

# Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit: **SUMMARY REPORT**

By Elizabeth Brown



**Raising the Roof** provides strong and effective national leadership on long-term solutions to homelessness through partnership and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, investment in local communities, and public education.

In November of 2012 Raising the Roof released the Report *[It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness](#)* and the accompanying [Online Toolkit](#) for employers and community agencies. This work was groundbreaking and provided front-line agencies across Canada with a comprehensive framework and practical tools to engage the private sector in finding jobs for vulnerable youth. Raising the Roof has continued the Youthworks Initiative through activating the Report and Toolkit in communities across Canada.

## Acknowledgements

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## EDITORIAL CREDITS

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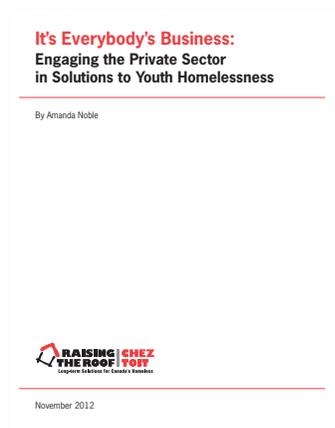
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## Background

**Youth homelessness is a complex social and economic issue facing Canadians.** Homeless youth range in age from 13-24 and live independently from parents or caregivers; they often lack the social support and resources needed to make a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood. Youth homelessness has been a pervasive problem in Canada since the 1980's. On a given night there are approximately 6,000 youth sleeping in shelters, hostels, or on the street (Gaetz, 2014). One of the major distinctions between youth homelessness and adult homelessness is that youth have generally left a home where they were dependents and relied upon relationships with their family and/or caregivers. Many homeless youth have not yet established the skills needed to live independently (Gaetz, 2014). There are many factors that need to be addressed in order to assist youth in remaining housed and living independently – one of these factors is employment. Youth need to be able to support themselves financially in order to be able to secure housing. Unfortunately, homeless and at-risk youth face many barriers to attaining and maintaining employment. These barriers include structural barriers (e.g. poverty, discrimination), housing and food insecurity, stigma around homelessness, and limited human capital (i.e. the skills a person can bring to a job) and social capital (i.e. interpersonal networks and connections) (Noble, 2012).

Employment programs that serve at-risk youth are offered at community agencies across Canada. These programs provide life-skills and job-skills training, and often provide youth with the opportunity to participate in a work placement. In November of 2012 Raising the Roof released the Report *It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness*. This Report, written by Amanda Noble, outlined the types of support youth need for immediate and long-term employment, the importance of employment programs for at-risk youth, and the role that the private sector can play in providing meaningful work opportunities to youth. Eight community agencies across Canada were selected as partners to participate in the research project. The work was informed by semi-structured interviews with program workers, youth, and members of the private sector.



For more information on the project please read the Report [\*It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness\*](#)

Out of this research came not only a comprehensive Report but also an **Online Toolkit for Agencies** that offer pre-employment programs to youth and an **Online Toolkit for Employers** in the private sector. For the first time ever, frontline service providers have practical tools to aid them in engaging the private sector to help find jobs for vulnerable and at-risk youth.





Raising the Roof developed the *Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit Project* to help to continue to put the Report and Toolkit into action in communities across Canada. Raising the Roof conducted a scan of the employment programs across Canada and chose four community agencies running innovative two-tiered employment programs:

1. **Choices for Youth** – Jumpstart Program, St. John's, NL
2. **Bois Urbain** – Pre-employment Program, Montreal, QC
3. **360°kids** – Base for Success Program, Markham, ON
4. **Quickdraw Animation Society** – Aboriginal Youth Animation Project, Calgary, AB

A variety of models of services exist for at-risk and street involved youth. These include pre-employment programs; pre-employment combined with work placement programs, social enterprises, umbrella organizations, broker organizations, odd-job/outreach programs, and mentorship programs. The program model that

is most relevant to Raising the Roof's work is the pre-employment/work placement model or a "Two-tier program model". Youth participate in 'pre-employment' training, which typically offers a combination of life and workplace skills followed by a work placement, usually in the private sector. All of the programs chosen offer pre-employment training that covers both hard and soft job skills, a variety of supports, and help obtaining and maintaining a work placement.

