

Improving Employment Outcomes for Vulnerable Youth

Completed for the Burns Memorial Fund

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May 31, 2018

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1. Introduction

The Burns Memorial Fund is working with other Calgary funding organizations and stakeholders to improve employment outcomes for young people who face serious barriers to employment and are at risk of long-term social exclusion.

Young people in Canada are increasingly challenged to find lasting and meaningful work due to factors such as changing labour market conditions, automation, the rise of precarious employment and “gig” work, and mismatches between supply and demand, including job requirements and would-be workers’ skills. Today, it is common for post-secondary education graduates “to be underemployed in service occupations with few career ladders.”¹ For young people with low levels of education and other disadvantages, even poor quality, entry-level jobs can be completely out of reach.

This paper does not address the issues and needs of post-secondary students or graduates. Rather, its purpose is to provide information to inform the development of employment programming for youth aged 15 to 24 years and, especially, those aged 20 to 24, who face multiple barriers to entering and succeeding in the work force and are at risk of social and economic exclusion, described here as “vulnerable.” The paper (i) provides an estimated number of youth aged 15 to 24 in Calgary who are not in school, not employed, and not in the labour force and, within this group, the number and type of vulnerable youth; (ii) describes the barriers to employment faced by these youth and best and promising practices in youth employment initiatives; and (iii) suggests indicators of movement toward employment that can be used to track an employment program participant’s progress toward employability or employment over time.

2. Youth who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET)

Individuals who are not in school or employed are often described as “NEET,” an acronym for “not in employment, education, or training.” The NEET indicator originated in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, and spread throughout Europe, when increasing numbers of youth who were not attending school were also unable to find work.² It is now tracked annually by and compared among all OECD countries. In most countries, it is generally accepted that young people who are NEET are at risk of becoming socially excluded, with income below the poverty-line and without the skills to improve their economic situation.³ This is because, in some European countries, many young people have given up looking for work out of hopelessness due to poor employment situations.⁴

In Canada, however, not only are NEET numbers dramatically lower than in European countries, the proportion of young people who are both NEET and at risk of long-term exclusion from the labour force and society is small. Despite provocative headlines such as “For almost a million young people: No job, no school,”⁵ Statistics Canada’s first comprehensive study of NEET youth in 2012 reported that the population was not “in a high risk, negative state” because many were in a period of short-term unemployment or were having trouble finding a job that matched their post-secondary credentials.⁶

Current concerns about youth unemployment in Canada may also be overstated. For a number of years, the unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 years has been about twice as high as the national average. However, this is mostly due to young people's low seniority and a higher risk of layoff and periodic departures from the labour force to attend school.⁷ Likewise, the steady decline since the 1970s in the percentage of youth with full-time employment is largely explained by increases in post-secondary education participation.

These facts do not mean that some youth are not at high risk of lifelong social and economic exclusion; they do mean that most young people in Canada are not shut out of the labour force.

For this paper, NEET figures have been calculated using data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, in this case from a special tabulation of data from the first quarter of 2017,⁸ the most recent available at the time of this paper, for the province of Alberta, the smallest geographic area available. Consistent with Statistics Canada's research on NEET youth, "Not in employment, education, or training" includes youth who were not in the labour force, with the definitions for each of the three groups as follows:

- Not in education (or training), including both full-and part-time students at primary and secondary educational institutions, colleges, and universities.
- Unemployed - youth who, during the reference week, were without employment, but were available and actively looking for work (excluding temporary absences from work for reasons such as illness, vacation, maternity leave, or labour dispute).
- Not in the labour force (NILF) - youth who are neither employed nor unemployed, that is, those who were not looking for work.

2.1 Total NEET youth in Alberta and in Calgary

In Canada, NEET data are commonly reported in one or more of three age groups, 15 to 19 years, 20 to 24 years, and 25 to 29 years, often to facilitate comparison with OECD countries, or even in one group of ages 15 to 29. However, for purposes of this paper, the data are presented in smaller age groupings within the age 15 to 24 cohort to provide more insight.

Figure 1 presents NEET percentages in Alberta for males, females, and both males and females in six age groupings and overall. Overall, 10.5% of youth aged 15 to 24 years in Alberta were NEET in January 2017, with more males (11.2%) than females (9.9%).

The figure shows that few 15 and 16-year-olds were NEET, in fact, the number was below the confidentiality threshold of 500 for the province. This is consistent with falling NEET numbers among all Canadian youth due to increased proportions staying in school, especially 15- and 16-year-olds. Among females, the percentage was 13% to 14% from age 19 to 24; for males, the percentage rose steadily with each age group, peaking at almost 18% for the age 23-24 cohort.

Figure 1. Percentages of Alberta youth who were not in education, employment, or training and not in the labour force, January 2017 (N=511,000) (Numbers for youth aged 15-16 were below the confidentiality threshold)

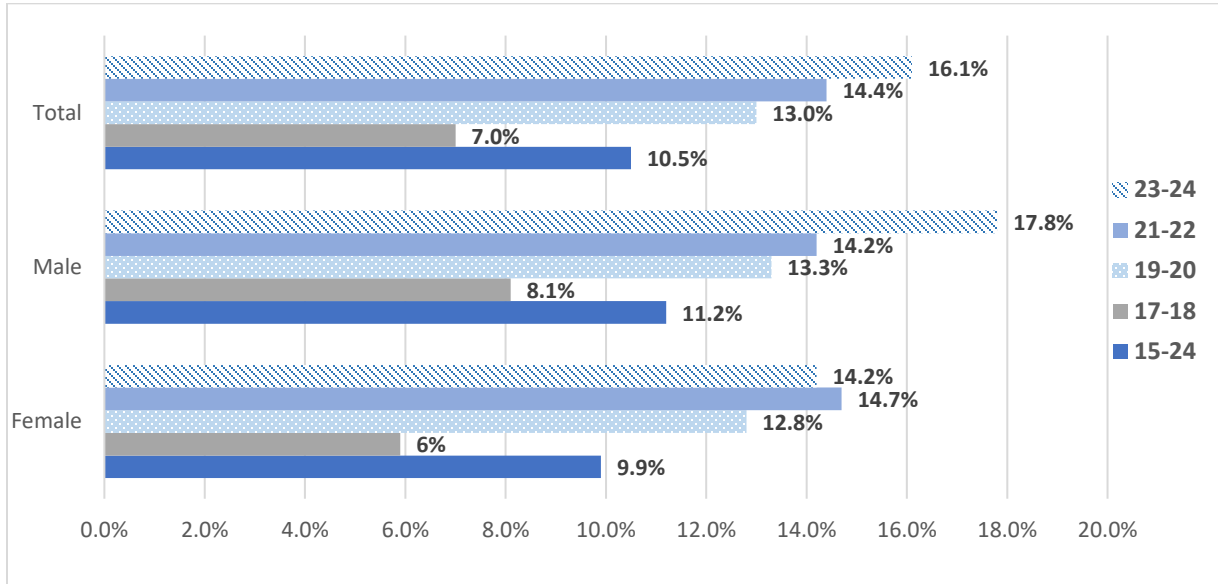
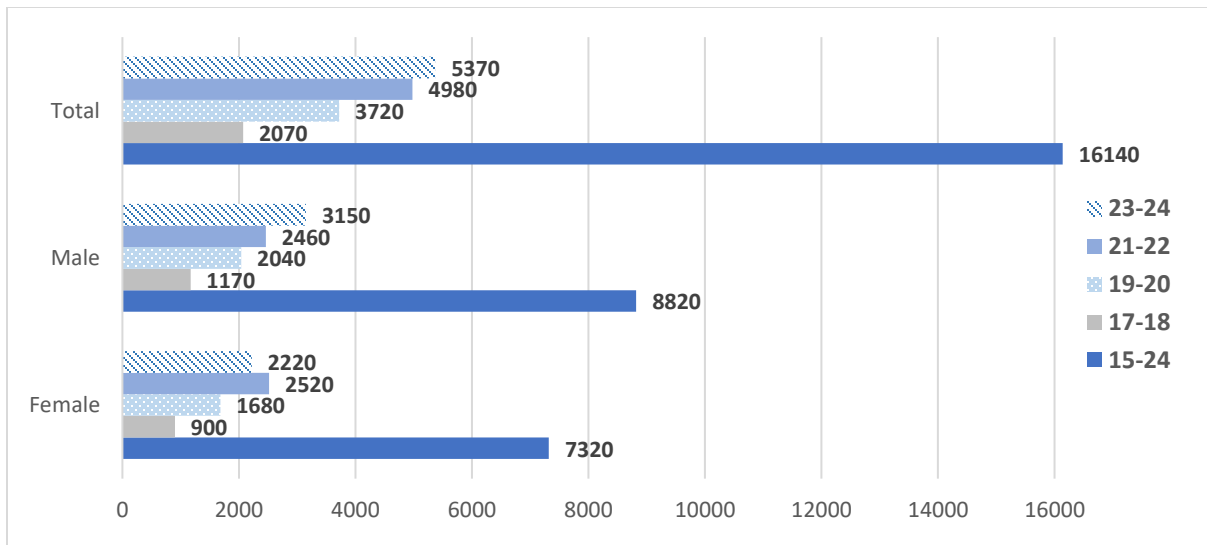


