



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

A report on the status of youth employment in Mississauga



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Our Vision

**Mississauga
will be a Healthy
City of people
with optimal
physical, mental
and spiritual
health.**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Healthy City Stewardship Centre (HCSC) formed in 2004, bringing together key decision-making organizations from all sectors in Mississauga and the Region of Peel around a central vision: a city of people with optimal physical, mental and spiritual health. HCSC has been a driving force for 12 years, focused on actualizing health initiatives and identifying opportunities for systemic, cross-sectoral transformation. The collective has received international recognition, including a World Leadership Award for excellence in leadership. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of member organizations.)

We, the members of HCSC, believe that Mississauga has a unique story within the larger community of the Region of Peel and of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Our report will concentrate on Mississauga, a city of over 760,000 people,¹ which accounts for over 55 per cent of the population of Peel.² However, the majority of the most relevant data on the city relative to our report exists within statistics representing the entirety of the Region of Peel, which also includes the City of Brampton and Town of Caledon. For this reason, a large proportion of our data has been sourced from the 2011 Federal Census, where Mississauga is represented as part of the Region of Peel.²

Mississauga is geographically central, with several 400-series highways in close proximity and a busy international airport contributing to a prosperous economy and successful business growth over the past 40 years. There are more than 140,000 businesses in Peel, or about 10 per cent of all businesses in Ontario.

These factors, along with vibrant residential neighbourhoods amid a vast and diverse cultural landscape, continue to make Mississauga a sought-after location to live, work and enjoy recreation. Every year, Peel welcomes more than 30,000 newcomers to our vibrant

and diverse communities, many of whom settle permanently in Mississauga. As of 2011, 52.9 per cent of Mississauga's population was made up of immigrants, further adding to the rich culture of the city.³

This rapid growth creates many economic and cultural opportunities for the people who live here, but funding has not increased to match the rise in population. Peel now serves 1.3 million people, 28% more than a decade ago. By 2035, the seniors' population is expected to triple, and the child population is expected to almost double.² Yet the current funding model for social and community health services has changed little since 1980, when Peel served only 467,000 people.⁴

The funding gap threatens to undermine the long-term health and vitality of our community. We, the members of HCSC are committed to working collaboratively to close these gaps. Our intention is to mobilize collective action and with the support of our government partners to ensure our residents have the same opportunities, access to services and possibilities for optimal health as our neighbours across Ontario. We believe youth employment is the place to start.

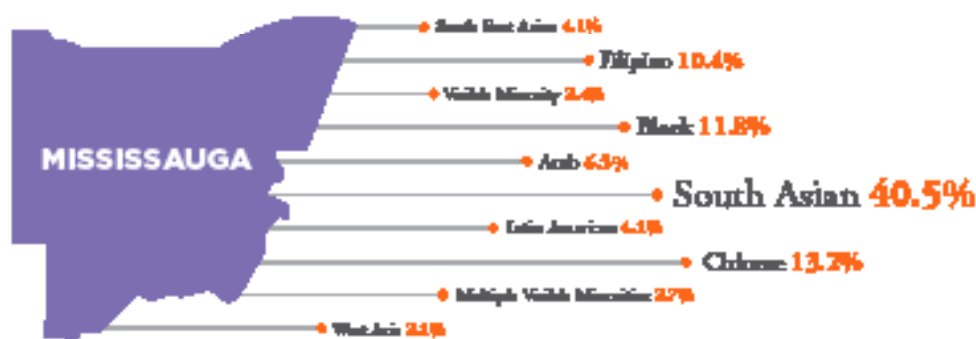
Our report outlines the work we have conducted over the past year to understand the issues underlying youth unemployment in Mississauga, summarizes our findings and provides an action plan for a city-wide, coordinated and focused effort to ensure our young people are learning, working and contributing to their highest potential. We believe it is important to nurture this crucial renewable resource to ensure businesses have access to a vibrant pool of young workers with the right skills to ensure a healthy foundation to support not only continued economic growth but also continued social health, diversity and cultural vibrancy in our community.



28% more than
a decade ago

1.3 million people in the Peel Region

Top 10 Visible Minorities in Mississauga



Statistics Canada National Household Survey 2011



TOP BARRIERS IDENTIFIED

Through our research, we identified the top barriers to youth employment in Mississauga and recognized that they could be grouped under three categories: System, Youth and Employers. Each of these categories presents its own specific challenges and opportunities. We believe change must occur within each of these categories, with the respective stakeholders taking ownership to address these significant barriers.

