

Supporting Young People in Employment:

An Evaluation of the
HireUp Platform

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Prepared for: HireUp

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Hub Solutions is a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Income generated from Hub Solutions fee-for-service work is reinvested into the COH to support research, innovation, policy recommendations and knowledge mobilization.



Executive Summary

WHAT IS HIREUP?

HireUp is an online employment platform designed to assist young people who face barriers in obtaining employment. It is based on three principles:

1. **Find:** discover untapped talent through partnerships with Youth Serving Organizations (YSOs) across Canada
2. **Hire:** job seekers can apply to opportunities directly online
3. **Retain:** job seekers receive up to six months of wrap around supports from partnered community agencies to ensure success in their job

CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

HireUp received funding from the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (ISH) grant administered by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada. As part of this grant, funding was dedicated to a third-party evaluator to assess the development and outcomes of the program. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded in The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, served as the third-party evaluator and partnered with HireUp to develop a fulsome understanding of their program.

The evaluation had four main goals:

1. To establish the program theory and develop a program logic model;
2. To determine the effectiveness of the program in providing employment opportunities for youth who have experienced homelessness;
3. To assess the strengths of HireUp;
4. To assess areas of improvement for HireUp.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Our methodology included six main components:

1. Refinement of the program logic model
2. Development of an outcomes measurement framework
3. Key informant interviews with two HireUp staff members
4. Interviews with 9 young people who have accessed HireUp
5. Surveys with 32 young people who have accessed HireUp
6. Secondary data analysis of 11 interviews with representatives from YSOs that have partnered with HireUp

KEY FINDINGS

How has HireUp grown since its launch?

- In its first year, 76 job applications were submitted via HireUp, with an average of 6.3 applications per month. Over the past three months alone (May 2018 to August 2018), there have been 305 submitted job applications.
- Currently, there are 1372 active users on HireUp.
- The number of jobs posted on HireUp has increased, as there are over 300 active job posts that reflect 20 different employment sectors (e.g. retail, restaurant, banks, general labour, etc.).

What barriers are young people experiencing in seeking and/or maintaining employment?

- Young people commonly listed a lack of education and experience as major barriers to employment. Other barriers centered on not having Canadian job experience, language challenges, mental health challenges, and housing insecurity. YSO participants noted that stigma related to transgender and non-conforming gender identities also served as a barrier.

What types of jobs are young people looking for?

- Young people shared that they were often looking for retail and customer service positions, with jobs in the technology sector also popular. The participants were looking for a mix of part-time and full-time employment options.

Is HireUp offering employment opportunities that are meeting young people's needs?

- Young people had generally positive opinions on the number and breadth of employment opportunities listed on HireUp. When asked how satisfied they were with the jobs available on HireUp, 55.2 percent of survey respondents stated they were extremely or somewhat satisfied, 27.6 percent of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 17.2 percent were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied.

Were participants able to attain employment through the HireUp platform?

- All of the interviewees and close to 88 percent of survey respondents reported applying to at least one job through the HireUp platform. Of the four interview participants who were currently employed, one was hired through HireUp and two were unsure. Of the 15 survey participants who were currently employed, two young people (13.3%) reported that they received their current job by applying through HireUp.

What are the strengths of HireUp?

The participants generally had very positive feedback on the features and usability of the platform. The majority of participants found the website easy to use and were relatively happy with the job opportunities available. Two themes stood out when participants spoke of the strengths of HireUp: (1) Job opportunities were tailored to young people; and (2) HireUp is a reputable website.

What are opportunities for improvement?

- Along with the positive feedback about HireUp, interviewees shared several suggestions for improvements. These included: (1) Real-time supports on the website; (2) Focused keyword searches; (3) Receiving a confirmation from employers once an application has been reviewed; (4) Greater details on the specifics of employment opportunities; (5) Increased outreach; and (6) Pre- and post-employment supports.
- YSO respondents shared similar improvement opportunities, particularly around supports to attain and maintain employment. Other areas for improvement included the development of a mobile app and including feedback from young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations focus on tangible actions HireUp can take to sustain and improve its platform, as well as recommendations for employers. They are focused on five main areas: (1) Data monitoring and feedback; (2) Platform content and functioning; (3) Breadth of employers and employment opportunities; (4) Partnership development; and (5) Employer opportunities.

Data Monitoring and Feedback

1. Enhance the process of tracking employment outcomes of young people.
2. Acquire regular feedback from young people, YSOs, and employers.
3. Continue research and evaluation activities to monitor the effectiveness and operations of the HireUp platform.

Platform Content and Functioning

4. Enhance the number of employment resources on HireUp's website, particularly focused on pre- and post-employment supports.
5. Provide assistance to young people while they use the platform.
6. Increase the capacity of HireUp to include accounts for YSOs.

Breadth of Employers and Employment Opportunities

7. Continue expanding the number of employers and types of employment opportunities.

Partnership Development

8. Continue building partnerships with YSOs who work with young people who experience homelessness. Efforts should be made to enhance relationships with agencies that work with populations such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, veterans, and young people with mental health and substance use challenges.

Employer Opportunities

9. Employers should develop mentorship programs to support young people in their employment.
10. Employers should engage in open communication with YSOs in identifying and meeting the young person's employment support needs.
11. Employers should expand training opportunities to include anti-oppression and inclusion workshops to all staff to eliminate barriers (i.e. discrimination) that prevent young people from seeking and maintaining employment.

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Section 1:

Background on HireUp

WHAT IS HIREUP?

HireUp is an online employment platform designed to assist young people who face barriers in obtaining employment. HireUp works closely with employers to reduce eligibility requirements (i.e. driver's license, certification) by ensuring that requests are realistically aligned with what the actual requirements of the job are. HireUp's model is based on three principles:



There are minimal eligibility requirements to join HireUp. Young people must be connected to a Youth Serving Organization (YSO) and experience a barrier to employment (i.e., mental health challenges, disabilities, unfair discrimination, past criminal activity).

HOW HAS HIREUP GROWN?

As part of its original vision, the developers of HireUp recognized that many YSOs working with young people experiencing homelessness were trying to locate meaningful employment opportunities for their clients. However, organizations found it difficult to find employers who were willing to hire young people with lived experience of homelessness. At the same time, HireUp staff recognized that there were many employers who, out of social responsibility, wanted to hire young people with lived experience of homelessness, but did not have the connections to do so. Thus, HireUp emerged as a tool to connect these three groups: (1) young people with lived experience of homelessness; (2) YSOs; and (3) employers.

HireUp's target population has now expanded to include young people from underrepresented populations who face employment barriers. These populations include LGBTQ+ individuals, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, veterans, individuals from low socioeconomic status, and individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. The reason for this shift was positive - companies' demand for candidates often exceeded the number of HireUp participants. In response to this imbalance in supply and demand, HireUp decided to broaden their scope to include individuals with other substantial barriers outside of homelessness.

The growth of HireUp has been substantial since its launch. The number of young people using the platform and the number of job applications submitted have seen staggering increases. For example, in its first year, 76 job applications were submitted via HireUp, with an average of 6.3 applications per month. Over the past three months alone (May 2018 to August 2018), there have been 305 job applications submitted via HireUp. Similarly, in its first year, HireUp had just over 100 young people signed up for the program. Currently, there are 1372 active users on HireUp. The number of jobs on HireUp has also increased, as there are over 300 active job posts that reflect 20 different employment sectors (e.g. retail, restaurant, banks, general labour, etc.).