Raising the Roof worked with these four community agencies to engage local businesses to provide employment opportunities for homeless and at-risk youth with the goal of creating new employment opportunities for youth in these communities. As the four community agencies used the Report and Toolkit to engage the private sector, Raising the Roof documented the process, practices, and learning from their experiences and developed transferable models for other agencies to use.

In this Report we highlight what was learned during the activation as well as give guidelines for community agencies that want to create a pre-employment program that engages the private sector.

## Program Models



Choices for Youth

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**Choices for Youth**, located in St. John's Newfoundland, is dedicated to supporting growth and restoring hope in the lives of at-risk youth. They provide a wide range of services including housing, basic necessities, health and mental health supports, financial and legal support, and employment and education programming and referrals.

The *Jumpstart Pre-Employment Program* was created to give youth who are living street-entrenched lives the opportunity to engage in employment, art and education opportunities and overcome the many barriers in their lives, including poverty and homelessness.

The aim of the project is to provide wrap-around services to youth and provide them with the life skills and leadership opportunities that will give them the tools to succeed in finding and maintaining meaningful employment and educational options.

The hope is that through the process of stabilization, skill development, connecting with community services and potential employers, and personal goal setting, program participants will achieve greater accessibility to employment. Activities are designed to accommodate the different skill levels, interests, and lifestyle circumstances of each individual youth.

The new Jumpstart program allows for increased flexibility and a true understanding of “where youth are”, thereby increasing each individual's ability to achieve success within a two-tiered program model. This model allows Choices for Youth to connect with community employers in a supportive placement environment and gives youth hands on experience in both the food service industry and the arts sector.

The Jumpstart program runs three times per year and operates for 12 weeks, three days a week from 9:00-1:30 each day. A total of nine participants and two youth mentors participate in each program cycle. Some youth will remain in Tier 1 of the program in the Carter's Hill industrial kitchen throughout the twelve weeks while others will transition to Tier 2 of Jumpstart and move into placements with employers. Participants receive a daily stipend of \$20 per day and Mentors receive \$100.00 per week along with a \$1400.00 tuition voucher under the government-funded Student Work and Service Program or SWASP.

Program delivery goals include addressing employment barriers, developing employment skills, and establishing links to supportive services such as housing, employment, mental health and addiction services, and education. The program delivery is flexibly designed to meet group and individual needs and focuses on five major activity areas: life skills, stress management, cooking/art/education skills, youth leadership, and peer mentoring.



Established in 1995, in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville Urban district, located in north Montreal, Quebec, **Bois Urbain's** mission is to provide successful social integration to troubled youth, by providing at-risk youth with the technical skills needed to obtain a career in the trades, such as an assistant cabinetmaker or finisher, as well as the social and life skills needed to maintain employment and housing.

A strong leader in the field of woodworking and restoration, Bois Urbain combines productivity and social engagement in a dynamic and responsible setting. Bois Urbain is a nonprofit organization specializing in the manufacturing and restoration of furniture, kitchens and wardrobes, and the sale of new and used furniture, both residential and commercial. Profits obtained from the sale of furniture are reinvested in the mission of the business.

Funded by Emploi-Québec, Bois Urban offers more than 50 individuals annually the opportunity to gain work and life skills training and the chance to participate in meaningful work. The integration process is aimed at young, motivated 18 to 35 year olds who are uneducated, unemployed, and living in poverty. In addition, they must be without income support, social assistance, or unemployment insurance, and be disconnected from the labour market.