Figure 2 provides an estimate of NEET youth in total and by age and gender in Calgary. These estimates are based on the number of youth in the ages 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age categories and the 30% of Alberta youth in these two categories in the city of Calgary (not the larger Calgary Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)) as reflected in the 2016 Census. NEET data from a 2011 Labour Force Survey reported similar proportions of NEET youth living in urban and rural areas,⁹ so no adjustments were made for Calgary as an urban centre. Likewise, adjustments were not made for unemployment rates since the youth unemployment and labour force participation rates have not changed significantly since January 2017. Based on this simple calculation, about 16,000 youth aged 15 to 24 (8,800 males; 7,300 females) are NEET in Calgary.

Figure 2. Estimated number of Calgary youth who are not in education, employment, or training and not in the labour force (Numbers for youth aged 15-16 were below the confidentiality threshold)



2.2 Narrowing the focus: Which NEET youth are vulnerable

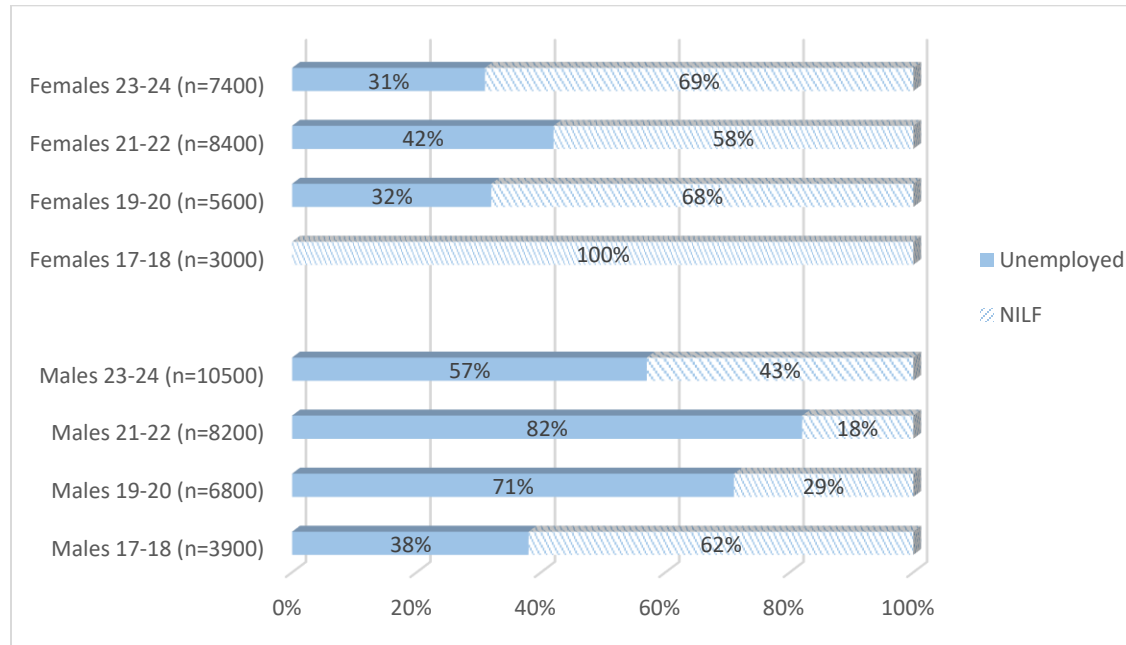
Statistics Canada reports that the vast majority of NEET youth are unemployed or out of the labour force only briefly, and they are not at risk of social exclusion. Individuals who are NILF include, for example, stay-at-home parents, young people who are taking time off to travel, and people with health conditions that prevent employment. There are many reasons that young people take a break from the labour force, sometimes for a brief period. However, the NILF group may also include unemployed people who have given up looking for work, which is more common during periods of economic downturn.¹⁰ It is likely that, in Alberta, most of the people who dropped out of the labour force, even if it was only for a short period of time, were young men aged 15 to 24 years. Employment rates for women have remained largely stable in recent years, but the sectors previously employing large numbers of young men—resource, construction, manufacturing, and related areas—declined with the economic downturn, resulting in fewer jobs.¹¹

Statistics Canada's 2012 NEET study found that 82% of NEET individuals who were NILF did not want a job, with a higher proportion of women than men in this group primarily due to higher rates of participation in post-secondary education and stay-at-home parenting. (The remaining 18% expressed interest in working but were not actively seeking employment, hence they are counted as NILF rather than as unemployed.) Likewise, in its 2012 NEET research, Statistics Canada reported that only 14% of NEET youth aged 15 to 29 years had been unemployed and seeking work for more than six months. Half of the 14% had not completed high school, 88% were aged 20 to 29 years, and 66% of the 88% were men.¹²

Unfortunately, additional demographic information about NEET youth was not available from Statistics Canada at the time of this paper, and simply removing 82% of the NILF sub-group and 86% of the unemployed subgroup across gender and age groups would present inaccurate estimates of the number of NEET youth who are vulnerable. There is a paucity of information about NEET youth in Canada and what does exist usually fails to disaggregate the age 15 to 24 or 15 to 29 age groups and, therefore, is not very helpful in planning any sort of services for NEET youth. Also, much of the extensive European research appears to have limited application here.