Section 2:

Context of Evaluation

HireUp received funding from the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (ISH) grant administered by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada. As part of this grant, funding was dedicated to a third-party evaluator to assess the development and outcomes of the program. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, served as the third-party evaluator and partnered with HireUp to develop a fulsome understanding of their program.

As previously stated, HireUp's mandate has changed over time to include young people experiencing multiple barriers to employment. At the beginning of this evaluation, HireUp was focused on providing employment opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness. During the midpoint of the evaluation, the

expansion of the mandate occurred. The evaluation team decided to retain the focus of the evaluation on young people who experience homelessness, as this was the original intention of the evaluation plan. However, we have incorporated an intersectional lens throughout our analysis, one that recognizes the multiple identities of young people who are accessing the HireUp platform.

The evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. What is the program theory of HireUp?
2. What is the effectiveness of HireUp in providing employment opportunities for young people who have experienced, or at risk of, homelessness?
3. What are the strengths of HireUp?
4. How can HireUp be improved?

This document provides the key learnings of the evaluation. It begins with a brief literature review on youth employment, followed by a description of the evaluation methods, and a presentation of the results. An interpretation of the results and recommendations stemming from these results conclude the document.

Section 3:

Literature Review

This section presents a brief, high-level overview of the literature on youth employment, with a focus on young people who experience homelessness. We begin by discussing some key factors related to youth homelessness, followed by a focused review of factors that may impact employment opportunities for young people who experience homelessness.

CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness refers to young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe, or consistent residence (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016).

The drivers of homelessness, regardless of age, generally follow three main pillars: 1) structural; 2) systemic; and 3) individual and relational (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013).

- **Structural factors** occur at the societal level and include problems that a young person, and their family, cannot control. This includes economic and social conditions such as poverty, a lack of affordable housing, inadequate education, and unemployment.
- **Systemic factors** include failures of systems of care to support young people and prevent them from entering into homelessness. This includes poor discharge planning from child protection services, hospitals, and the criminal justice system, resulting in young people exiting these systems into homelessness.
- **Individual and relational factors** are particularly poignant for young people, as the breakdown of family and/or family conflict can be main drivers of their homelessness. Often times, young people are forced to leave their homes due to unsafe, abusive, and/or neglectful environments.

Employment challenges experienced by young people and their families therefore act as one of the structural drivers behind youth homelessness; however, it is important to recognize that structural, systemic, and individual and relational factors all interact with one another and there is no one singular cause of homelessness.

The remaining sections of this literature review focus on youth employment specifically, with an emphasis on the experiences of young people who have lived experience of homelessness.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN CANADA

The unemployment rate among young people in Canada has historically been higher than that of adults. For example, in May 2018 the unemployment rate among young people in Canada was 11.1% (Statistics Canada, 2018a). In contrast, the general unemployment rate in Canada was 5.8%. Several reasons for this difference exist, including young people being more likely to be laid off by employers (due to a lack of seniority) and more likely to return to school to further their education (Bernard, 2015). Young people are also more likely to experience shorter periods of employment compared to adults (Bernard, 2015).

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

Several studies have examined barriers to employment among young people who experience homelessness. **These barriers include:**

- Mental health challenges (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Maccio & Pollio, 2012; Lenz-Rashid, 2006)
- Having a longer period of street homelessness (Ferguson et al., 2012)
- Residing in an emergency shelter/street homeless/detention facility/unstable housing (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2012; Karabanow, Hughes, Ticknor, Kidd, & Patterson, 2010)
- Engaging in substance use (Ferguson et al., 2012)
- Having a lack of self-discipline and underdeveloped communication skills (Ferguson et al., 2012)
- A high level of mobility, resulting in unfamiliarity with the local job market, job searching, hiring procedures, and local transportation systems (Ferguson et al., 2012; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002)
- Fear of discrimination in the workforce or by potential employers for mental health conditions (Ferguson et al., 2012) or gender, sexual orientation, race, and/or immigration status (The Home Depot Canada Foundation & Impakt Corporation, 2015)
- Prior criminal records and revocation of personal identification cards and drivers' licenses (Ferguson et al., 2012)
- Difficulty to adopt to a 'structured' lifestyle (Ferguson et al., 2012)

These barriers to employment lead to few employment opportunities available to young people who experience homelessness (Foster, 2012). For those who are able to attain employment, these jobs are often low-wage and temporary and/or part-time. This is challenging, as young people are forced into employment conditions that may not be suitable.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Given the challenges that young people who experience homelessness can face, many youth-serving organizations have developed employment programs. Skills and resources provided in these programs include:

- Job search and maintenance
- Fostering a passion for employment
- How to act in a professional manner
- Tutoring
- GED classes
- Secondary and post-secondary enrolment information and support (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014)
- Incorporating mentorships into the program/service (Youth Employment Task Force, 2017)

Surprisingly, there is a general lack of information available on the factors associated with young people actually accessing employment programs. However, research does show that young people are less likely to participate in employment programs the longer they experience homelessness (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014).

EMPLOYERS ROLE IN YOUNG PEOPLE OBTAINING AND SUSTAINING EMPLOYMENT

A major part of addressing the challenges faced by young people experiencing homelessness in obtaining employment is meaningfully engaging with employers. The literature demonstrates several ways that this engagement can be facilitated. **These include:**

- Engaging in events that allow for interactions among YSOs, young people, and employers (The Home Depot Canada Foundation & Impakt Corporation, 2015).
- Understanding the barriers and challenges that young people experiencing homelessness face and assist to break the stigma associated with the lack of employability of the population (The Home Depot Canada Foundation & Impakt Corporation, 2015).
- Offering more apprenticeships and internships and positions tailored to the strengths of youth, which are paid (United Way, 2017).
- Addressing Human Resource barriers to employment, including changing the level of education required for employment opportunities, as well as the length and type of experience required for entry-level positions (United Way, 2017).

Section 4:

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation had four main goals:

1. To establish the program theory and develop a program logic model;
2. To determine the effectiveness of the program in providing employment opportunities for youth who have experienced homelessness;
3. To assess the strengths of HireUp;
4. To assess areas of improvement for HireUp.

The methods to achieve these goals are presented below.

LOGIC MODEL REFINEMENT

In order to develop the program theory, several steps were taken. First, a rapid review of the literature on employment barriers faced by young with lived experience of homelessness face was completed. This was followed by a review of program documentation, including a previously developed theory of change created by HireUp. This document was instrumental in the development of a more focused program logic model. Once the logic model was created, two rounds of verification with the CEO and Chief Research Officer of HireUp took place.

OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

In consultation with HireUp staff, an outcome measurement strategy was developed to monitor the impact of HireUp. **The outcome measurement strategy focused on four domains:**

1. Demographics
2. Housing
3. Employment
4. Well-being

These domains all mapped onto the outcomes outlined within the program logic model.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

As HireUp is a new and evolving platform, it has undergone several structural changes. In order to fully capture the changes HireUp has made, qualitative interviews were conducted with two HireUp staff: (1) the CEO; and (2) the Chief Research Officer. The semi-structured interviews focused on the purpose of HireUp, the changes it has undergone, and HireUp's involvement with YSOs and employers.

INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Qualitative interviews were conducted over the phone with young people who have accessed the latest iteration of the HireUp platform. Young people were recruited through a brief online survey administered by HireUp. The survey asked young people of their use of the HireUp platform and their employment status, as well as if they would be interested in participating in an interview to discuss their experiences using HireUp. The Hub Solutions evaluation team contacted interested respondents over a two-month period (May-June). The list of potential participants was sorted by geographic location and the frequency of a young person's employment. This sampling strategy was used to ensure that young people from different organizations and with different employment histories were being interviewed, including young people who listed being employed and those who did not. Young people were contacted at least three times to set up an interview time, via email or the phone.

Interviews were semi-structured. At the outset of the interview, demographic information was collected from each participant. Participants were compensated \$20.

SURVEYS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Online surveys were distributed to young people who were currently accessing the HireUp platform. An email invitation was sent to young people via HireUp staff. The short survey assessed participants' experiences accessing HireUp, their satisfaction with HireUp, and suggestions for improvements. Participants were compensated with a \$10 Tim Horton's gift card.

YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATION INTERVIEWS

HireUp staff conducted the interviews with YSOs. The recorded interviews were then distributed to the evaluation team. These interviews were semi-structured and conducted over the phone with YSO representatives. Interviews were reviewed and analysed based on the main questions and goals of this evaluation.

EMPLOYER SURVEYS

In our original evaluation plan, we intended on conducting qualitative interviews with employers. Due to timelines and difficulties with contacting employers, this methodology was changed to an online survey. HireUp staff distributed the survey link. The survey questions focused on employers' experiences and satisfaction with being a part of the program. Due to the small number of respondents (n=4), the results are not reported.

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative Data Analysis

All interview recordings were transcribed. The qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach. The evaluation team started by independently coding the same transcript. After, the evaluation team met to compare and contrast their codes to ensure codes matched and to check-in to see if there were any differences. Where different codes emerged, a discussion took place for each team member to explain their codes and talk through the differences until a consensus was achieved. Following this process, each team member was assigned different transcripts to code.

Each transcript was coded line-by-line, and in the language of each participant (in vivo coding). Following the completion of coding, the coded data was analyzed for differences and similarities across transcripts. From this process, themes developed and were used to organize the data.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Section 4: Logic Model

WHY?: Most youth who experience homelessness face barriers to accessing employment as there is often a disconnect between the private job sectors, YSOs, and youth looking for work.

GOALS: To help youth with lived experience of homelessness to obtain meaningful employment; to provide a convenient and dedicated way for employers to hire youth who have experienced homelessness; to prevent youth homelessness

PROGRAM ELIBILITY: Youth at risk of and/or with lived experience of homelessness. Youth who are attending credited employment programs through YSOs.

INPUTS

Funding

- Personnel and supplies

Staff

- Web developer
- Project manager
- Corporate relationship developer
- Researcher
- Youth engagement officer

Partnerships

- Corporations /Employers
- YSOs

Platform

- Online platform

ACTIVITIES

Data

- Data driven decision-making

Website and Database

- Development & maintenance of online platform & database
- Development & maintenance of mobile app

Assessment

- Youth complete intake forms online/through YSOs
- Determine youth's eligibility
- Matching youth to appropriate supports (post-employment)
- Coordinate & monitor support

Partnerships with YSOs

- Development & maintenance of relationships with YSOs

Partnerships with PSCs

- Development & maintenance of relationships with YSOs

OUTPUTS

Youth

- # of youth users
- # of youth assessed & completed intake assessments
- # of jobs youth applied to
- # of job interviews
- # of youth successful in obtaining employment

Partnerships with YSOs

- # of YSO partnerships
- # of youth referred/connected
- # of engaged YSO partnerships

Partnerships with PSCs

- # of PSC partnerships
- # of engaged PSC partnerships

Website and Database

- # of job postings
- # of visits on site
- # of jobs applied to
- # of jobs received
- # of app downloads
- # of algorithms

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Youth

- Access to employment opportunities for at-risk youth
- Feeling secure and satisfied with employment
- Connected to coordinated supports

YSOs

- Connecting youth to more employment opportunities
- Greater success from internal employment programs

PSCs

- Providing more meaningful employment to youth

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Youth

- Greater stability in employment
- Greater stability in housing
- A sustainable livelihood (Improvement in financial, personal, physical, human, and social domains)
- Improvement in youth well-being

YSOs

- Relationships developed with PSCs
- Higher success rates of employment programs
- Increased organizational capacity & efficiency in employment programs
- Optimize resource allocation through the HireUp app

PSCs

- Relationships developed with YSOs and youth
- Improved socio-economic diversity

Systemic

- Reduction in youth poverty
- Increased economic mobility

Section 5:

Outcome Measurement Strategy

OUTCOME	INDICATOR
<p>Youth have opportunities for employment</p> <p>Youth feel secure in their employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth who access HireUp (HU) • Length of time youth stay in their employment • Number of youth who agree/strongly agree that they feel their job is secure
<p>Youth are satisfied with employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth who are satisfied with their employment, including pay and benefits • Number of youth who are satisfied with intrinsic job rewards (e.g., job is interesting and challenging, using skills and abilities, learning new things, recognition for doing a good job)Number of youth who are satisfied with their housing
<p>Youth who have lived experience of homelessness obtain stable, long-term employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth who obtain employment • Increase in youths' income • Number of youth who are satisfied with their housing

OUTCOME	INDICATOR
Providing more meaningful employment to youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of PSCs becoming HU employers • Number of employment opportunities offered through HU • Number of employment opportunities that are exclusive to HU • Length of time PSCs remain HU employers/return rate of advertising jobs on HU • Increased understanding/recognition of the employment potential of youth experiencing homelessness/social and business value of hiring individuals with multiple barriers to employment
Relationships developed with YSOs and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSCs report satisfaction with youth recruited through HU • PSCs and YSOs report increased collaboration
Connecting youth to more employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of YSO placement rates from their employment programs
Greater success of internal employment programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YSO staff satisfied with HU (positive experience, complimented their own employment program, helped youth get jobs, connected to employers in their area interested in hiring the youth they work with) • Number of employers each YSO is connected to through HU

Section 6:

Results

INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE & YSO INTERVIEWS

We begin this section with a description of the young people we spoke with and surveyed, followed by the key findings that emerged from the interviews and surveys with young people and interviews with representatives from the YSOs.

WHO DID WE SPEAK WITH?

Interviews with Young People

Below we present the key demographic characteristics of the nine young people who participated in an interview. The interview participants were in their early-20s and there was a relatively equal split of men and women. The majority of participants were single and did not have children. The participants were racially diverse and two-thirds were not born in Canada. The majority of participants were currently living with family or friends and slightly more than half had an experience of homelessness. A little less than half of the participants were currently working, with the remaining participants receiving government assistance.

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES.