A true gateway to employment, Bois Urbain provides personalized and diversified services modulated according to the specific problems experienced by the participant. These problems can include drug and alcohol abuse, financial problems, instability in employment, little or no work experience, and unfamiliarity with the labour market.

Participating employees receive six months of technical training workshops in woodworking, furniture restoration, or handling customer service and socio-professional support anchored on the needs of participants. The supervision is provided by qualified trainers who meet the standards of the labour market. Added to this are personal and social training, job search support, dynamic job search strategies, and participation in a two-week internship at the end of the program.

Through direct workplace training and supervision the teams of employees learn the skills and knowledge needed for employment in the labour industry and discover potential opportunities for employment. Monitoring post-course is conducted with the participants for a period of two years to encourage the development of good attitudes and job retention.

The program provides many advantages to the participants including obtaining a semi-skilled trade, the acquisition of significant work experience, professional references, and proof of training and reading skills. In terms of results, 80% of graduates secure jobs at the end of the program or return to school.

**360°kids** (formerly Pathways for Children, Youth and Families of York Region) is located in Markham, Ontario and provides a range of support services and programming for children, youth, and families throughout York Region. They provide a variety of programs to isolated and vulnerable children and youth in the community to overcome adversity and crisis and move to a state of safety, stability and wellbeing. Children's services include early learning and development programs for children 0-6, as well as after school programs for kids 6-12 that focus on health and wellness. For youth 13-24 they provide youth residential housing, drop in centers, counseling services, street outreach, and youth employment programs.

Their innovative Base 4 Success employment program was developed to meet the needs of youth facing multiple barriers to finding work, getting back to school and/or reaching personal goals. The 12-week program provides a combination of in-class training and on the job placement experience. The Base 4 Success program addresses various barriers youth may face in securing and maintaining employment. They offer a holistic approach to job preparedness that meets the unique needs of each youth, whether that means helping youth secure Smart Serve certifications or providing essentials such as bus tickets, and clothing to attend job interviews.

The program is delivered at four different locations in York Region to provide greater access for youth: YMCA Richmond Hill, YMCA Markham, Job Skills Markham, and Dufferin Clark Community Centre in Vaughan. The program is staffed by a full-time job developer, a full-time facilitator, and a half-time coordinator. Funding for the program comes from Service Canada. Youth go through an intake and screening process to determine eligibility or referral to other community supports that best meet their needs. Youth between the ages of 18-30 are eligible, must have a valid social insurance number, be out of school, unemployed, and have not collected Employment Insurance in the past five years. They also must be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, or person who has been granted refugee status in Canada.

This stipend-based group program focuses on developing and enhancing employability skills for youth age 15-30. Through this program participants learn skills required to obtain and maintain employment. Throughout 10 weeks of job placement, participants will gain real work experience that they can leverage to secure future gainful employment.

Youth spend the first two weeks of the program in class full-time and 10 weeks in a three-day a week job placement and two days in class. The youth learn subjects such as career exploration, resume writing, interview techniques, job search skills, and financial planning, and gain various certifications (CPR/First Aid, Safe Food Handling, WHMIS). All of these classes are provided in a non-judgmental, empowering atmosphere. The job developer helps the youth to connect and build relationships with potential employers and is also a support and mentor to the youth throughout the program.

The long-term goal of the program is that youth learn essential pre-employment skills, as well as valuable job placement experience to be able to maintain employment and self-sufficiency and improved economic conditions.



## Quickdraw Animation Society, Aboriginal Youth Animation Project

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Quickdraw Animation Society is a non-profit, artist-run centre in Calgary, Alberta for people who love animation. They run screenings, workshops, courses, camps, and other events designed to ignite the public's passion for animation, including the GIRAF animation festival held each November. They also house Western Canada's largest animation library, and introductory through professional-level film and digital production equipment.

Their Aboriginal Youth Animation Project (AYAP) helps build the confidence and resiliency needed in order for youth to set and achieve their goals. The project consists of a 25-week employment-training program managed by Quickdraw in partnership with USAY and AFCC. During each program cycle 10 Aboriginal youth participants aged 18-24 are accepted.