Extrapolating from Statistics Canada's 2012 findings provides some guidance. The proportions of NEET youth who are unemployed and NILF are provided in Figure 3, which shows that, within the NEET population, far more males than females were unemployed; far more females than males were NILF. Statistics Canada states that the unemployment rate is a better indicator than the NILF rate of how non-student youth are faring. (A figure presenting these percentages alone is provided in the appendix.) Overall, 49% of all Alberta NEET youth were unemployed and 51% were NILF, with men comprising 73% of the unemployed group, and 82% of men aged 21 and 22 unemployed. Duration of unemployment is unknown but, extrapolating from the findings in the 2012 Statistics Canada study, it may be roughly estimated that 3,724 (14%) were long-term unemployed, and 3,277 (88%) were aged 20 to 24 years, and 2,163 (66%) were men. These numbers under-represent the vulnerable NEET population, as they don't include the roughly 18% of the NILF group that would like to work but was not actively looking, the vast majority of whom in Alberta were likely men at least 19 years of age. Including 18% of the male NILF group aged 19 to 24 (3,150) and 10% of the female NILF group in the same age range (1,380, as a very rough guess, as no guiding data are available) brings the total estimated vulnerable NEET population in Alberta to 8,254 (3,724+3,150+1,380). About 30% of this group, 2,476 people, reside in Calgary, and about 75% of them are males aged 20 to 24.-

Figure 3. Proportion of Alberta NEET youth who were unemployed (n=26,600) and who were NILF (n=27,200), January 2017 (N=53,800: M=29,400; F=24,400) (Numbers for youth aged 15-16 were below the confidentiality threshold)



3. Barriers to finding and maintaining employment

The barriers to finding and maintaining employment faced by Canadian youth as a whole were identified in 2017 by Canada’s Expert Panel on Youth Employment. The Panel paid special attention to vulnerable youth, including Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, recent immigrant youth, and youth without a post-secondary education and concluded that the key six key barriers for youth in finding and maintaining employment in Canada are:

- a lack of labour market information for youth and a lack of employment data for policy-makers;
- a perceived reluctance by employers across Canada to hire young people;
- uncertainty faced by young people about both a rapidly changing world of work and an increasing number of young people who find themselves in less-stable part-time and/or contract employment;
- inadequate preparation for the workplace and requisite life skills to succeed;
- systemic and indirect discrimination experienced by marginalized youth; and
- a lack of resources for Indigenous youth to lead and positively impact their communities.¹³

The Panel’s recommendations for change primarily address federal policy, including improving statistical data to better capture youth employment information, and developing “a holistic definition of skills and competencies needed for a constantly evolving workplace” that reflects “globally accepted attributes needed for the modern workplace” and makes it possible to assess the impact of education and youth employment programs.¹⁴

Individual characteristics and circumstances also serve as barriers to employment. Research from North America, Western Europe, and Australia identifies these to include the following inter-related factors:¹⁵

- lack of a high school credential
- lack of labour market experience
- homelessness or housing instability and lack of basic necessities, such as food and identification
- learning challenges or disabilities
- low confidence and personal motivation
- mental health and substance abuse problems
- history of child welfare involvement
- criminal involvement/criminal record
- early parenting, dependent young child(ren) or caring for younger siblings
- weak social capital

In Canada (and probably elsewhere), demographic factors also come into play. As discussed earlier, almost all youth who are unemployed for more than six months are aged 20 and up, and two-thirds are male.¹⁶ Indigenous youth, particularly males, are at heightened risk of unemployment and labour force exclusion, but analysis of data from the Canadian Survey on Labour and Income Dynamics suggests that this may not be true for those who live exclusively or primarily in cities.¹⁷

Recent Canadian research found that racialized youth, especially those aged 18 to 21 years, who were from middle and high socio-economic status(SES) households face significant barriers to employment, but those from low SES household do not. The authors suggest that they may be seeking lower-skilled jobs, where they may be encountering fewer barriers.¹⁸

Racialized and immigrant status often overlap, and recently-arrived immigrant youth tend to work in lower-skilled employment, experience significant delays in finding employment, experience racism and linguistic discrimination, and have difficulties with foreign credential recognition.¹⁹ Racism plays a role but, for some racialized youth, so do intersections among racism, low SES, lack of positive adult mentors with connections to the world of work, and ineffective employment services.²⁰ In addition, even if they have been in Canada for many years, immigrant youth are far less likely than Canadian-born youth to have worked during high school or post-secondary education, and have not “accumulate[d] resources such as job references, networks, job skills and work ethics that lead to better economic outcomes as adults.”²¹

4. Best practices in employment programs serving vulnerable youth

Based on in-depth, longitudinal evaluation of large-scale Canadian demonstration projects, Canada's Social Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) recently concluded that the four best practices for all types of workplace training and employment programs (not specific to youth or vulnerable youth) are:

- i. "assessment of learner needs and skills, in relation to
- ii. employer business priorities and job performance requirements, leading to
- iii. training aligned with both learner and business needs, and
- iv. provision of retention supports to facilitate post-training learning transfer."²²

Best practices for programs targeting youth in general also pay attention to and seek to overcome the six key systemic barriers to youth employment, described earlier, which includes effective corporate engagement: As observed by Gaetz and colleagues:

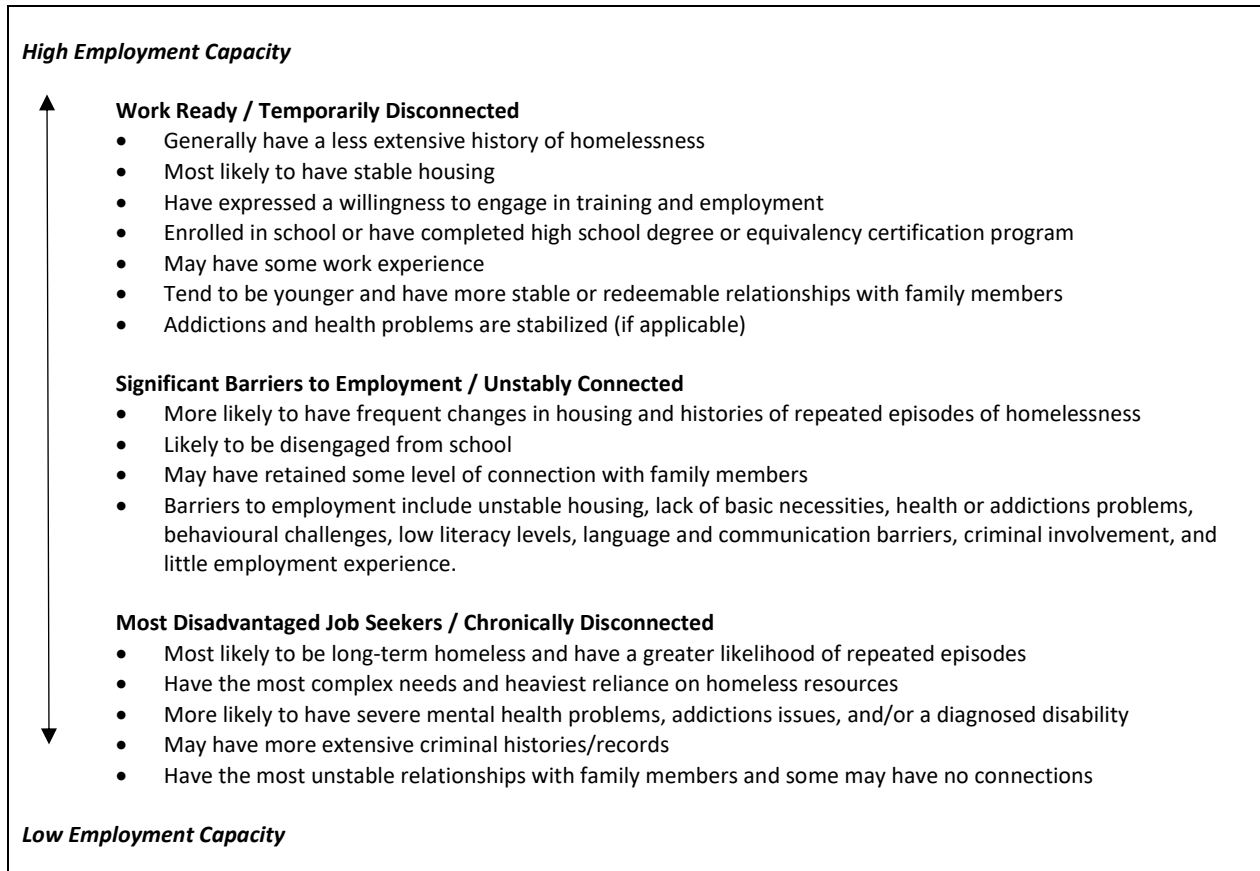
"One of the key challenges of employment training for marginalized youth is finding employers willing to take a chance on youth they may – rightly or wrongly – perceive to be problematic. Establishing effective relations with employers, understanding their concerns and needs, and providing the right kind of support for young people based on this understanding, can lead to positive experiences for young people and for employers as well."²³