	Mean (SD) or %	Min	Max
Age	23.28 (4.44)	17	27
Gender			
Female	44.4%		
Male	55.6%		
Relationship Status (yes)	22.2%		
Number of dependents (yes)	0.0%		
Race/Ethnicity			
African Canadian/Black	44.4%		
Caucasian/White	22.2%		
Hispanic	11.1%		
South Asian	11.1%		
Mixed Ethnicity	11.1%		
Born in Canada (yes)	33.3%		
Experience of Homelessness			
Yes	44.4%		
No	55.6%		
Current Housing			
Own apartment	22.2%		
Living with family/partner	55.6%		
Transitional housing/ Emergency shelter	22.2%		
Source of Income			
Employment	44.4%		
Gov't assistance (OW, ODSP, OSAP)	44.4%		
Did not answer	11.1%		
Currently Employed			
Yes	44.4%		
No	44.4%		
Did not answer	11.1%		

Surveys

In total, 39 young people accessed the survey, 30 of whom fully completed the survey and two who completed the majority of the survey (i.e., completed at least 72 percent of the survey). There were seven respondents who completed less than 10 percent of the survey and were therefore excluded from the results. Below we present the key demographic characteristics of the sample.

The demographics closely mirror that of the interview participants. The survey participants were in their early-20s, there was a relatively equal split of men and women, and the majority were single and did not have children. The participants were racially diverse and half were not born in Canada. The majority of participants were either living alone or with their family or a partner and one-fifth of participants had an experience of homelessness. Approximately 38 percent of the participants were currently employed, close to one-third were unemployed, and the remainder were receiving government assistance.

TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.

	Mean or %	Min	Max
Age	23 (SD 5.38)	16	30
Gender			
Female/Woman	50.0%		
Male/Man	46.9%		
Trans Female/Trans Woman	3.1%		
Has a partner (yes)	25.0%		
Has children (yes)	6.3%		
Race/Ethnicity			
Asian/Southeast Asian/ East Asian/Indian	35.5%		
Caucasian/White	29.0%		
African Canadian/Black	16.1%		
Indigenous	3.2%		
Other	16.2%		
Born in Canada (yes)	50.0%		
Year Moved to Canada	n/a	1990	2018
Experience of Homelessness			
No	68.8%		
Yes	21.9%		
Prefer not to say	9.4%		
Current Housing			
Own apartment	44.8%		
Living with family/partner	51.7%		
Transitional housing/ Emergency shelter	3.4%		
Source of Income			
Employment	37.5%		
None	34.4%		
Government Assistance	18.8%		
Employment & Government Assistance	6.3%		

Given the importance of education, we also asked survey respondents of their educational backgrounds. As demonstrated in the table below, more than half of the participants were either currently enrolled in or had fully or partially completed college or university.

TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.

	%
Currently enrolled in any education or training programs	59.4%
High School	52.6%
College/University	36.9%
Other (English)	10.5%
Not currently enrolled in education or training programs	40.6%
Graduated High School	8.33%
Some College/University	16.67%
Graduated College/University	75.00%

Youth-Serving Organizations (YSOs)

HireUp staff conducted interviews with several of their YSO partners. In total 11 interviews were completed, with participants situated in Alberta and Ontario.

Key Findings

from the Interviewees and Surveys

We begin this section by presenting the barriers to employment that young people were facing. We follow this by discussing the impact of HireUp in helping young people seek out and attain employment. We finish by discussing the strengths of HireUp and opportunities for improvement.

WHAT BARRIERS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING IN SEEKING AND/OR MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT?

Interviews with Young People

We asked young people of barriers they were encountering in seeking and/or maintaining employment. As expected, participants commonly listed a lack of education and experience as a major barrier; however, the participants also shared several unique barriers. These centered on not having Canadian job experience, language barriers, mental health, and housing insecurity.

Lack of Canadian Employment Experience

One interviewee spoke of the challenge of not having employment experience in Canada. They shared the following:

“ Like I said there's, like, experience wise, like, I'm, so, I'm not from Canada and most of my job history is not from Canada. Um, like, most of the stuff I did in Canada was, like, volunteer work not much like going into the workforce and working and getting paid stuff. Like, um, but a lot of people are asking like experiences in like for years of experience and I'm like I've only been here in like three years, so yea, like, that's the barrier for me, like, not having like experience here.

The quote highlights the challenges that new Canadians can have in accessing employment.

Language Barriers

Some participants shared that they were not always able to understand job titles and requirements. For example, a participant stated, “*Just basically it was maybe my English, I'm not sure, I wasn't able to understand some of the titles. So I-I, maybe me not understanding it because of language, but yeah.*” This quote further highlights the challenges that new Canadians can have in accessing employment.

Anxiety with Job Process

Some interviewees revealed that their efforts to seek employment were impeded by their mental health, particularly symptoms of anxiety. Specifically, young people felt anxious around the interview process. For example, one participant shared that they, *“feel kind of like too jittery when I go to an interview, and I know that’s not a good thing but, but um that could probably be a barrier also I kind of tend to, like when I’m really kind of nervous I kind of tend to stutter.”*

Homelessness

Participants with current or former experiences of homelessness spoke of several barriers they faced in obtaining and maintaining employment. Participants noted that it is easier to seek employment with stable housing since most employers require an address to send employment-related information. This point is demonstrated by the following quote, *“Oh, um, like, when I [was] homeless that was kind of hard [because] I didn’t know what address to put, but with stable housing it’s pretty easy to apply.”*

Without stable housing, some participants had to list their family’s home as an address when filling out an application. This was not an easy decision for some young people, as familial conflict may have contributed to their homelessness.

Another challenge participants shared was the lack of access to new and clean clothing.

YSO Interviews

YSO participants spoke of two additional barriers that young people are facing: (1) gender non-conforming identity of young people; and (2) other intrapersonal factors.

Non-Conforming Gender Identity

YSO participants shared that transgender and gender non-conforming young people had challenges filling out job applications, as the gender on their government-issued identification did not reflect their gender identity. This caused anxiety and many feared gender-related discrimination from employers.

As stated by one of the YSO participants:

“... so, [youth] may not have been able to legally change their name um yet, and so, one of their biggest barriers around finding or even going for a job is that their ID might say like ‘Elizabeth’ and they show up and their appearance isn’t that of what you know, society might deem as like a ‘female-like’, ... so, usually they won’t even apply for jobs because...an employer might discriminate against [them] because of [their] gender identity.”

Intrapersonal Factors

YSO representatives stated that many of the young people accessing their services were experiencing challenges related to substance use and mental health. Due to these challenges, some young people lacked the skills needed to navigate the workforce. One participant attributed this to young people *“never [having] someone to teach them those life skills that are crucial to doing well”*. As a result, YSO representatives found that many young people they work with lacked self-confidence and did not perceive themselves as ready for employment.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYER?

Many of the YSO representatives shed light on the importance of employers in helping young people overcome these barriers to employment. Indicators of a supportive employer included flexible interview processes, mentorship, awareness of a young person’s unique identity, and engagement with YSOs.

Flexible Interview Processes

YSO representatives identified the need for a non-traditional interview process to test the true candidacy of the young person. A non-traditional interview was described as a hands-on, on-site interview that required young people to perform tasks required for the job as opposed to focusing on traditional means of young people pitching their abilities.

Mentorship Opportunities

Once employed, YSO representatives suggested that employers provide young people with workplace mentorship opportunities to assist with transitions into the workplace. They suggested that employers should seek out and train mentors who could provide personalized learning opportunities for young people. These learnings will help a young person to reach their full potential on the job.