The first part of the program is characterized as "Life Skills" which takes place over 12 weeks. This is paired with a "Simulated Work Experience" where the participants learn animation skills. Participants attend animation classes three days a week, and life skill classes two-days a week. At the end of these 12 weeks, the participants begin their work placements, which last another six weeks. The program connects with creative and cultural organizations in order to place youth into roles that make use of their creative skills.

The program is designed to enhance the employment, creative, personal, and social skill sets of the youth participants, and to enable storytelling through the creation of an animated movie. The films are based on issues relevant to the Aboriginal community. Throughout the project, participants are guided through the development of a personal action-plan, gaining access to cultural and life skills and preparing themselves for future employment. The youth also gain fluency in a variety of computer office and graphics programs including: Adobe Photoshop, Adobe AfterEffects and Toon Boom.

# Project Outcomes

The Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit Project was designed to pilot the Toolkit and Report in communities across Canada. The project was guided by measurable deliverables and milestones, all of the agencies involved, including Raising the Roof, completed work plans guided by the project goals.

## PROJECT GOALS

The overarching goals of this project were to assist community agencies in strategically engaging the private sector and promoting community collective action:

- Create more employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth in partner communities
- Increase private sector engagement – more employers participating in community employment programs
- Community plans that include a commitment to increasing employment opportunities for homeless/at-risk youth
- The development of a replicable pre-employment program model for other community agencies to reference and use to meet the needs of the at-risk and homeless youth they serve

The community agencies were asked to:

- Utilize the findings and recommendations of Raising the Roof's Report *It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness*
- Share Raising the Roof's Report and Online [Employer/Agency Toolkit](#) when engaging with potential employers
- Make use of Raising the Roof's professional relationships and networks
- Work with Raising the Roof to create a replicable program model for other community agencies to use
- Encourage local leaders to incorporate/reference Raising the Roof's Report and Online [Employer/Agency Toolkit](#) into community plans which promote collective action
- Share the Report and Online [Employer/Agency Toolkit](#) with their communities and networks

## MEASURABLE INDICATORS

### New Employers

All of the community agencies secured new employers/businesses to participate in their employment program during the project.

#### **360°kids:**

- Canadian Tire (Markham)
- Cassidy's Flowers and Gifts

#### **Choices for Youth:**

- Power Vac Belfor
- Love of Learning

#### **Quickdraw Animation Society:**

- Blue Quills First Nations College
- CJSW 90.9FM
- Urban Curvz Theatre
- Alberta Theatre Projects
- Artistavision Inc
- The Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth

**Bois Urbain:**

- Concertation-Femme
- Artitalia Group Inc.
- Couche-Tard (Montreal)
- Atelier de fabrication Rona
- Accès Travail
- Finition Beryo Bois
- Les Jardins Chartrand

It should be noted that while many agencies developed new private sector partnerships while participating in the project, the use of the Report and Toolkit is not the only variable that impacted these increases. For example, 360°kids changed their program model in 2013 to include one dedicated job developer. This allowed the employee to concentrate efforts on recruiting and communicating with employers, instead of balancing their time between case management with youth and developing relationship with prospective employers.

The agencies also developed relationships with new potential employers.

**360°kids:**

- Rexall Pharmacy (Newmarket)
- Pounce and Paws Pet food Stores (Woodbridge)
- K & B Tires & Mags

**Choices for Youth:**

- McDonald's (St. John's)
- Coffee Matters (St. John's)
- Ches's Fish and Chips (St. John's)

**Quickdraw Animation Society:**

- About Staffing
- The Imagine Native Film Festival
- The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary

**Bois Urbain:**

- Bois Déco
- Meubles Concordia Ltée
- Mobilier Philippe Dagenais

Agency	360°kids	Choices for Youth	Quickdraw Animation	Bois Urbain
# of new employers	2	2	6	7
# of new potential employers	3	3	6	3

## Increase in Job Opportunities

All of the agencies developed new relationships with private sector employers during the project, and we are hopeful that these relationships will continue to result in an increase in job opportunities for youth in these local communities. Quickdraw Animation Society was established in 2012 and this was their first year providing a youth employment programs, they started to collect these outcomes in 2013. Choices for Youth works with particularly vulnerable youth who are not always ready to participate in employment. While in 2013-2014 17 of the 29 youth who went through the Jumpstart program were able to secure employment 16 youth were connected to educational opportunities and two began post secondary education.