It is also crucial that youth develop real, marketable skills for an evolving workplace. Approximately 40% of jobs that exist today have a high probability of being affected by automation in the next 10-15 years.²⁴ Canada's Expert Panel on Youth Employment urges programs to avoid replicating and perpetuating gender-based employment disparities, and not to train youth for jobs that could quickly become obsolete. The focus should be on "the development of transferrable skills, adaptability, and resilience."²⁵ Despite the threat of fewer jobs due to automation in sectors that may be the easiest to access by vulnerable youth, according to the Foundation for Young Australians, when a young person trains for or works one job, they acquire skills that will help them get 13 other jobs.²⁶ The Foundation's research revealed dramatic increases in demand for critical thinking and digital literacy skills, which are transferable across job clusters and individual jobs.²⁷

Best practices in employment training programming for vulnerable youth vary somewhat with participants' pre-program employment readiness. Vancouver's Streethome Foundation's Employment Readiness Continuum (Figure 4) provides a quick summary of characteristics that should be considered when designing an employment initiative for vulnerable people. In practical terms, when considering youth alone, it appears that the "unstably connected" group may be too broad in scope. When all the relevant research about vulnerable youth, beyond issues of education and employment, is considered, it is helpful to break this group into two sub-groups: low/medium acuity and high acuity, with high acuity meaning that the young person has serious challenges in multiple areas, often including clinical mental health and/or substance abuse challenges and street life entrenchment.

The roughly 750 men and 250 women aged 18 to 24 years who currently use adult shelters each year in Calgary²⁸ fall into both the high acuity, unstably connected and chronically disconnected categories.²⁹ The Calgary Homeless Foundation cautions that employment training will not work for these youth: “These young people lack more than a high school diploma and may have addictions and/or mental health issues. The needs of these difficult to serve youth are met with a comprehensive, youth-centered approach that combines employment training with several other necessary components: housing, education, and intensive personal support.”³⁰ ⁱ

Figure 4: Employment Readiness Continuum³¹



ⁱ At present, The Alex, a Calgary organization that provides health, housing, and wellness programming to highly vulnerable people across the lifespan, is piloting an employment program for youth who are at the acute end of the unstably connected group (i.e., substance abuse and/or mental health concerns, street life entrenchment) and who are already participating in other Alex programming. Many of these youth are receiving Intensive Case Management (ICM) from a team of doctors, nurses, social workers, and other professionals. The goals of the pilot program are modest: While some youth might secure employment, it is hoped that most will acquire some workplace skills to become more employable in the future, should their lives stabilize, and perhaps take some high school level courses through the on-site school support program.¹ To move them further along the employability continuum may require a full-scale Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, which is an evidence-based intervention for adults with psychiatric illnesses, and can be used to help homeless young adults by more deliberately combining employment and clinical services.¹

Excluding the most disadvantaged/chronically disconnected job seekers and the unstably connected job seekers with high acuity, effective employment training programs for vulnerable youth fall into three models: the Foyer Model, social enterprise programs, and supportive employment training, which might be described as “IPS Lite.”

The Foyer Model is similar to the most current version of the Housing First model for homeless youth, and it is not of interest in this paper. The social enterprise model, which offers promise, is described briefly, for informational purposes, at the end of this section. Of most interest in the current discussion is supportive employment training, which is most suitable for the low acuity, unstably connected young adult population that comprises the majority of the vulnerable NEET population in Calgary.

Supportive employment training initiatives work to enhance the employability of young people who face multiple challenges integrating into the labour market. Such programs are not intended or designed for those who face ongoing addictions and mental health challenges nor, at the other end of the spectrum, educated youth who are struggling to find a job that matches their qualifications. Rather, they target vulnerable NEET youth with low human and social capital and provide them with the necessary skills to prepare them to successfully compete for and keep jobs; “in a sense, to ‘work their way out of poverty.’” Such training usually involves a combination of ‘hard skills’ – technical skills for jobs, such as computer training, trades etc., – and ‘soft skills’ – that focus on work readiness including job search and interview strategies, or how to manage conflict with other employees or managers.”³² The idea is to incorporate workplace, life, and essential skills training into one integrated program delivery model that also includes 24/7 wraparound supports to address crisis situations, personal and family counselling, and long-term coaching and mentoring, well after the young person has found employment.

Case studies profiling different types of effective employment programs for lower acuity, unstably connected youth are provided in the next section. These case studies have been selected because they so clearly illuminate both the challenges and rewards of implementing best and promising practices, as follows.

Successful supportive employment training programs for vulnerable youth may include three components, depending on participants’ level of vulnerability or acuity:

- Employment readiness preparation:
 - (i) daily life skills training (core skills (numeracy, literacy, technology); independent living skills (budgeting, grocery shopping, setting up a bank account, keeping appointments, etc.);
 - (ii) social skills (communication, anger management, dealing with interpersonal conflict, etc.) (The Homeless Hub, 2015c, p. 1).
- Skills training development:
 - (i) job search skills - resume, cover letter, and interview preparation, etc.;
 - (ii) work certifications such as Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), Serving It Right, Occupational First Aid Level 1, Food Safe, etc.
- Employment Placement Facilitation
 - Work experience placements with either employer partners or non-affiliated employers.³³

As demonstrated by the case studies, successful initiatives may also include intensive personal supports. A key feature of all three of the Canadian programs targeting vulnerable youth are support workers, who are available to participants 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide support, advice about, and assistance with any issue whatsoever that arises in the young person's life.

A few words about social enterprises to employ vulnerable youth

There is some emerging evidence that social enterprises may be a promising way of employing and improving the workplace skills of vulnerable youth, most notably those who are not among the most disadvantaged job seekers. While most Canadian social enterprises don't generate enough revenue to cover expenses,³⁴ they are used around the world with many types of vulnerable populations to provide them with employment training and placement that is integrated with clinical and other social services within a supportive setting.³⁵

Several organizations, most notably the McCreary Centre Society in Vancouver, have recently been touting the use of social enterprise as a strategy to help youth facing barriers to employment connect to long term jobs and career paths.³⁶ Although there are few comprehensive or long-term studies that have evaluated the outcomes of the social enterprise model to determine its effectiveness, there is a growing body of anecdotal evidence and various program-level evaluations that suggest that social enterprises have been successful in producing positive employment outcomes for vulnerable youth. An Alberta example is the Redemptive Developments non-profit organization established by the Jasper Place Wellness Centre in Edmonton. The organization runs several inter-related businesses, including junk removal and mattress recycling, which provide entry-level jobs and training to hundreds of individuals who may be joining the work force for the first time, or have had trouble finding secure work for a multitude of different reasons. They receive no external funding and are beginning to turn a small profit. Although they have not been tracking employee outcomes longitudinally, anecdotal evidence and the fact that many individuals have worked with them for several years, moving up the ladder of responsibility, indicates positive outcomes for some participants. It should be noted that almost all employees are in their twenties; they don't hire teenagers.³⁷

According to Canada's Social Enterprise Catalyst (<http://www.secatalyst.ca>), a social enterprise uses business strategies to maximize its social, environmental, or cultural impact. A social enterprise is distinguished from other types of businesses, non-profits, and government agencies by the following criteria:

- Addressing a cultural, social, or environmental need is the principle goal of the organization, which serves the common good through its products and services or through offering employment to people who face barriers to mainstream employment;
- Commercial activity is a strong revenue driver, whether a significant earned income stream within non-profit's mixed revenue portfolio, or as a for-profit enterprise;
- The common good is its primary purpose, literally 'baked into' the organization's DNA;
- Surpluses and profits are principally reinvested into its social, cultural, or environmental mandate.

