Empowering Youth in Canada: Navigating Career Prospects and Well-Being

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) Community of Practice (CoP) is a pan-Canadian network for skills and workforce development stakeholders across diverse sectors and industries to connect, share, and learn from each other. As part of the CoP, Research Impact Canada, in collaboration with FSC, hosts themed Peer Learning Groups to facilitate open discussions among peers on relevant topics.

On October 31, 2024, Research Impact Canada and the Future Skills Centre hosted a Peer Learning Group called **Empowering Canadian Youth: Navigating Career Prospects and Well-Being**. The goal of the peer learning group was to facilitate an open discussion among participants in an informal, safe, shared space.

In this session, we discussed how to close workforce disparities among youth by equipping them with practical skills in high-demand areas of work. Attendees shared the impact of entrepreneurial and resilience training to better prepare youth for higher education and career opportunities.

Participants were then invited to join small breakout groups for free-flowing moderated discussions, responding to the question:

> **How have you/your organization worked with employers and/or other partners to help empower young people and prepare them for the future of work?**

WHAT WE HEARD

Mentorship is vital to supporting youth. Having diverse mentors from different fields is critical to reflect the full diversity of youth coming into programs and respond to their needs effectively. Mentorship should be provided consistently during transitional periods (e.g., from high school to post-secondary education to first jobs). Some programs recruited mentors from a pool of alumni – encouraging them to return as mentors for future cohorts. This was critical to the success of these programs, especially in building trust amongst participants, giving leadership opportunities to alumni, and encouraging peer-to-peer mentorship.

Newcomer and minority-language youth require more support. Newcomer and minority-language youth face additional challenges with language barriers. Some programs grapple with supporting youth in their spoken language when they only offer programs in English and/or French. Among others, there were often language gaps in networking, leadership skill building, or presentation components of programs. Some service providers also shared that these youth often have difficulty finding information about community programs and rely on their families/friends as resources instead. To combat this, programs need to "meet where youth already are" for effective outreach and engagement, such as in churches, libraries, and community centres.

Start early. Empowering career prospects and well-being should begin as early as high school rather than waiting until they reach post-secondary education for work-integrated learning.

Resume training, career counselling, and networking with employers can be actively offered to youth while they are still in high school. This lays the foundation for long-term success and planning.

Find ways to compensate youth for gaining work experience/skills. While paid internships are ideal for gaining work experience, they may not always be feasible. Where possible, participants emphasized the importance of offering alternative forms of compensation. For instance, hours towards school credit or providing a micro-credential accreditation. Play-integrated opportunities with hobby clubs that build on leadership, entrepreneurship, creativity, and technical skills can also be another option to traditional, work-integrated learning for younger kids. In our discussion, internships and employers often had a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) focus. Work-integrated learning that expands beyond the STEM fields to also include the social sciences, humanities, and arts would reach more interests and provide important skills.

Non-traditional academic pathways should also be explored. Youth who do not plan to pursue academic pathways into colleges and universities should be supported with other options, such as trades/apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, and early entry into the workforce. Participants also suggested training programs in specific industries or one-year diplomas as other viable avenues to less traditional career pathways.

WHAT WE HEARD

How to demonstrate the success/impact of the programs. Measuring the impact of youth programs is important and was a focus for much of the discussion. Beyond numeric metrics indicating the intake of youth into the programs or graduation rates, capturing the qualitative perspectives, such as the hope, confidence, self-advocacy, and resiliency youth have gained, is equally important for measuring the success of the programs. Furthermore, communicating the impact of these success stories to target audiences – e.g. funders, employers, and policymakers – will be crucial to ensuring long-term support from them. Some participants suggested using LinkedIn as a platform to reach their intended audiences in a lower effort, low-contact way.

Continuous funding is critical for the long-term success of the programs. Funding from all sources will be critical to maintaining the youth programs long-term. In addition to government funding, funding from employers (e.g., banks) to support career prospects in the workforce will be crucial to supporting the bridging initiatives that connect employers and youth.

Wraparound supports are absolutely needed. Career placements for youth cannot exist in a vacuum. To help youth continuously show up and thrive in the workforce, wraparound support must be available to them, such as coaching and wellness programs and social-emotional skills training.

RESOURCE COMPILATION

Here are some of the resources shared by the participants during the PLG.

Impact Assessment
CSI Impact Dashboard: A free, simple, and centralized tool to help mission-driven organizations with their impact metrics. The dashboard is powered by the Centre for Social Innovation and is part of the Common Approach to Impact Measurement.

Common Approach to Impact Measurement: The Common Foundations provide guidance for how to measure impact. The five essential practices comprise a minimum standard of impact measurement. The Common Foundations can and should be used in collaboration with other tools and approaches.