Awareness of a Young Person's Unique Identity & Educational Opportunities

Employers are also entreated to be understanding of the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and trauma of the young person once hired. One YSO representative stated that some young people are *"coming from a hard place and just need that person that can understand that it might not always work out at work"*. As such, educating employers around the various issues young people may face, such as mental health challenges or substance use, will help them to be flexible around the needs of young people and to provide supports, as well as challenge and address stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

Engagement with YSOs

Finally, as described in the quote below, a supportive employer must be willing to communicate with young people and YSO staff.

“ Sometimes the youth want us to be involved in that and want us to kind of help them advocate and stuff so making sure that the employer is open to having those conversations with support people, umm, to help maintain that position for the youth.

WHAT TYPES OF JOBS ARE YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKING FOR?

Interviews and Surveys with Young People

Both interview and survey participants were asked of the kinds of jobs they would like to see on the HireUp platform. Responses from the survey participants are found below.

TABLE 4. SECTORS OF EMPLOYMENT YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO SEE ON HIREUP

	%
Retail/Customer Service	21.33%
Technology	14.67%
Food Services/Restaurants	12.00%
Call Centres	9.33%
Social Services/Support Work	8.00%
Office/Banks	8.00%
Construction/Trades	8.00%
Other	8.00%
Factory/Manufacturing	5.33%
Driver/Delivery	2.67%
Marketing/Design	2.67%
Total	100.00%

The top three responses were Retail/Customer Service (21%), Technology (15%), and Food Services/Restaurants (12%). Almost half of young people indicated that they are looking for part-time employment (43%). Thirty percent reported they are looking for full-time work and 27% are looking for a job that starts part-time and will lead to full-time.

As with the survey participants, interviewees shared that they were often looking for retail and customer service positions. The participants also listed banking, data-entry, and youth-specific opportunities at youth camps and after-school programs.

The types of jobs participants were interested often matched their previous employment experiences. The majority of interview participants spoke of having previous food service and retail experience, while a handful spoke of working in information technology (IT) and data entry.

YSO Interviews

YSO representatives provided specific examples of the employment areas and settings in which young people are interested. Some of these included: (1) Construction and general labour; (2) Security; (3) Retail & Customer services; (4) Banking; (5) Bartending/Serving; (6) Coffee shops & cafes; and (7) Family-owned businesses. YSO participants also shared that young people are looking for positions that start as part-time and can lead up to full-time hours, as well as temporary and permanent positions. All positions should provide appropriate compensation and benefits.

IS HIREUP OFFERING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT ARE MEETING YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEEDS?

Interviewees and survey respondents had mixed opinions on the adequacy of the number and breadth of employment opportunities listed on HireUp. When asked how satisfied they were

with the jobs available on HireUp, 55.2 percent of survey respondents stated they were extremely or somewhat satisfied, 27.6 percent of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 17.2 percent were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied.

Many interviewees were satisfied with the employment opportunities available on HireUp, but some felt that there could be greater variety in the jobs that are offered. For example, one interviewee stated:

“ I mean to be honest with you like, when I was applying there, there were literally only five companies' jobs were there and then the one company has like ten listings of their you know, so they're not, at that time there were not enough jobs, maybe there's more now? Right now, I'm looking at it its Scotiabank has their only, for me - it's only three companies that are - have job openings and Scotiabank has like fifteen job openings. So, I mean, if I was a potential candidate, I might be looking for more job listings from various other companies as well, like not just limited to three or four.

Another young person shared that due to their geographic location, there were few options available to them. They stated:

“ Yeah, there just wasn't a lot offered in Ottawa, like I searched again and maybe like I did my search and there was four to five jobs basically...You're kind of just limited in some way.

Interviewees who were seeking jobs in customer service positions were generally pleased with the jobs offered on HireUp, as illustrated by the following quote, “*Um, yeah [I'm looking for] retail, customer service, mostly I would say... So I feel like Hire Up kinda gave me that opportunity...[to apply to] all those types of jobs.*”

It should be noted that HireUp has diversified the number of employers on its website and continues to seek out new employers.

WERE PARTICIPANTS ABLE TO ATTAIN EMPLOYMENT THROUGH THE HIREUP PLATFORM?

All of the interviewees reported applying to at least one job through the HireUp platform. The number of jobs applied to ranged from one to 20. Of the four interviewees who were currently employed, one was hired through HireUp, two were unsure, and one did not attain employment through HireUp.

Close to 88 percent of survey participants reported applying to a job through HireUp. Of the 15 survey participants who were currently employed (see Table 5), two young people (13.3%) reported that they received their current job by applying through HireUp. To apply these employment numbers to the current number of active users on HireUp (n=1372), this means that potentially close to 180 young people may obtain employment via HireUp (i.e., 13% of all active HireUp users). It is important to recognize that these are only projections and do not reflect the actual number of young people who have obtained employment via HireUp.

The 17 survey participants who were not currently employed were asked if any of their previous employment was the result of applying via HireUp. Of the 13 participants who had previously applied to jobs via HireUp, 23 percent reported that they successfully attained employment via HireUp.

TABLE 5. EMPLOYMENT ATTAINED THROUGH HIREUP

	Yes	No	I don't know
Did you get your current job by applying through HireUp? (n=15)	13.3%	86.7%	0.00%
<i>If no to above, have you applied to a job through HireUp's website? (n=17)</i>	76.5%	23.5%	0.00%
<i>If yes to above, did you get hired for any of the positions you applied to on HireUp? (n=13)</i>	23.1%	69.2%	7.7%

We also examined trends among survey participants who were currently employed to those who were not (excluding participants who were on social assistance). We focused on gender, whether young people were born outside of Canada, and previous experiences of homelessness. As indicated in the table below, more females were currently employed and more males were unemployed. A higher percentage of those who were currently employed were born outside of Canada, whereas a higher percentage of those who had no employment were born in Canada. Also, a slightly higher percentage of those who had experience of homelessness were unemployed, whereas those who were currently employed had a slightly higher percentage of not experiencing homelessness.

Although the number of participants was too small to determine if these differences were statistically significant, it demonstrates that certain groups may be encountering barriers (i.e., young people who have experienced homelessness), while others are able to effectively obtain employment (i.e., new Canadians and women).

TABLE 6. COMPARISON OF EMPLOYED AND UNEMPLOYED SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.

		Employed (n=15)	Not employed (n=11)
Gender	Female/Woman (n=12)	60.00%	27.27%
	Male/Man (n=13)	40.00%	63.64%
	Trans Female/Trans Woman (n=1)	0.00%	9.09%
	<i>Total (n=26)</i>	<i>100.00%</i>	<i>100.00%</i>
Born in Canada	Yes (n=14)	40.00%	72.73%
	No (n=12)	60.00%	27.27%
	<i>Total (n=26)</i>	<i>100.00%</i>	<i>100.00%</i>
Experience of Homelessness	Yes (n=10)	13.33%	18.2%
	No (n=15)	80.00%	72.7%
	Prefer not to say (n=1)	6.67%	9.1%
	<i>Total (n=26)</i>	<i>100.00%</i>	<i>100.00%</i>

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF HIREUP?