4.1 Employment program case studies

4.1.1 Canadian programs targeting vulnerable youth

Train for Trades, provided by Choices for Youth in St. John's, Newfoundland

Choices for Youth (CFY) describes itself as “an organization that works with young people who have experienced and continue to experience substantial barriers and trauma in their lives. The organization was founded in 1990 as a response to an identified need among youth, the community, and government to have an empowerment-based program available to youth. CFY provides young people with the tools and opportunities they need to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from leading healthy and stable lives.”³⁸

The primary goal of CFY's Train for Trades program is to transition youth aged 16 to 21 from dependency on income support and other government programs to “long -term, sustainable, and viable employment.”³⁹

Train for Trades begins with two weeks of safety training and certification at a local carpenters' college, after which participants move to a 42-week work placement that is accompanied by life skills training such as budgeting, how to maintain a job, and essential skills training (definition and details not available). At present, all work placements are with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to complete home energy efficiency retrofits.⁴⁰

A key component of the program are the support workers, who are available to participants 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to provide support, advice about, and assistance with any issue whatsoever that arises in the young person's life, whether or not it relates to the program.⁴¹ Youth may also access transitional housing and supportive housing and physical and mental health care, if required.⁴²

Results

Of the 10 youth who registered in the program pilot in 2008, two immediately secured jobs in the construction industry and three were accepted in post-secondary programs.

A subsequent, unpublished 2011 evaluation⁴³ found that, of the youth who completed Train for Trades Phases I and II (number not provided)

- 26% secured work in trades-related fields (e.g., abatement, flooring)
- 21% pursued post-secondary education
- 10% graduated from a trades-related postsecondary program and were pursuing trades-related work
- 16% secured work in an unrelated field
- 21% were unemployed but eligible for employment insurance because of their completion of the Train for Trades program
- 42% of youth *who took part (number not provided)* in the first two years of the program sought support for addictions

BladeRunners, provided by Aboriginal Community Career and Employment Services Society (ACCESS) and other organizations in British Columbia

Founded in 1994, BladeRunners is probably the best known and largest youth employment program in Canada. Founded and delivered in Vancouver and, now, elsewhere in B.C., it is a construction and, more recently, hospitality, employment readiness program for vulnerable youth aged 16, 17, 18, or 19 (depending on location) to 30 years. Because about 90% of participants are Indigenous, Indigenous cultures, practices, and traditions are embedded in the program. Since 2001, BladeRunners has served about 6,800 youth. BladeRunners is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and BC Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training.⁴⁴

Eligible youth are not in school or employment or are under-employed, not receiving Employment Insurance (EI), living in B.C., and experiencing barriers to employment (lack of experience or certification, financial hardship, lack of tools and equipment, lack of social supports: family, friends, community).⁴⁵

Program components are four weeks of training followed by job placement, with job coach support at all times. Job coaches provide support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and do whatever it takes to help the youth get to work, do their jobs, and manage their personal lives and issues. Former participants often remain involved with the program and sometimes serve as mentors to new participants.⁴⁶ Training consists of four components:

- (i) basic life skills, including workplace etiquette and expectations, home life and maintenance, and money management, and Indigenous cultures, practices, and traditions;
- (ii) health and safety training and certifications (including WHMIS, several types of first aid certification);
- (iii) under strict supervision, learning and practicing power tool handling and maintenance on job sites; and
- (iv) “enhancement” training, where participants are given the opportunity to branch out from traditional construction into different roles and learn new skills (e.g., flagging (traffic control) and forklift training).

Following the successful completion of all four components of the training, participants are placed on an actual job site in a permanent position, which is intended to set them on a long-term career path. When this doesn’t happen, participants are eligible to try again with another placement.

Results

It appears that the only BladeRunners program to have been formally evaluated is ACCESS BladeRunners in Vancouver, where the program originated. The evaluation concluded that all the 37 participants across three program sessions improved their employment skills, although the types of skills and ways in which they were assessed is not known. Employment outcomes were not tracked.⁴⁷

ACCESS BladeRunners keeps careful statistics on participants’ progress and outcomes. Before and after program participation, participants complete Canada’s Test of Workplace Essential Skills (“the TOWES test”), which includes nine skill domains including numeracy, writing, document handling, and reading. (Changes in test scores were not provided.) Follow-up conducted at three, six, and 12 months post-program indicate a “successful job placement rate of 75%,” although this was not defined.⁴⁸

The program identifies partnerships with the private sector and unions to transition youth into long-term employment and 24/7 support from coordinators as the program’s keys to success.⁴⁹

Toronto Youth Job Corps (TYJC), provided by JVS Toronto, West Neighbourhood House (formerly St. Christopher’s House), and West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre in Toronto

TYJC is a paid employment program designed to connect NEET youth aged 16 to 29 to the work place through employment, school and/or training. Initiated in 1983 and continuously revised over time, TYJC is administered by the City of Toronto and is currently delivered by three community agencies selected through an open request for proposals process. The number of youth served each year increased from about 150 in 2016 to 400-500 in 2017 and 2018, thanks to a funding increase.⁵⁰

The program has four components:

- in-house workshops tailored to participant needs;
- community painting projects to simulate work environments and develop basic employment skills;
- up to 24 weeks paid work experience with employers; and
- individualized client-centred case management to meet participant needs and career goals.

Specifics about each component are not readily available. Participants are paid based on attendance, up to 35 hours per week at minimum wage.⁵¹

“The program also supports improved youth service coordination by working in partnership with employers, training providers, community organizations, schools and governments in providing group-based employment skills intervention to youth who have a sporadic or non-existent employment history.”⁵²

TYJC employs a holistic case management approach that is client-centred and able to support youth facing multiple barriers with the comprehensive life skills support they need to prepare for employment, maintain their placements and navigate concerns in other areas of their lives. These program components are proven key success factors of the TYJC model while addressing youth unemployment in Toronto.⁵³

Results

- In a nine-year period from 2006 to 2015, TYJC provided pre-employment training to 1,880 youth: 879 youth obtained employment, and 399 youth returned to school or participated in skill development opportunities.
- Program data show that in 2015-2016, TYJC engaged 57 employers who provided 175 youth with on-the-job training opportunities through 175 subsidized job placements. Of the 57 participating employers, 10.5% were restaurants, 26% from the not-for-profit sector, 17.5% from retail, 28% from the service sector, 9% from construction/manufacturing, and 9% from other industries. In that year, 265 youth started the program and 202 youth completed the program, although information on employment and other outcomes were not available.
- In 2016-2017, 184 (70%) out of 263 youth participants who enrolled in the TYJC program were expected to return to school or to secure employment.
- For the 2017-2020 contract year service levels were expected to increase to an additional 1320 youth served.⁵⁴

4.1.2 Employment and Social Development Canada's Pay For Success demonstration project

Pay for Success demonstration project, multiple partners in Manitoba and Nova Scotia⁵⁵

Pay for Success is the first Canadian test of a “pay for performance” model for essential skills delivery (as defined by the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES)). It is one of the initiatives launched by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) under its social innovation initiative, which began in 2012. Pay For Success was different from most employment programs in two ways:

- “Pay for performance” means that the service provider received outcome-based funding, in this case, funding not only for employment outcomes, particularly for long-term employment and retention, but also for helping job seekers reach a series of intermediate indicators (or milestones) believed to be associated with progress towards sustainable employment.
- The model also incorporated a “demand-informed lens that focused on preparing job seekers for quality jobs in high-growth industries and sectors. This dual customer approach was intended to align training with job seeker needs while also preparing them to meet the needs of employers in specific sectors, thus ensuring that job placements provided benefits for both employers and job seekers.”⁵⁶

Different variations on the model were tested in three locations:

- Opportunities for Employment (OFE) in Winnipeg implemented a sector-focused, “dual customer” model with integrated Essential Skills and technical training, and served primarily married new immigrant and Canada-born participants (51% Indigenous) aged 30 to 50 years who had a high school diploma or post-secondary education.
- PATH Employability Centre (PATH), a service provided by the Winnipeg North End Community Renewal Corporation, implemented a “Ready to Learn” model for those with complex and severe barriers to employment, most of whom were over the age of 40, 67% of whom had not completed high school; and 65% of whom were Indigenous (no immigrants).
- Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), in partnership with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia and Wagmatcook First Nations, implemented a post-secondary education model that connected learners to in-demand sectors. In this cluster of programs, most participants were under the age of 30, all were single, and many had not completed high school and had been unemployed for more than a year.