Agency	360°kids	Choices for Youth	Quickdraw Animation	Bois Urbain
Job Opportunities in 2012-2013	56	6	n/a	45
Job Opportunities in 2013-2014	56	17	9	43

## Community Engagement

The four community agency partners were asked to work on engaging their communities by meeting with community leaders, sharing the Toolkit and Report with them, and asking them to incorporate the Toolkit and Report into relevant community plans. Agencies were able to meet with a total of 14 community leaders in person.

**Choices for Youth** met with a city counselor and a government official at the provincial level.

**360°kids** shared the Report with:

- Terry Harney, Ontario's Salvation Army community and family services coordinator
- Richmond Hill Counsellor, Vito Spatafora
- Brian Chamberlain, a Richmond Hill Liberal candidate nominee

**Quickdraw Animation Society** met with several First Nations Band Leaders, which is especially relevant as they work primarily with Aboriginal youth.

**Bois Urbain** met with two local MPs, as well as:

- Agnès Maltais, Minister of Social Development, Solidarity and Vocational Training and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women
- Immigration Minister and MP of Ahuntsic, Diane de Courcy

Agency	360°kids	Choices for Youth	Quickdraw Animation	Bois Urbain
Number of meetings with community leaders	3	2	5	4

## Key Findings

**Two-tiered pre-employment programs that include supports, skills training, and a supervised work placement are an effective model for teaching at-risk youth the skills needed for employment and self sufficiency, which in turn will assist youth in transitioning into independent living.** Engaging the private sector in this process allows for increased opportunities for youth and community agencies. The four community partner agencies utilized the Report and Toolkit and shared these resources with employers and community agencies in their networks. Both community agencies and employers reported finding the Report and Toolkit engaging and informative. The only criticism of the Toolkit was the format – several agencies and employers reported that they found the Online Toolkit hard to use and as a result Raising the Roof has created a [printable PDF version of the Toolkit](#) for people to download.

The community partner agencies reported that several aspects of the Report were particularly useful to them; these include being up front and honest about work placement challenges and the barriers that youth face. One program worker commented:

*In the past we have found employers to be upset when there are issues with the youth they have chosen to employ. From the report, we have learned that being upfront and honest is critical in helping the youth maintain their employment and be successful.*

All of the agencies also commented that they found lots of follow-up and regular face-to-face meetings with the employers were very helpful in ensuring successful work placements for their youth.

*When meeting face to face with the potential work placement employers I brought copies of the report summary booklet and referred to specific parts to get the employer to read through it later so they have a clear understanding of who the youth are and the types of challenges homeless youth face.*

### Challenges – Barriers to Employment Success

Several program workers commented that while the Toolkit and Report gave them valuable tools to engage the private sector and secure jobs for the youth in their programs, they occasionally encountered difficulties with the youth during the work placement. Many of the youth served at both the Jumpstart program at Choices for Youth and the Aboriginal Youth Animation Project at Quickdraw Animation Society face challenges including mental health problems, addictions, developmental disabilities, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Some youth are also unstably housed and are experiencing family difficulties. Youth with complex needs had more difficulty mastering job skills, communicating effectively with employers and program workers, and being on time for work.

Financial barriers also contributed to youth facing challenges in completing the employment program. A program worker commented that one of the youth in her employment program often would not be able to attend work because they did not have money to buy gas for their car and couldn't call their employer because they did not have minutes on their cell phone. This resulted in the breakdown of the work placement.