We asked interviewees and survey participants of their favourite parts of HireUp. The participants generally had very positive feedback on the features and usability of the platform. The majority of participants found the website easy to use and were relatively happy with the job opportunities available. Two themes stood out when participants spoke of the strengths of HireUp: (1) job opportunities tailored to young people; and (2) HireUp is a reputable website.

Tailored Job Opportunities

Several participants appreciated that HireUp was tailored to young people. One participant stated:

“ I like what they’re doing, like what they’re representing, um, they’re trying to help out kids, you know, youth and stuff because you know um, I think this seems really exclusive like you know I can’t get the information from anywhere else ... Um, so it’s kinda good, being a former kid in care, I’m still dealing with struggles. Um, I like the fact that they have this specifically for us. So it’s really helpful. I really like what they’re representing, stuff like that.

In comparing HireUp to other employment website, one participant shared that in other websites:

“ ... most of the jobs were not for a younger people or for the people the companies asked for a lot of requirements and like I didn’t match neither of them and with Hire Up I was able to match quickly.

These responses demonstrate that young people who access HireUp appreciate that it is unique to other employment platforms.

A Reputable Website

One participant felt that in comparison to other employment websites, HireUp felt more reputable.

They shared:



With Indeed, it's too much. It's not very custom tailored to one niche market, it's like everywhere. So I mean like, HireUp is more you know, for students or new students or people who are entering the workforce so I think it's more, mostly dedicated for that. So, I mean, with Indeed, sure I will say it's alright but like but they have too much scams going on there as well like you know, some of the job listings like people faking, trying to get your information, they're not real jobs.

Employment Outcomes

Although not necessarily a qualitative theme, we did want to highlight that some young people shared that they are receiving callbacks for interviews. For example, a participant stated, *"I think the service is really good, I like it. I have got some call backs since I been using it, and that was early last year. So pretty good."*

WHAT ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT?

Along with the positive feedback about HireUp, interviewees also shared several suggestions for improvements. These included real-time supports on the website, focused keyword searches, receiving a confirmation from employers once an application has been reviewed, greater details on the specifics of employment opportunities, increased outreach, and pre- and post-employment supports.

Real-time supports

A small number of participants shared that they would have appreciated real-time supports when applying to jobs on HireUp. A participant shared:



I might be doing something wrong, but I wouldn't really know who to go to, to be able to switch up my way of jobs searching or emailing somebody or something like that. So just really having that person to access to get feedback from, despite like, the system is there it's helpful, but we always need, I guess another hand.

Focused Keyword Searches

Similarly, a small number of participants shared that the HireUp platform could improve its search capabilities. One participant stated that they would like to be able to limit searches to one city or province. Another participant stated that the results from their keyword search were too broad, *"like the words [I] put in exactly and then a bunch of other jobs showed up and I'm like*

that's nice but that's not what I'm looking for."

These suggestions reflect the previous version of the HireUp platform and have subsequently been addressed.

Confirmation of Application Submission & Interactions with Employers

A handful of participants discussed the importance of HireUp providing a confirmation email once an employer receives their application. For example, one participant stated: *"Yeah ... I was successful with the Walmart one, yeah, but for the Scotiabank, they didn't reply back to me after that like so, I don't know what happened."* Another participant stated that they would have liked to follow up with the employer directly to confirm that their resume had been reviewed. Similarly, a different participant stated that they would have appreciated for the name and coordinates of the hiring manager to be provided to enable them to directly follow up with their application.

Details of Employment Opportunities

Several participants spoke of wanting more detailed descriptions of the jobs that are posted. This includes providing specific coordinates of hiring managers (as stated above) and salary and wage expectations. For example, one participant shared:

“ I would say if HireUp has more, more information about the company that you're applying [to], like Walmart or Scotiabank, ... [HireUp should] provide you with the salary range. People will be more interested to apply because like everyone is looking at the salary or the wage rate, how much is it, you know, what's the range?

Social Media Outreach

Several participants indicated that they heard about HireUp through the YSO they were connected with. As another form of outreach, one young person suggested maintaining an active social media presence:

“ I just think they should have like an active social media...I think that will be a good way to connect to the young people...every young person is on social media so, HireUp has...an advantage or like, to help with something and a lot of people see something good for the community, the word could spread to each other and like, more people coming out and like, more people will be effective on HireUp...and achieve their goals to what they want to accomplish.

Supports to Attain and Maintain Employment

Pre-employment Supports. Participants listed several pre-employment supports that they felt HireUp could provide on their website. These were:

- Cover letter and resume supports;
- Interview preparation, practice and feedback;
- Information on training/certifications/licenses needed for specific types of employment (i.e., construction, servers, etc.);
- Developing and improving communication skills (i.e., how to communicate with employers);
- Access to an employment coach/counsellor for additional supports; and
- General feedback on submitted applications.

In relation to the last point, general feedback on submitted applications, one participant shared that they would like to:

“ ...get that other perspective of what you can do differently. Cause I might be doing something wrong, but I wouldn't really know who to go to, to be able to switch up my way of job searching or emailing somebody or something like that. So just really having that person to access to get feedback from.

Supports to Maintain Employment. Once employed, participants thought that HireUp could provide supports with effectively communicating with employers and access to materials needed for employment (i.e., access to appropriate work attire).

YSO Interviews

YSO respondents shared similar areas for improvement as young people, particularly around the supports to attain and maintain employment. Other areas for improvement included the development of a mobile app and including feedback from young people.

Supports to attain and maintain employment

YSO representatives stressed that employment supports need to be youth-centered and youth-driven, meaning that young people should be involved in the development of employment programming and that supports should be tailored to their unique circumstances.

Many of the YSO representatives spoke of the value of providing pre-employment and post-employment supports to young people. Participants spoke of specific pre-employment strategies, such as enhancing a young person's understanding of the importance of attendance, time management, and abiding by instructions/company policies. Checking-in with a young person once they have attained employment was thought of an important follow-up support.

As part of this support, a peer component was described as particularly helpful. This involves connecting young people with their peers who have been in similar life or work situations so that they can learn from one another.

YSOs thought that HireUp could include some of these materials on their website. They thought that these online materials would be particularly helpful for young people living in rural communities where supports may be harder to access.

Mobile App

Several YSO representatives indicated that a mobile HireUp app that young people could access on their cell phones would be particularly helpful. It should be noted that HireUp is currently working on developing a mobile app.

Incorporating Feedback from Young People

Some YSO representatives indicated that HireUp should check-in with young people who access their website to see what elements of the website could be improved. This feedback will ensure that young people are engaged with HireUp and using a system that is easy for them to use.

INTERVIEWS WITH HIREUP STAFF

Data monitoring

HireUp staff identified that tracking employment outcomes was challenging. For example, a staff member shared:

“ So one thing we really recognized in the first year was that...right now we do have to rely on employers to report back to us...but employers...even, you know, the most engaged employers and the most engaged hiring managers might have a difficult time to respond to that email or respond to that request for numbers

As a result, HireUp has undergone changes to improve their data monitoring functions. For example, HireUp introduced the ability for their platform to be integrated into a company's existing applicant tracking system. This change allowed applications from HireUp to flow seamlessly into an employer's applicant tracking system and allowed for candidates to be flagged as HireUp applicant. It also provided an opportunity to flag applicants as candidates applying through HireUp.

WHAT PRIORITY AREAS SHOULD HIREUP FOCUS ON?