The key components of the model were as follows:

- Needs assessment and service planning (Milestone 1). Participants began with a needs assessment that includes essential skills, other employability skills, and work readiness. This assessment determines the participant’s starting point which defines the number and type of payable milestones along a job seeker’s pathway that a service provider is eligible to receive. As a job seeker’s distance from the labour market increases, so does the number of milestones associated with his/her pathway. Drawing on the assessment results and reflecting the demand-led approach of the model, providers and participants develop a service plan outlining what steps they need to take to achieve employment in a specific industry/occupation.
- Employment preparation (Milestones 2 and 3). Participants’ specific employment preparation activities depend on the steps outlined in their plans. People who are “more distant from the labour market” may begin with “Ready to Learn” programming (Milestone 2), which prepares them for career development and further learning. People who are closer to the labour market may skip the Ready to Learn stage and directly enroll in industry-specific Essential Skills or technical training program or begin a work experience program (Milestone 3). People who are “work-ready” but need assistance securing employment may begin with job matching and placement services.
- Placement and retention (Milestones 4, 5, 6 and 7). When a participant is deemed work-ready, they work with the service provider to identify employment opportunities. The first employment milestone (Milestone 4) is payable if the job seeker secures employment in the industry/ occupation specified in their Employment and Learning Plan. Further milestone payments are for sustained employment at 13, 26, and 52 weeks (Milestones 5-7). These milestones provide incentives for service providers to develop innovative and effective retention strategies.

Results

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) completed a five-year rigorous evaluation of Pay For Success in 2017.

- The programs had different outcomes. Among the OFE participants: Most experienced large gains in both essential skills and non-cognitive abilities; 93% completed the classroom portion of the program; 54% passed the subsequent technical training and productivity requirements and were hired by the employer partner. Of those hired, 64% were still employed at 12 months follow up. Overall, 35% of classroom graduates were hired by the employer partner and retained their job for at least 12 months.
- In addition, SRDC found that, in the OFE program, increases in (i) numeracy and document use skills and (ii) non-cognitive abilities and well-being measures (career adaptability measures, self-care and getting along with others, attitudes toward learning, social supports, and self-esteem) were linked with subsequent performance on the occupation-specific Essential Skills (OSES) assessment and ultimately with the productivity level required for employment purposes.
- Outcomes were more difficult to measure for the PATH and NSCC programs due to data collection problems. The NSCC program actually comprised three program models: Academic & Career Connections (ACC), Construction Association of Nova Scotia Works (CANS), and the Construction Trades Labour (CTL) program at Wagmatcook First Nations Learning Centre.
- For the ACC program, 72% of participants finished both terms of the program, but there was difficulty in getting participants to complete the essential skills questionnaires, so there weren't much data to analyze.
- For CANS and CTL, small groups of learners were enrolled into programs that combined classroom training with work placements, leading successful learners to certification and employment. CANS targeted job seekers with less than high school. Seven of the 13 enrollees were able to complete the two terms of class work, and six went on to complete their work placement and employment. Five of the 13 made full or partial gains in document use and/or numeracy. Data on hiring and retention were not properly collected.
- CTL targeted job seekers with high school. All six enrollees were able to complete the two terms of class work and all six went on to complete their work placement. Four of the six had full or partial gains in document use and/or numeracy. Data on hiring and retention were not properly collected.

Two key lessons learned:

- All providers were able to translate the model into a set of concrete services, but the development and implementation process took time – more than a year for some providers and model components.
- All providers experienced serious challenges and set-backs in collecting data, which led to service provider stress and increased evaluation costs.

An important recommendation arising from the evaluation of the Pay For Success demonstration project is as follows: "Before implementing a Pay For Success model, we recommend a 'learning period' to understand and build provider capacity to not only develop new services but also participate in the measurement of resulting outcomes. Investing in provider ability to track outcomes would i) significantly reduce the expenses associated with third-party data collection, and ii) allow providers to more immediately see and connect with participant progress. A thorough provider needs analysis could build on existing data collection and tracking tools, and if necessary incorporate the development of new tools and resources and training in their use."⁵⁷

NOTE: SDRC has released the interim evaluation of the Foundations Workplace Skills Project (FWSP), another ESCD employment demonstration project that is not specifically targeting youth. This program appears to improve non-cognitive abilities and well-being measures and the basic essential skills (document, reading, and numeracy) for participants in general, but only improved employment outcomes for university graduates, the majority of whom were recent immigrants. The big success story of this program is its ability to help recent immigrants with a university education from their home countries move away from unskilled low-wage work into high-wage jobs commensurate with their levels of education.

4.1.3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Young Adults Internship Program

Young Adult Internship Program, multiple providers in New York City (YAIP)⁵⁸

The Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) is part of a large evaluation funded by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) called the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED), which is testing various subsidized employment strategies in several cities across the country. The STED Evaluation is being completed by MDRC along with its research partners MEF Associates, Decision Information Resources, and Branch Associates.

YAIP is a workforce development program in New York for NEET youth aged 16 to 24 who are living in poverty. "In theory, the YAIP target population is not so disadvantaged that they need extensive wraparound services but disadvantaged enough to require the support of a program to acquire the skills and experience needed to improve their labor market prospects and give them a 'jump start' back into productive activity. YAIP is a multiphase program that enrolls youth in cohorts, with a new cohort starting every four months; participants in a particular cohort move through the program together. Each community-based YAIP provider is responsible for enrolling and serving a portion of the full cohort, usually about 30 young adults each."

The program's three phases are as follows:

- Phase 1: During the first two to four weeks of the program (duration varies by provider), youth attend daily five-hour workshops facilitated by program staff at provider offices, for which they are paid minimum wage for 25 hours per week. The goals of orientation are to prepare participants for the workplace by providing various job-readiness and personal development activities, to lay a foundation for cohort cohesion using icebreakers and group activities, and to match participants' interests and skills with an available and appropriate internship.
- Phase 2: During the 10 to 12 weeks of this phase, youth are expected to work 20 hours a week in their internship placement and continue to earn minimum wage. Their earnings are fully subsidized. The goals of internship placements vary based on the particular needs of young people, but generally include work experience, development of soft or hard skills, career exploration, and potential transition from a subsidized internship to a permanent, unsubsidized position. Once a week, youth are required to return to the provider offices to attend five-hour educational workshops, for which they are also paid minimum wage. These workshops cover topics including job readiness, healthy living, money and time management, and conflict resolution.
- Phase 3: The nine months following youths' completion of their internship is the follow-up phase of YAIP. During this time, providers are expected to help participants secure and maintain an "outcome placement." Outcome placements include participation in unsubsidized employment, education, training, or the military. Providers also offer support services during this phase, including housing assistance, counseling, and transportation assistance, among other types of support.

