Canada. Through extensive research and consultations, Project Integrate has built an understanding of how youth navigate the complexities of the employment journey today, as well as the tools and platforms they use along the way. Project Integrate's research has demonstrated how a single, technology-enabled employment pathway can enhance youth's outcomes and improve their career navigation experience during this time of employment uncertainty.

About Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)

Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC), a not-for-profit, is Ontario's tourism and hospitality workforce development organization, delivering skills training, consulting, research and insight- that guides workforce strategy in the sector. OTEC provides a diverse portfolio of customized, sector-specific workforce solutions designed to ensure organizations achieve the highest standards of service and performance objectives – including customer service and leadership training, up skilling and reskilling, professional certifications, HR technology, and consulting services for a wide range of businesses and destinations.

The organization's mission is to provide thought leadership and dynamic execution to build workforce skills, capacity, and competitiveness throughout the workforce life cycle. OTEC connects and guides industry and community partners through research, technology, skills development and strategic opportunities for collaboration.



Sarah Fox is a writer whose passion stretches across any subject she can put pen to paper on – or more accurately these days, fingers to keyboard. She got her start writing inspiring stories on today's youth making a difference, change-makers in education, development, and environmentalism, and national and international leaders. Throughout her career, she's helped small businesses launch websites with engaging copy, and now she writes thought-leadership on the tech industry and shifts in workplace culture. She lives in Huntsville, Ontario with her perfect rescue dog, Ray.



Shelagh O'Donnell has held senior leadership roles with high profile organizations in the tourism, government, health care, non-profit and cultural sectors – including Director, Marketing Communications at OTEC; Head of Communications at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM); Director, Corporate Communications at CNIB; and Corporate Communications and Stakeholder Relations at CBC-TV. She specializes in all marketing communications disciplines including corporate communications, media relations, digital marketing, branding, content strategy, writing, social media, stakeholder relations and issues management. Shelagh's passion is supporting accessibility and marginalized communities, serving on boards including Homes First.





Mentoring

A Key Tool for an Inclusive and Equitable Recovery for Youth

By Véronique Church-Duplessis, *Mentor Canada*


The pandemic's impact has been felt more acutely and persistently among young adults than among other age groups. Since they had less time to establish their careers, younger workers were more vulnerable to the pandemic's economic repercussions: they were more likely to lose work hours, become unemployed, or lose income. Groups of young Canadians – including those who identify as Indigenous, Black, disabled, and recent postsecondary graduates – are more likely to have experienced significant disruptions to their lives (Future Skills Centre, 2021a).

The long-term implications of the pandemic are still being uncovered but evidence suggests that the recovery will be especially challenging for youth. Many young adults cannot go back to what they had previously established and will instead have to try to build something new such as starting a post-secondary education or finding a first career-related job after graduating during the pandemic (Future Skills Centre, 2021a).

Mentoring is a crucial tool to promote a more inclusive and equitable recovery for youth. Mentors are uniquely positioned to offer youth the flexible and holistic support they need to navigate their employment and early career journeys. Studies have demonstrated that youth who have been mentored – whether informally by supportive adults in their surroundings or formally through structured mentoring programs – are more likely to report positive outcomes related to their education and careers (DuBois et al., 2011, Raposa et al., 2019, van Dam et al., 2018).

Mentor Canada's 2020 survey of close to 3,000 young adults between the ages of 18 to 30 highlighted the many ways through which mentors support young Canadians' journeys towards healthy and productive

adulthood. Mentors help youth gain skills (including social-emotional skills, soft skills, and technical skills), increase access to social capital and connect them to new opportunities, and offer them emotional, informational, and instrumental support along their pathways to employment (Mentor Canada, 2021).



96% of mentored newcomer youth consistently reported being employed or studying, compared to 85% of un-mentored youth,
92% of mentored Black youth consistently reported being employed or studying, compared to 83% of un-mentored Black youth, and
86% of mentored youth experiencing a disability consistently reported being employed or studying, compared to 75% of their un-mentored peers.

Mentored youth are more likely to be employed or studying

According to the *Mapping the Mentoring Gap* study, young adults who had had access to at least one mentor, formal or informal, during their childhood or adolescence were 59% more likely to be employed or to be studying than their peers who did not have access to any mentoring.

Mentors prepare youth for the labour market

Wanting help planning their careers or their academic future are common reasons why youth seek out mentors. In fact, over one-third of youth who were mentored during their adolescence reported that their mentor shaped their career aspirations. Mentored youth were also more likely to report feeling positive about their career plans than their non-mentored peers.

Close to half of youth who were mentored during their teenage years indicated that they developed job-related skills with their mentors' help. Many formal mentors also helped youth gain work experience. Nearly one-third of youth who participated in formal mentoring programs during their adolescence obtained their first job with their mentor's help.

Mentors support youths' educational achievement. Youth who were mentored were twice as likely to have completed high school than their non-mentored peers. Among Indigenous youth, 92% of those who had a mentor completed high school compared to 81% of their unmentored peers. Mentored youth were also 95% more likely to have pursued further education or training after high school than unmentored youth.

Mentoring support youth's mental health and resilience

The deterioration of young people's mental health during the pandemic poses a challenge for the recovery and has direct implications for the labour force. Youth with mental health needs are less likely to return to work and less able to adapt to the workplace changes engendered by the pandemic. Overall, poor mental health negatively impacts young people's employment and career advancement (Future Skills Centre, 2021a).