Based upon the feedback received from interviewees, we asked survey respondents to prioritize five areas that HireUp could improve on to better support young people in their search for employment. Participants were asked to rank the factors from most important (1) to least important (5). The five areas were:

1. Increase the number of jobs available
2. Increase the number of companies to apply to
3. Help connect me to other employment services and supports (e.g., resume workshops, interview preparation, etc.)
4. Have someone who can help answer questions through live chat or email
5. Providing supports after obtaining employment

The results are presented in the table below.

TABLE 7. PRIORITY AREAS

Priority area	Priority Level			Average Per Item Rating
	High	Mid	Low	
Increase the number and types of jobs available	15 (48.4%)	0 (0%)	16 (51.6%)	3.13 (1.6)
Increase the number of companies to apply to	12 (38.7%)	9 (29.0%)	10 (32.3%)	2.84 (1.2)
Help connect me to other employment services and supports	11 (35.5%)	12 (38.7%)	8 (25.8%)	2.90 (1.1)
Have someone who can help answer questions through live chat or email	12 (38.7%)	6 (19.4%)	13 (41.9%)	3.00 (1.4)
Providing supports after obtaining employment	12 (38.7%)	4 (12.9%)	15 (48.4%)	3.13 (1.6)

As evident by the table, increasing the number and types of jobs on HireUp was listed as the highest priority. The remaining areas were prioritized in relatively similar frequencies. Interestingly, an increase in the number and types of jobs was also rated as the lowest priority, indicating a divide among the participants.

Upon further examination of the data, participants who were currently working often ranked increasing the number and types of jobs as a low priority (9 of 14 participants who responded to the question). For those who were not working, they often ranked increasing the number and types of jobs as a high priority (9 of 16 participants who responded to the question). This makes

intuitive sense, as support needs will change once a young person attains employment. Assistance with connections to other employment services was ranked by three-quarters of participants as either a mid- or high-level priority. This is much higher than the other priority areas, indicating that participants consistently viewed this priority as an important feature that HireUp should consider adding to their current platform.

What do these results mean?

Our evaluation has demonstrated that HireUp is an effective platform to help young people access employment opportunities. Young people are satisfied with the features of the platform and appreciate that HireUp is specific to young people who encounter barriers to employment, unlike more generic employment platforms (i.e., Indeed). Below we discuss two key findings that emerged from the evaluation: (1) barriers to employment and diversity of participants; and (2) areas for growth.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT & DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS

Many of the young people we spoke with discussed the challenges they encounter when looking for employment. These barriers were similar to those reported in the literature and included a lack of education and employment experience, mental health challenges (Ferguson et al., 2012), housing instability (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014; Ferguson et al., 2012; Karabanow et al., 2010), and discrimination based upon one's gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or race (The Home Depot Canada Foundation & Impakt Corporation, 2015). Below we discuss three groups in particular: (a) transgender and gender non-conforming young people; (b) new Canadians; and (c) young people experiencing homelessness. We close by discussing the educational attainment of participants.

Gender Identity

In regards to gender identity, YSO representatives shared that transgender and gender non-conforming young people experience barriers from the outset, as even applying to jobs is difficult since many application forms frame gender in binary terms (i.e., "male" or "female"). Further, some young people's government-issued identification does not match their gender identity, making it stressful for young people to identify their gender on an application. These examples indicate that

targeted strategies for working with transgender and gender non-conforming young people are warranted. This could include identifying inclusive employers, informing transgender and gender non-conforming individuals of their rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and partnering with YSOs to organize a transgender job fair (Whalen, 2017).

New Canadians

Our data found that new Canadians reported specific barriers to employment, such as a lack of Canadian employment experience and language barriers. Interestingly, our analysis of the survey data demonstrated that a large proportion of participants who are employed identify as new Canadians compared to participants born in Canada. Although our sample was small, it demonstrates that despite the barriers new Canadians are facing, many are still able to attain some form of employment. This finding is somewhat surprising given that the unemployment rate among new immigrants to Canada (age 15 and older) is 10.4%, compared to 6.3% of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2018b). HireUp's tailored job offerings, especially the modification of standard job requirements (i.e., experience, certifications), therefore may be particularly helpful for new Canadians. The finding also indicates that it will be prudent for HireUp to make connections with agencies that work with young people who are new Canadians.

Young People Experiencing Homelessness

The survey data confirmed the qualitative accounts that homelessness and housing insecurity are significant barriers to employment for young people. Several survey participants who were currently unemployed reported a current or previous experience of homelessness. It is not a surprising finding, but it provides evidence that further work is needed to support young people who experience homelessness in their search for employment. This will involve continued outreach with HireUp's current YSOs, but could also reflect the need for additional YSOs to be recruited.

Educational Attainment

Interestingly, the educational backgrounds of the survey participants were varied. Many of the survey participants reported that they were currently enrolled in, or had graduated, college or university, while there were also a substantial proportion of young people currently enrolled in high school. These varying education levels provide evidence of the need for HireUp to maintain a broad array of employment opportunities that speak to the various experiences of its users.

AREAS FOR GROWTH

Young people and YSO representatives shared several ways HireUp could be enhanced. Along with increasing the number and type of employment opportunities, young people prioritized being connected to other employment services. It is clear that many young people require supports that extend beyond what an online platform can feasibly offer, which is why the partnerships with YSOs are so important. This may be particularly relevant for post-employment supports, as both young people and YSO representatives stressed the importance of continuing to develop skills while in the job force, such as working effectively with employers and learning from peers.

The participants shared many tangible supports that they would like to see, such as cover letter and resume supports; interview preparation, practice and feedback; information on training/certifications/licenses needed for specific types of employment (i.e., construction, servers, etc.);

developing and improving communication skills (i.e., how to communicate with employers); access to an employment coach/counsellor for additional supports; and general feedback on submitted applications. These supports are similar to the types of employment supports discussed in the literature (e.g., Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014). It should be noted that young people particularly sought out feedback on their employment applications. This is an important finding, as it demonstrates that young people are looking for ways to strengthen their applications and develop mechanisms for self-improvement.

YSO representatives shared that it would be beneficial to incorporate opportunities for feedback from young people and to have employment-based mentorship opportunities. Access to mentors has been substantiated in the literature as a best practice (Youth Employment Task Force, 2017). Therefore, HireUp should consider ways to implement this practice when onboarding new employers.