Results

A longitudinal, quasi-experimental evaluation completed in 2017 by MDRC reported that:

- 75% of participants worked in a subsidized internship and 86 % of those youth completed the internship.
- The program group was more likely than the control group to have worked during the year following random assignment, but the employment rates of the two groups converged during the quarters after the YAIP internships ended.
- The program group had higher earnings than the control group. While largest during the time when program group members were working in paid internships, these earnings impacts persisted throughout the follow-up period, suggesting that program group members may have obtained better jobs than control group members.
- There was no significant difference between the program and control groups in completing a high school diploma, but program group members were slightly more likely to enroll in a post-secondary institution. Post-secondary completion was not tracked.

5. Suggested evaluation plan outline, overarching questions, indicators, and instruments for the vulnerable youth employment initiative

The suggested evaluation plan is based on a review of all or most of the publicly-available evaluations of employment programs for hard-to-employ adolescents and young adults in Canada and the U.S. over the past two decades.

It is recommended that the new Calgary employment initiative for vulnerable Calgary youth include a comprehensive evaluation plan that tracks an array of employment outcomes, but also tracks employability skills gains, sometimes referred to as milestones, during and after program participation. Because this is a new initiative and data collection can be undertaken from the outset, it will be possible to use good, standardized measures and, ideally, a comparison group.

Canada's Expert Panel on Youth Employment recommended the development of "a holistic definition of skills and competencies needed for a constantly evolving workplace" that reflect "globally accepted attributes needed for the modern workplace" and make it possible to assess the impact of education and youth employment programs, as such does not currently exist.

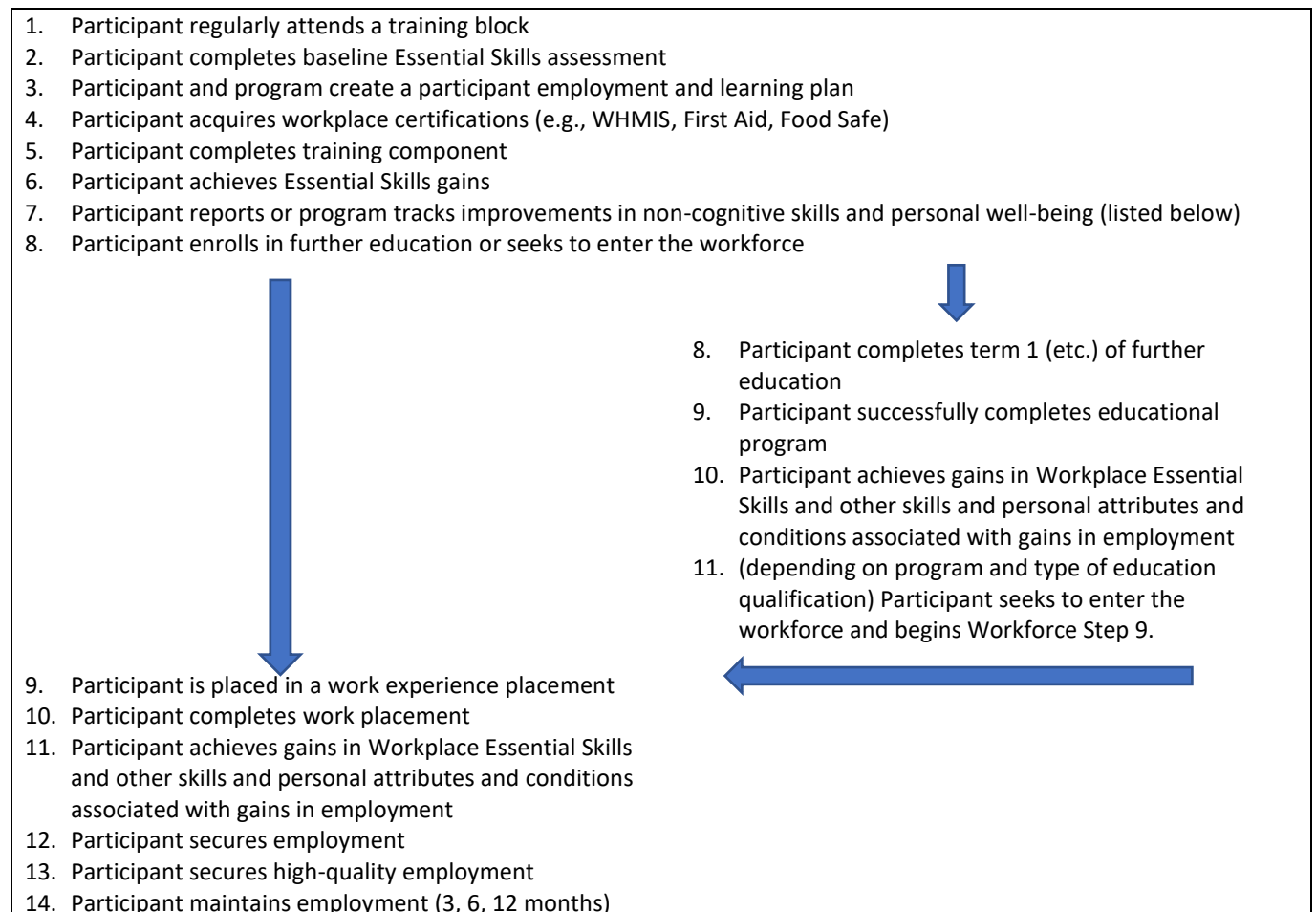
For immediate purposes, however, a lot of good work to identify appropriate measures has been undertaken in the past few years by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to evaluate initiatives launched by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) under its social innovation initiative, which began in 2012. While the ESDC initiatives have not targeted vulnerable young people in particular, SRDC's approach, supplemented with a few additional sets of indicators suitable for highly vulnerable youth, would allow for thorough assessment of and revisions to the program in its first few years, comparison of results against those of the government-led programs, and better information than other community-based programs in demonstrating success, which is often useful in obtaining funding and donations. Calgary can emerge as a leader in this field.

Overarching process and impact evaluation questions might include:

1. Was the program delivered in accordance with research-identified best practices?
 - Attention to/efforts to overcome the six key barriers to youth employment and workforce integration:
 - lack of labour market information for youth and a lack of employment data for policy-makers
 - perceived reluctance by employers across Canada to hire young people
 - uncertainty faced by young people about both a rapidly changing world of work and an increasing number of young people who find themselves in less-stable part-time and/or contract employment
 - inadequate preparation for the workplace and requisite life skills to succeed
 - systemic and indirect discrimination experienced by marginalized youth
 - a lack of resources for Indigenous youth
 - included employment readiness preparation, skills training development, and employment placement;
 - facilitated the development of real, marketable skills, ideally based on labour market trends and an evolving workplace and economy;
 - featured strong corporate or union involvement;
 - included opportunities for educational advancement; and, for highly vulnerable youth, included:

- individualized case management and targeting and supporting special needs, such as mental health or addictions issues; possibly training in independent living skills
2. Was participation in this program associated with gains in Workplace Essential Skills and other skills and personal attributes and conditions associated with gains in employment?
 3. What was the size of the impact (quantified effect size) of participation on Workplace Essential Skills and other skills and personal attributes and conditions associated with gains in employment over time (before, during, after, and at 12 months follow-up) on participants and relative to the comparison group?
 4. Was participation in this program associated with gains in employment and retention and with quality of employment (at various points including 12 months post hiring)?
 5. What was the size of the impact (quantified effect size) of participation gains in employment and retention and with quality of employment (at various points including 12 months post hiring)?
 6. What participant features (e.g., age, gender, education level, employment history) and which program features (TBD as program develops but should include “dose” of participation) were correlated with or predictive of outcomes?