By fostering connections and offering support, relationships such as mentoring promote young people's positive mental health. According to the *Mapping the Mentoring Gap* study, young adults who were mentored growing up were 53% more likely to report that their mental health was good or excellent than their peers who did not have a mentor. Only 62% of young adults who did not have access to mentoring growing up reported positive mental health before the pandemic compared to 79% of young adults who had access to a formal mentor.

For groups who are less likely to report positive mental health such as youth experiencing a disability and youth from sexual minorities, the percentage of them reporting good or excellent mental health is noticeably higher when they had access to mentoring: there is a 13-percentage points difference between mentored and unmentored sexual minority youth and a 12-percentage points difference between mentored and unmentored youth with a disability.

A large proportion of young people do not feel that they belong in their local community. However, mentoring is an effective strategy to bolster feelings of connection and belonging. Mentored youth were twice as likely to feel that they belong compared to their unmentored peers. **Youth from equity-seeking groups who had access to mentoring consistently reported strong or somewhat strong feelings of belonging in greater proportions than their peers who did not have access to mentoring:**

82% of mentored Black youth pursued further education compared to 64% of unmentored Black youth.

78% of mentored youth who faced adverse life circumstances growing up pursued further education compared to 63% of those who did not have access to mentoring.

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- There is a 22-percentage points difference between mentored and unmentored Indigenous youth who report feeling that they belong;
 - There is a 19-percentage points difference between mentored and unmentored sexual minority youth;
 - There is a 17-percentage points difference between mentored and unmentored newcomer youth.

Mentors made a difference in several areas that contribute to youth's resilience, including their social capital, their confidence in their abilities, and their hopefulness. Young adults who were mentored growing up were more likely to report that they have people they can count on and that they can easily get help if they need it than their unmentored peers. Mentors often had a positive influence on youth's development during their adolescence: 73% of mentored youth reported that their most important mentor had a significant influence on their confidence in their abilities and 70% on their hope and optimism for the future.

Youth face barriers accessing mentors when they most want them

Mentors can influence almost every area of young people's lives, but too many young people face barriers accessing mentors when they need them the most. Over half of the young adults surveyed could recall a time growing up when they wished they had a mentor but did not have access to one. Sexual minority youth and youth experiencing a disability were statistically more likely to report unmet needs in terms of access to mentorship. Many young adults faced barriers accessing mentors during their adolescence such as not knowing how to find a mentor, not understanding the value of mentorship at the time or not having access to a mentoring program. In fact, 38% of young adults reported facing at least one barrier accessing mentorship during their teenage years. On average, a greater proportion of youth from equity-seeking groups reported facing barriers. For example, nearly half of youth experiencing a disability and youth who faced adverse life circumstances growing up encountered barriers accessing mentorship.

Youth sometimes face challenges finding mentorship opportunities aligned with their needs and goals. One newcomer interview participant explained: "After arriving to Canada, I tried to seek out different career mentors. I looked online, I tried contacting people, I looked on government websites, and other organizations websites. Some programs offered career mentors, but they did not seem qualified to help me and my career". To close the mentoring gap, we must work together to ensure that youth are able to access mentors capable of responding to their unique goals and needs, and to do so when they need it the most.

Mentoring can foster a more inclusive recovery for youth

Mentoring is a key tool to foster a more inclusive and equitable recovery for youth. Research exploring diverse young adults' employment experiences demonstrated that youth want consistent and ongoing support throughout their lives and employment journeys, including support from mentors (SRDC, 2021a). Mentors provide a stable and flexible form of support, which stands in contrast with many other employment

services or programs that emphasize getting youth hired with limited consideration to quality of work, job retention, skills development, or career growth. By fostering a person-centered approach to employment service delivery and removing barriers for youth on their employment journeys, mentoring can support the development of more responsive career pathways (Future Skills Centre, 2021b & 2021c).

To realize the power of mentoring, it is crucial to adopt policies encouraging the inclusion of mentorship into youth employment programs. It is also essential to build employment service providers and employers' capacity to implement quality and evidence-based mentoring programs and to adopt mentoring mindsets in their everyday interactions with youth. Together, we can close the mentoring gap and help more young people reach their potential.

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About Mentor Canada

Mentor Canada is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. We are working together to build sector capacity and expand access to mentoring to empower every young person to reach their potential. Mapping the Mentoring Gap is one of 3 studies conducted by Mentor Canada as part of the State of Mentoring Research Initiative. Between January and March 2020, we surveyed 2,838 young adults aged 18-30 about their mentoring experiences growing up and their current lives. Learn more about Mentor Canada and our research at [MentoringCanada.ca](https://mentoringcanada.ca).



Dr. Véronique Church-Duplessis is Mentor Canada's director of research and evaluation. She leads the State of Mentoring Research Initiative which examines youth mentoring experiences, the prevalence and scope of mentoring programs, and Canadian adults' roles as mentors. Dr. Church-Duplessis is also a co-lead for the development of the Canadian Centre for Mentoring Research. Dr. Church-Duplessis works with researchers and practitioners to facilitate knowledge mobilization and create research-driven tools that support mentoring programs and services.





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