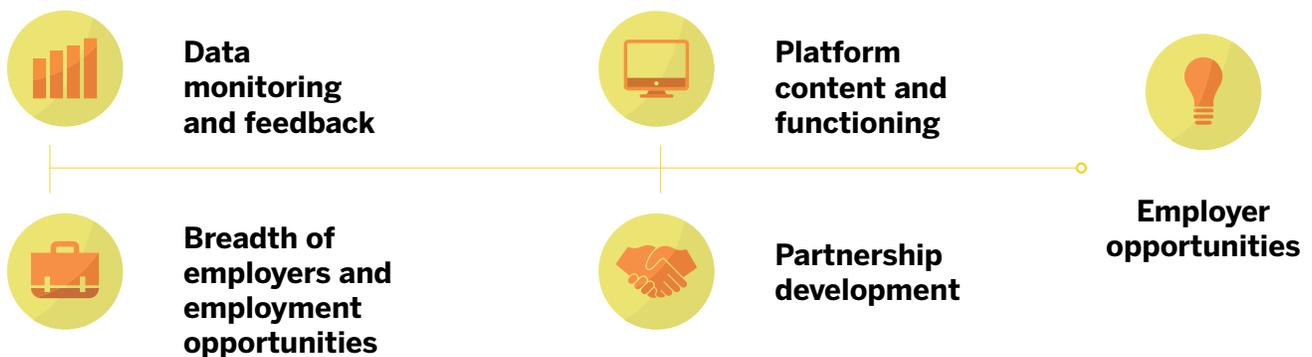
Limitations

It is important to mention that this evaluation has several limitations. We were unable to connect with employers who are partnered with HireUp. As such, the experiences, successes and challenges of employers working with HireUp were not able to be included in this report. We were unable to access administrative data for this report, presenting a limitation as we were not able to address demographics and other information on the database of young people registered with HireUp. Further, it would have been ideal to conduct interviews with young people pre and post-employment; however, with challenges tracking when a young person received employment, this was not possible. Lastly, we largely spoke with young people who either had not received employment from HireUp or were unsure if they received their current job by applying through HireUp. It would have been ideal if we were able to speak with more people who had received employment through HireUp, as well as employers who had and had not hired from HireUp applicants.

In the proceeding section, we present a series of recommendations for HireUp to sustain and enhance their work.

Recommendations

The recommendations were derived from the surveys and interviews with young people, the interviews with YSO representatives, and the key informant interviews with HireUp staff. They are focused on five main areas:



Data Monitoring and Feedback

1. *Enhance the process of tracking employment outcomes of young people.*

HireUp staff have made great inroads in developing and enhancing their data collection systems; however, much of the data collection is contingent upon employers taking the initiative to report back their numbers to HireUp. As such, it is recommended that HireUp continue to follow-up with employers on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly) to receive information on key indicators, such as the number of hires, tenures of employment, and reasons for dismissal. Targeted recruitment strategies should be developed with employers (i.e., phone-based, web-based, in-person), so as to acquire this important information.

HireUp should also continue to collect administrative data to report on key indicators, such as the demographic characteristics of young people who access their platform, the number of visits to the site, the number of jobs posted, the number of applications submitted, etc.

In considering this recommendation, it is important to note that difficulties in tracking data is a challenge that is not unique to HireUp alone. HireUp staff informed us that they have consulted with other employment platforms and that these platforms also encounter similar challenges in tracking employment outcomes.

2. Acquire regular feedback from young people, YSOs, and employers.

It will be important for HireUp to continue to assess the level of satisfaction of its intended users – young people, YSOs, and employers. This is particularly important for employers, since we were unable to attain a sufficient number of employers to participate in this evaluation and cannot comment on their satisfaction with the HireUp program.

Acquiring feedback, through surveys and testimonials, will provide HireUp with valuable information to continually improve its process. It will also provide a platform for each group, particularly young people, to voice their opinions and feel heard.

3. Continue research and evaluation activities to monitor the effectiveness and operations of the HireUp platform.

This evaluation has shed light on the effectiveness and operations of the HireUp platform. It will be important for HireUp to continue their research and evaluation activities, especially with the recent mandate expansion, to examine if the underrepresented groups they are targeting are feeling supported in their employment searches.

Platform Content and Functioning

4. Enhance the number of employment resources on HireUp's website, particularly focused on pre- and post-employment supports.

Several young people stated that they would like access to employment-related resources, such as preparing for an interview, resume and cover letter writing, and communicating with employers. This information is readily available on other web-based sources (including the websites of YSOs) but having a central repository for these resources could be beneficial. HireUp could serve as this repository, eliminating the need for young people to seek out information from a variety of sources. HireUp could work with their partner agencies to develop the resources for this repository.

5. Provide assistance for young people while using the platform.

Several young people stated that they would like to be able to connect with someone if they have questions when using HireUp's platform. HireUp has already started this process, as staff noted that a live chat feature is something they are currently working on. This live chat will offer support to young people, while also serving as a data collection tool.

6. Increase the capacity of HireUp to include accounts for YSOs.

YSOs are an integral part of HireUp, as they provide essential pre- and post-employment supports to young people. To increase the supports that YSOs can offer, it will be beneficial to provide YSOs with their own accounts on HireUp to allow for the monitoring of their clients in the progression of their employment goals. This could involve the creation of a dashboard where aggregated, real-time data could be displayed that indicates the number of clients from their agency who are accessing HireUp, the types of jobs young people are applying to, and the number of active users of HireUp.

This would require the permission of young people, but a monitoring feature would allow YSOs to see where training and education opportunities may exist in their organization. For example, if the majority of young people from an organization are applying to jobs in the technology sector, it would indicate that a YSO should develop or enhance training and education opportunities in this sector.

Breadth of Employers and Employment Opportunities

7. Continue expanding the number of employers and types of employment opportunities.

HireUp has substantially grown their network of employers over the course of this evaluation. Through targeted engagement, HireUp staff have successfully on boarded a number of large-scale companies. HireUp should continue this engagement and look to increase the types of employment opportunities that are available. As young people who use HireUp are coming from diverse backgrounds, particularly in regards to education, it will be important to include employment opportunities of varying tenures (i.e., part-time, full-time, casual) and skill levels (i.e., entry-level, mid-level).

Partnership Development

8. Continue building partnerships with YSOs who work with young people who experience homelessness. Efforts should be made to enhance relationships with agencies that work with populations such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, veterans, and young people with mental health and substance use challenges.

HireUp has undergone significant changes and improvements, not only to its platform, but also its mandate. With the expansion of its mandate, it will be important for HireUp to continue working with YSOs who work with young people who experience homelessness, but also reach out to YSOs that work directly with these underrepresented populations (i.e., Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, and veterans) to learn of the unique employment barriers that these populations face. For example, and as demonstrated by the results, new Canadians may require translation support, and transgender and gender non-conforming young people can find application processes to be stigmatizing. As well, we know that young people who experience homelessness are disproportionately impacted by mental health and substance use challenges, and that these challenges are also barriers to employment. Therefore, HireUp should work collaboratively with YSOs to identify solutions to these barriers so as to increase equity in the employment process.

Employers

Although we did not speak directly with employers, YSO representatives and young people provided several suggestions as to how employers can support young people in employment.

9. Employers should develop mentorship programs to support young people in their employment.

Our literature review demonstrated that mentorship opportunities are one way employers can support young people in their employment and this point was reiterated by YSO representatives. Therefore, employers should provide workplace mentors who will serve as guides and supports for young people. Mentors can help young people navigate successfully through the working environment and provide informal training opportunities.

10. *Employers should engage in open communication with YSOs in identifying and meeting the young person's employment support needs.*

Young people expressed that they are not always comfortable approaching and communicating with their employers. Therefore, it is important for employers to be open to consistent communication with the respective YSOs, in order to identify and meet the unique needs of the young person.

11. *Employers should expand training opportunities to include anti-oppression and inclusion workshops to all staff to eliminate barriers (i.e. discrimination) that prevent young people from seeking and maintaining employment.*

If not already part of regular training opportunities, employers should provide periodic workshops on anti-oppression and inclusion. This will help to develop an inclusive work environment that will bring to light issues of discrimination that impact young people with intersecting identities.

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