Examples of possible milestones (not including the most basic pre-employment readiness outcomes, like independent living skills) might include:



The following list of suggested domains and indicators would allow for the collection of data to answer the impact evaluation questions and draws on several SRDC and other evaluations.

- 1. Non-cognitive abilities and well-being measures** (via standardized questionnaires)
 - Personal well-being (questionnaire not specified but there are several options)
 - Attitudes Toward Learning
 - Social supports
 - Self-esteem
 - Life satisfaction
 - Mental and physical health, addictions items (one item each)
 - Community functioning (World Health Organization’s Community Functioning Scale, in the public domain (which asks questions about ability to concentrate, remember, solve problems, communicate with others, deal with people, maintain relationships))
 - Understanding and thinking
 - Self-care
 - Getting along with others
 - Career adaptability measures (questionnaires available, permission may be required)
 - Job search clarity
 - Job search self-efficacy
 - Career planning
 - Career decision-making self-efficacy
- 2. Essential Skills**
 - Basic skills: document use, reading, numeracy (entry-level assessment for benchmarking clients' skills for foundational or remedial training programs, or Levels 2 and 3, intermediate, often used for entrance into training, employment or as a prior learning assessment. (Canadian Test of Workplace Essential Skills, “TOWES”)
 - Industry-specific Essential Skills (TOWES)
 - Math and reading skill use and maintenance post training component
 - Employer-rated (work experience placement or employment or both) workplace skills and satisfaction with participant (domains such as task competence, dependability, initiative, social behaviour) (questionnaire options: Generic Work Behavior Questionnaire (GWBQ); the BELS Checklist for Developing Learners’ Employability Skills; there may be others)
- 3. Employment**
 - Employment
 - Hours
 - Duration/permanence – specific items are available)
 - Employment suitability
 - skills and education match
 - match with industry-specific technical training
 - employee satisfaction
 - Retention (3, 6, 12 months – at least xx (TBD) hours per week)
 - Wages
 - Job quality (specific items are available)
 - Permanence/duration
 - Work conditions/safety
 - Employee benefits

APPENDIX

Figure 5. Numbers and percentages of Alberta youth who were not in education, training, or employment, excluding those who are not in the labour force, January 2017

	Total in age group	Unemployed and not in school: Number within age group and gender	Unemployed and not in school: Percent within total age group and gender	Unemployed and not in school and not in labour force: Number within age group and gender	Unemployed and not in school and not in labour force: Percent within total age group and gender
15-24 M	263.3	19.0	7.2%	29.4	11.2%
15-24 F	247.7	7.6	3.1%	24.4	9.9%
	511.0	26.6	5.2%	53.8	10.5%
15-16 M	46.6	x	x	x	x
15-16 F	44.1	x	x	x	x
17-18 M	48.2	1.5	3.2%	3.9	8.1%
17-18 F	50.5	x	x	3.0	5.9%
			98.7		
19-20 M	51.4	4.8	9.4%	6.8	13.3%
19-20 F	43.7	1.8	4.1%	5.6	12.8%
			95.1		
21-22 M	58.0	6.7	11.6%	8.2	14.2%
21-22 F	57.0	3.5	6.1%	8.4	14.7%
			115		
23-24 M	59.1	6.0	10.2%	10.5	17.8%
23-24 F	52.4	2.3	4.3%	7.4	14.2%

Figure 6. Percentages of Alberta youth who were not in education, training, or employment, excluding those who are not in the labour force, January 2017 (Numbers for youth aged 15-16 and females 17-18 were below the confidentiality threshold)

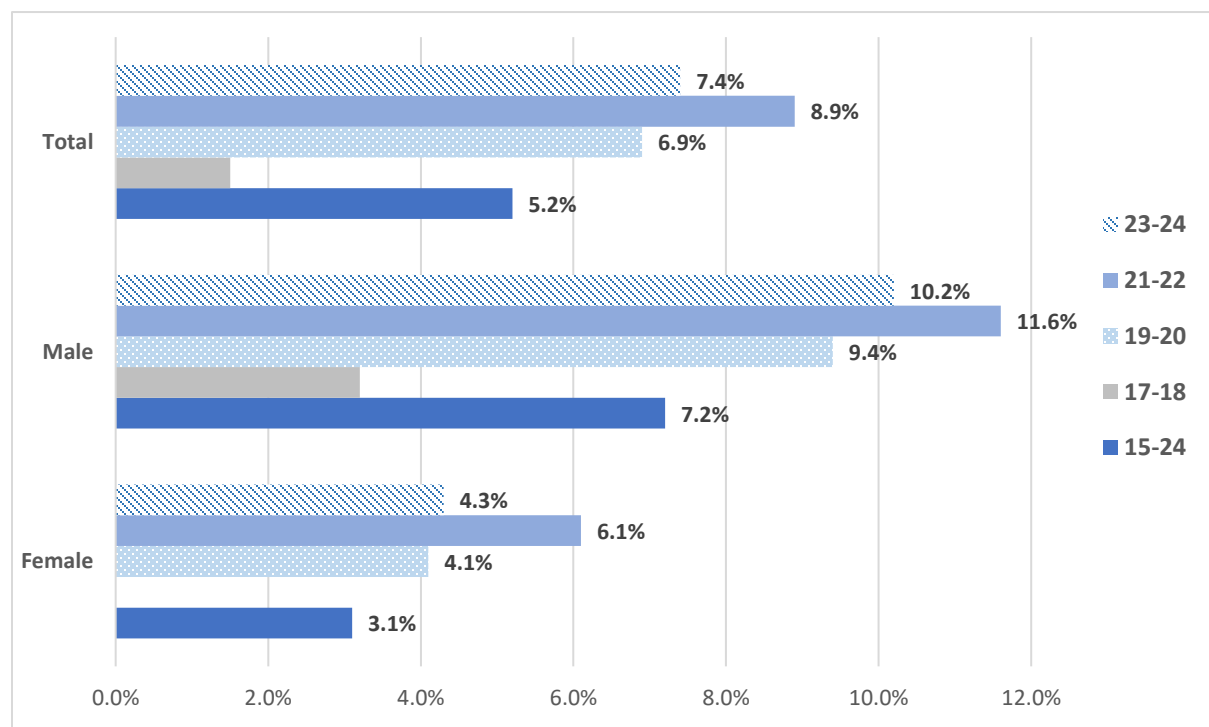


Figure 7. Highest level of education, Alberta youth aged 15-24 years, January 2017

	Total		Less than high school		High school diploma		Some post-secondary		Post secondary non-university		University degree	
	# (000s)	%	# (000s)	%	# (000s)	%	# (000s)	%	# (000s)	%	# (000s)	%
Male (age)												
15 to 16	46.6	100%	45.7	98.1%	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
17 to 18	48.2	100%	32.0	66.4%	12.6	26.1%	3.5	7.3%	x	x	x	x
19 to 20	51.4	100%	6.1	11.9%	29.3	57.0%	12	23.3%	4.1	8.0%	x	x
21 to 22	58.0	100%	4.2	7.2%	27.6	47.6%	13.2	22.8%	12.3	21.2%	x	x
23 to 24	59.1	100%	5.5	9.3%	22.8	38.6%	5	8.5%	17.5	29.6%	8.3	14.0%
Female (age)												
15 to 16	44.1	100%	43.0	97.5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
17 to 18	50.5	100%	30.5	60.4	12.2	24.2%	7.2	14.3%	x	x	x	x
19 to 20	43.7	100%	4.8	11.0%	19.7	45.1%	13.8	31.6%	5.3	12.1%	x	x
21 to 22	57.0	100%	3.9	6.8%	19.7	34.6%	16	28.1%	11.9	20.9%	5.5	9.6%
23 to 24	52.4	100%	2.6	5.0%	16.8	32.1%	4.5	8.6%	14.5	27.7%	14	26.7%

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