

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Background

Youth Unemployment Statistics

Youth employment, or more specifically, youth unemployment is an important issue for Canadians. In 2012, the youth (ages 15-24) unemployment rate was 14.3%. On average, according to Statistics Canada, youth unemployment nationally tends to be double the unemployment rate of adults (in 2012, adult unemployment was at 6%). In 2014, immigrant youth had even higher rates of unemployment (17.2%) compared to Canadian-born youth, with those more recently landed having higher rates than those who have been here for an extended period of time (19.5% for immigrant youth here five years or less versus 15.8% for immigrant youth landed 10 years ago or more) (Statistics Canada, 2015a; Statistics Canada, 2015b; Bernard, 2013).

Youth unemployment is also linked to education levels. The lower one's level of education the longer one tends to be unemployed and the higher the rate of unemployment is amongst that group (Marshall, 2012). There is a push in the market towards credentialism and a job that may have required a high school diploma 20 years ago now requires a university degree. In 2014, only 23.8% of youth with less than a Grade 9 education were employed compared to 63.7% of high school graduates and 71.8% of youth with a bachelor's degree (Statistics Canada, 2015b).

Youth tend to experience more frequent periods of unemployment (for example, lower seniority means they are laid off first) but on the more positive side, youth tend to be unemployed for shorter periods of time than adults. Additionally, more than a quarter of the unemployed youth in 2012 were youth who had never worked before and therefore lacked experience necessary to obtain a job (Bernard, 2013).

HOMELESSNESS AND YOUTH UN/EMPLOYMENT

With unemployment a significant issue amongst housed youth, it is no surprise that it is also a challenge for youth experiencing homelessness. While some of the issues are the same (lack of experience, lack of education), there are also unique challenges to maintaining employment presented by the lack of a permanent address. Research conducted by Raising the Roof with “nearly 700 youth experiencing homelessness in three Canadian cities found that 73% were not employed. Similarly, in a study with 360 homeless youth in Toronto, only 15% identified paid employment as their primary source of income” (cited in Noble, 2012, p.8).

In her report for Raising the Roof, Amanda Noble (2012) shares a number of barriers to employment for homeless and at-risk youth including:

- » not having basic needs met
- » a lack of social support
- » low education and skill levels (or social capital)
- » trauma
- » mental health concerns
- » addictions
- » criminal justice involvement

Noble also stated that “some employers are hesitant to employ youth once they find out they are homeless, perhaps due to the fear that their lives are not stable enough to maintain employment, or as a result of the stereotypes associated with homeless and at-risk youth” (cited in Noble, 2012, p.14).



Some former Train for Trades youth on the job.

Employment Programs for Youth

The best employment training programs are effective in that they meet their objective of improving the employability of marginalized youth by providing them with the supports necessary to transition into the world of work. (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013, p. 250).

There are numerous training and employment programs for unemployed youth, some of which specialize in at-risk or homeless youth. However, traditional employment programs and methods may not work for marginalized youth. Creating a program that supports and responds to the needs of at-risk or homeless youth means addressing some of the systemic issues that affect their participation in a program.

Some considerations:

- » Connect employment training with housing stability. Youth should be supported to find or maintain housing, either independently, with the same agency or through a community partner. However, there should be no risk of eviction if the youth fails to complete the training program.
- » Provide start-up costs including transportation, work clothing and necessary supplies/equipment.
- » Support the youth to obtain necessary identification.
- » Provide life skills training to assist the youth with development of practical skills that will serve them after the program is complete. In particular, obtaining a bank account and developing a budget, creating a resume, interview skills etc. are key for a youth employment program.
- » Offer intensive case management supports to assist the youth in dealing with issues that arise. This includes allowing time off (with pay) to attend to urgent matters such as court dates, counselling appointments etc.
- » Figure out a plan to address issues of lateness and attendance. These present particular challenges for street-involved youth who may not have the same ability to adhere to a structured routine as housed youth.
- » Build in access to education – especially a GED – if possible. This will help improve outcomes after the program for the young person. Support a young person's goals for future educational attainment. This could include discussing educational programs, assisting with applications and applying for scholarships.
- » Create opportunities for job shadowing/mentorship so that youth can see what a program looks like in a real world application.
- » Consider a weekly or bi-weekly pay schedule rather than monthly. This serves two functions:
 - › Youth do not have to wait as long between pay cheques, especially for those items that are deemed essential for work.
 - › Money is spread out over the month rather than arriving in one large sum (this does make budgeting for rent important however).

Promising Practices for Community Agencies

The report on the “[Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit](#)” highlighted several promising practices that had emerged for community agencies in engaging with private sector partners. These promising practices are included here, but the full report should be read for a more complete understanding.

- » Be upfront and honest with employers about the barriers homeless and at-risk youth face and the possible challenges they may encounter during the work placement. Encourage youth to be transparent with their employer as well.
- » Try and make sure that youth have the practical tools needed to succeed at their job placement. For example, make sure they have access to a phone and arrange a work placement in close proximity to where they are living. One organization used a “buddy system”: youth were paired up with a buddy who lived near them, and if they needed to contact their employer but did not have access to a phone they would ask to use their buddy’s cell phone.
- » Arrange weekly meetings with the youth in either a group or one-on-one setting once they have started their job placement. Go over any challenges they are having and brainstorm strategies and solutions, such as better time management. Emphasize the importance of being accountable to their employer and being on time.
- » Meet face-to-face with employers to discuss the opportunity of becoming partners and providing employment opportunities to youth. Share with them challenges, best practices, and success stories.
- » Meet with the employer during the youths’ work placement to see how it is going and provide support. Help to manage challenges the youth may be facing.
- » Promote pre-employment programs broadly using various communication outlets. Many employers are very interested in giving back to their community but do not know that these types of programs exist.
- » Community agencies should think creatively when developing jobs for youth. If a youth is particularly talented artist look into placements at art galleries or in marketing.

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– Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013