System

Lack of connectivity between sectors

Lack of access to meaningful mentorship opportunities

Stigma towards trades and other non-professional careers paths

Racialized/marginalized youth & youth with disabilities experience discrimination

Potential employers underestimate the value of youth employees

Lack of opportunities to showcase skills & personality to potential employers due to lack of work experience

Youth

Lack of awareness about how to access existing services

Lack of understanding of hiring process, relationship-building and applied skills

Widespread anxiety and a lack of confidence

Racialized/marginalized youth & youth with disabilities experience discrimination

Stigma towards trades and other non-professional careers paths

Employers

Potential employers underestimate the value of youth employees

Small and medium-sized enterprises lack resources to onboard and train youth

Lack of opportunities to showcase skills & personality to employers due to lack of work experience

HCSC RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations have been carefully devised to encompass the voices of the many stakeholders we have engaged. They are designed to complement and enhance the extensive and very important work being done to address youth unemployment in Mississauga, understanding that by championing this work and leveraging the successes of those performing it, we are broadening the collective responsibility and building a complete system for the youth in our community to rely on.

System

Improved system connectivity:

- Knit together existing programs offered by educational institutions, employers and youth employment support services.
- Provide a central portal to information.
- Create streamlined knowledge for agencies, youth, parents/guardians and education systems.
- Support the work of existing agencies.
- Enhance alignment of existing work to increase efficiency in the system.

Youth

Develop a targeted campaign geared towards disadvantaged youth, including racialized and disabled youth:

- Create streamlined knowledge for agencies, youth, parents/guardians and education systems.
- Use technology to connect youth with job opportunities and mentors.
- Promote job readiness for youth and businesses:
 - Prepare youth to understand the role of the employee and how to find and compete for positions;
 - Help small businesses understand how to become active mentors to young employees, fostering employee commitment to the business;
 - Encourage and participate in community networking events.
- Provide parents/guardians with resources and opportunities to support the educational and career pathways of their children.

Employers

Create experiential opportunities for youth:

- Assist youth in development of soft skills, networking and securing work experience.
- Explore and test opportunities for youth job-sharing between small-medium businesses:
 - Creates a low-risk “try and buy” opportunity for the business and/or a possible pipeline for filling future positions.
- Promote job readiness for youth and businesses:
 - Prepare youth to understand the role of the employee and how to find and compete for positions;
 - Help small businesses understand how to become active mentors to young employees, fostering employee commitment to the business;
 - Encourage and participate in community networking events.
- Leverage funded programs such as Ontario’s Youth Job Connection:
 - Programs may include paid pre-employment training, job matching, paid work placements, mentorship services and/or education and work transition supports

EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE IN PEEL REGION

The global recession beginning in 2008 strongly impacted Mississauga and the entire Region of Peel with a decline in the labour force, an elevated unemployment rate and an increase in part-time employment coupled with a decrease in full-time employment, among other factors. Despite the end of the recession, the labour market continued to feel these impacts negatively through 2014.⁵

Historically, young workers are disproportionately affected during periods of recession and economic uncertainty. Due to a lack of experience, lesser seniority and fewer employment opportunities, those youth who are fortunate enough to find employment are often the first to be let go as businesses cut costs to survive the economic downturn.⁶

“In Canada, 10% of unemployed youth will remain unemployed for more than one year.”

Youth who are unemployed long-term or who lose their jobs may have the added disadvantage of little to no financial resources in order to support themselves during their job search. In turn, youth may feel forced to work in positions that are low-paid, part-time or contract, or well below their educational backgrounds and skills. This can lead to long-term underemployment or postponement of further education due to their need to meet immediate financial responsibilities such as rent or groceries.⁷

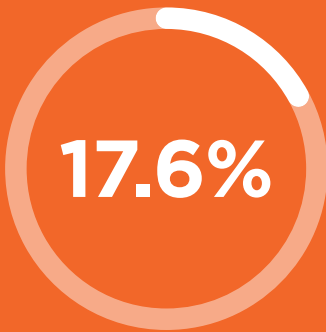
Since 2008, youth unemployment rates have been on the rise. In 2013 the national unemployment rate for the 15-24 age range was approximately 14%, double the national average.⁸ In Peel, the youth unemployment rate is even higher – 17% in the third quarter of 2014, representing more than 32,000 young people.⁹ It is anticipated that youth unemployment rates will continue to climb in our region as more young people are entering the job market than ever before. Thirty-six per cent more young people started looking for work in the first quarter of 2015 than in the first quarter of the previous year.¹⁰

Some young people - those who are Aboriginal, Black, disabled or experiencing mental illness, for example - face multiple barriers when they try to enter the workforce. In the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), the unemployment rate for Aboriginal youth between 15 and 19 was 35%; for Aboriginal youth between 20 and 24 it was 20%, according to 2011 statistics.¹¹