Youth-Friendly Measures, Program Development, and Evaluation: YouthRex is an incredible knowledge hub filled with resources for organizations working with youth, including ways to measure youth programs and provides logic model templates and evaluation frameworks.

Communicating Impact
Introduction to Knowledge Mobilization: The purpose of this module is to introduce key concepts in knowledge mobilization (KMb) and demonstrate how they can be applied in different contexts to help create impact. This resource is intended to be an introductory guide for people who would like to familiarize themselves with basic concepts in knowledge mobilization and begin applying them to their work.

Infographic Design for Knowledge Mobilization: This module is designed for individuals who are interested in knowledge mobilization, regardless of their prior experience with graphic design. By the end of the module, you will have the skills needed to create effective infographics that can help communicate your results to a wider audience.

Storytelling for Impact: This module on storytelling for knowledge mobilization is designed to teach the importance of incorporating narratives into your research and how to effectively craft and deliver these stories. You will gain a general overview of ethical and inclusive considerations to account for prior to, during, and after collecting stories from diverse individuals.

Skills Training
Specialized Youth Entrepreneurship Curriculum: Youth Employment Services (YES) has created resources and tools for employment specialists who are looking to expand their programming and adapt their practices to better serve youth exploring entrepreneurship as a career option.

Tech Fleet: A community-driven nonprofit focused on creating fair access to tech careers for all. It removes barriers by allowing participants without a portfolio, resume, experience, and proper education to join and learn in-demand tech skills. Participants must be eighteen years of age or older to sign up.

Organizational Leadership and Capacity-Building
Innoweave: A nonprofit organization that offers practical tools for social innovation through several coaching streams. They help changemakers and social purpose organizations access innovation resources and provide coaching to enhance leadership capacity and organizational impact.

[State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth](#): This report from FSC explores how to improve the long-term career prospects of Canadian youth and their well-being while stimulating economic growth and fostering social inclusion. The report draws on several examples of FSC youth projects.

Engaging Youth

[The CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#): Indigenous data and research governance principles, such as CARE and OCAP, can be an excellent and practical framework for engaging with all groups, especially with youth. Reciprocity practices apply at every level of engagement, community-building, and resource sharing.

[Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT)](#): A non-profit, multi-stakeholder initiative focused on addressing the employment and employability challenges facing Québec's English-speaking community. Here is a [report](#) in French about the state of English-speaking youth in Quebec using 2021 census data.

[Bridging the school-to-work transition for youth: Insights and learnings](#): This learning bulletin from FSC provides case study examples to questions of how to increase participation in higher education, better prepare them for work, gain relevant work experience, integrate support, and encourage employers to hire and invest in youth.

Newcomer Youth

[Strengthening employment interventions for newcomer youth](#): This report by Blueprint highlights the unique challenges and opportunities newcomer youth face in the labour market and co-designed recommendations for what can be done to ensure all newcomer youth are able to realize their full potential.

[Towards A Better Understanding of NEET Youth in Ontario](#): NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) youth have been under-researched in Canada. This report by Blueprint helps to inform the development of policies and programs to serve this population.

[Hidden talent: Unlocking the employment potential of newcomer youth in the Toronto region](#): This report from the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), JVS Toronto and WoodGreen explores the employment experiences of newcomer youth in Toronto. It aims to highlight the strengths of this group and the employment barriers that its members face and provides recommendations on how to improve support for newcomer youth.

Mentorship

[Recommendations for Workplace Mentoring](#): This checklist by Mentor provides recommendations that support the planning, design, and implementation of high-quality workplace and workforce-focused mentoring programs for youth to integrate them into the workplace or get them engaged in a career pathway.

[The Business Case for Private-Sector Engagement in Quality Youth Mentoring](#): This report examines how top American businesses collaborate with the public and non-profit sectors to connect youth in their communities to transformative mentoring relationships and the value gained by the business and its employees. The report offers best practices for businesses looking to start a mentoring effort or enhance the results of an existing program, including examples from the companies interviewed.

[Mentoring Toolkit for Career Readiness Programs](#): The Career Readiness Toolkit provides instruments for implementing, monitoring, and supporting career readiness programs that have the opportunity to infuse mentoring practices within their organization. The focus is in connecting employees and staff with entry-level staff and youth workers.

Non-Profit Organizations that Work with/for Youth

[Kytos](#): Making games that teach. They share scientific knowledge through games that allow players to understand scientific concepts as a by-product of playing the games.

[Digital Moment](#): Advances digital literacy by focusing on creating impactful programs and experiences for youth and their communities on digital skills such as coding, algorithm and data literacy, and artificial intelligence. Here is a [brochure](#) about their Social Innovation Lab for youth.

[Future Black Female](#): Works to empower Black girls and women between the ages of 16 and 22 to take charge of their education, career paths, and social, political, and civic engagement. Here is a [brochure](#) about their programs.

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