Youth with significant challenges, such as an FASD diagnosis may benefit from a program that has a higher level of supports such as the Jumpstart Program at Choices for Youth. It is important that youth get placed in a program that has the right amount of supports for them. Also – there are many mitigation strategies that can be used to ensure that both youth and employers get the most out of the work placement. These strategies will be discussed below.

However, it is important to note that structural barriers and individual factors that influence youth homelessness in Canada cannot be addressed with employment programs alone. Structural barriers such as high rates of unemployment and underemployment and the lack of affordable housing in Canada need to be addressed. In addition, there are significant individual and relational factors influencing youth homelessness such as abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, and mental health and addiction issues in both youth and their families. A strategic, integrated response to youth homelessness that addresses the structural barriers, individual factors, and systems failures (Gaetz, 2014) must be implemented in order to find a lasting solution to this complex issue.

## Promising Practices for Community Agencies

### **Several promising practices emerged out of the Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit**

**Project.** While many of these were outlined in the initial Report these are practices that the community agencies found to be particularly useful when engaging the private sector in solutions to youth homelessness:

- 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 didn’t 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 placements. 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.

# Youth Pre-Employment Program Model

## PROGRAM OUTLINE

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### Two-tiered program model

- Tier 1 = Job and life skills training
- Tier 2 = Job placement and support

### Program length: 16 = weeks

- 10 weeks of in class training and one-to-one support, 4 days a week
- 6 weeks of job placement, 3 days a week + 1 day training/support

### Program runs 3 x per year: 10 youth per cycle

### Courses offered – Job Skills

- Resume writing & interviewing
- Career exploration
- Certificate Training (e.g. CRP/First Aid, WHMIS)
- Job Skills (e.g. cooking, sales, technology)

### Courses offered – Life Skills

- Budgeting
- Time management
- Educational Programming
- Stress Management

### One-to-one Counseling and Case Management

- Connection to services such as housing, legal assistance, education
- Mental health and addictions assessment and referral
- Action-plan, goal development
- Weekly support/counseling through entire program
- Accompaniment to legal and medical appointments
- Help obtaining identification, health card etc.

### Job Development

- Job developer helps youth find placement and build relationships with employers
- Assistance with application for educational programming

## STAFFING AND RESOURCES

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### Staffing

- 1 full time Program Manager
- 1 full time facilitator
- 1 part time job developer
- 1 part time counselor/case manager

### Space

- 1 large classroom
- 2 offices
- Access to kitchen and bathrooms
- Computer lab
- Reception

\$20 per day stipend for youth + transit tickets

Breakfast and lunch provided for youth on in class days

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

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- Full time employment, further job training or return to school
- Increased connection to critical social services such as housing, counseling, health care, and legal services
- Development of hard and soft job skills
- Lessened barriers to employment (e.g. mental health and legal issues)
- Development of life skills
- Increased opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency
- Improvement in attitude and behavior

## POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

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- Poor youth retention and follow through
- Staff turn-over/ burn out
- Funding
- Barriers youth face (e.g. mental health issues, financial issues, legal issues)

## Conclusion

**Youth employment is a vital component to addressing youth homelessness.** Youth need to be able to secure and maintain employment in order to support themselves financially and live independently. Youth employment programs help make this possible but in order for these programs to function optimally youth should have the opportunity to participate in a hands-on work placement. Strategically engaging the private sector in solutions to youth homelessness is an important part of creating successful, two-way employment partnerships that are sustainable and mutually beneficial.

During this community activation project many promising practices re-emerged including being transparent with employers about the barriers youth face and providing varying degrees of support to youth depending on their individual needs. While pre-employment programs present a wonderful opportunity to youth and employers, some youth will struggle due to financial, logistical, and mental health challenges. This is why pre-employment programs must be part of an integrated response to youth homelessness.

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