The most recent data available (2006) for young people with disabilities reveals a significant disadvantage. The Canadian unemployment rate for young people 15-19 with disabilities was 21.9% compared with the average of 15.9%; in the 20-24 age group, the unemployment rate for those with disabilities was 15.1% compared to 9.9%.¹²

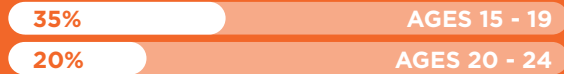
Youth is an important developmental stage when positive experiences like a supportive first job can make all the difference, yet many young people struggle for an extended period of time before finding work.

STATISTIC | PEEL REGION YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

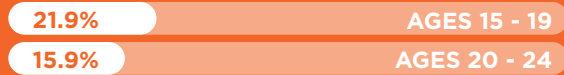


32,000 +
UNEMPLOYED YOUTH

UNEMPLOYED ABORIGINAL YOUTH



UNEMPLOYED YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES



UNEMPLOYED BLACK YOUTH



While joblessness at any age can negatively impact self-esteem and create significant stress, for young people there are significant long-term effects that are difficult to turn around. Studies have shown that youth who experience long-term unemployment are at greater risk for poverty, poor health and social exclusion throughout their lives.¹³

According to a 2013 report released by TD Economics, *Assessing the Long Term Cost of Youth Unemployment*, periods of unemployment for young people at the outset of their entry into the labour market are highly associated with continuously lower wages throughout their careers, a phenomenon known as “wage scarring.”¹⁴

The cost of today’s youth unemployment is paid not only by individual young people themselves. Our economy and society as a whole pay a price in terms of lost productivity, economic growth, and higher expenditures in health care and social supports.

The wage scarring resulting from the 2008 recession will lead to the loss of the equivalent of \$12.4 billion dollars from future earnings for Canadians who entered the workforce during that time.¹⁵ These workers, in return, will not have the opportunity to reinvest this money into the economy, nor will taxes be returned on the lost earnings, which might have supported much-needed government funded services across the country.

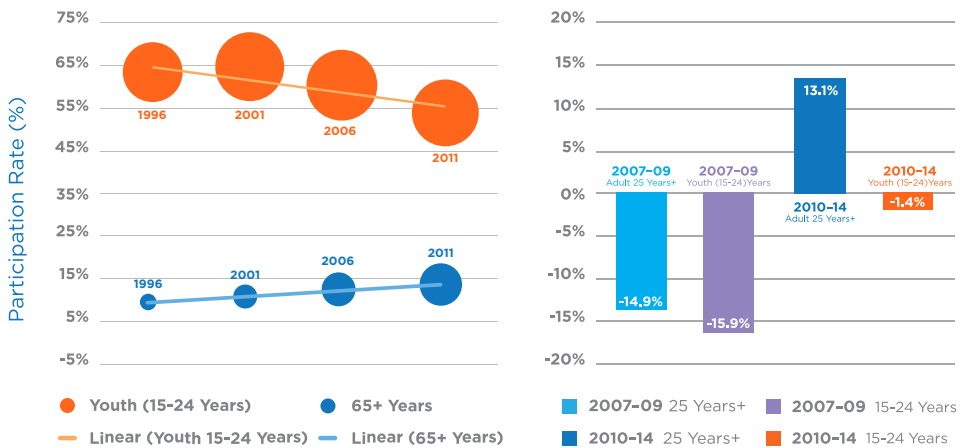
INVESTIGATING THE SITUATION

At its annual strategic planning retreat in November 2014, HCSC set youth unemployment at the top of its agenda for the coming year. We took a series of steps to understand the realities of job seeking for young people, to investigate the existing barriers to full-time, fulfilling employment for youth, to identify the supports currently available and to identify opportunities for our collective to provide support in filling the gaps. These activities gave us the foundation of understanding that enabled us to develop our recommendations for meaningful action.

Fact Finding

We conducted a scan of current and past data at the national, regional and local levels to get a clear demographic and statistical picture of youth employment. Academic research studies from across the globe as well as reports by social agencies in the GTHA contributed to the depth of our understanding (See Appendix 2 for a selected bibliography).

Youth Employment Conditions



- Proportionally less youth participating in Peel’s labour market
- Peel’s youth labour market has shown sustained employment loss since the recession
- Proportionally more persons 65 years and over participating in Peel’s labour market

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Characteristics (2014)

Several agencies including CivicAction, the Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, and the United Way of Peel Region's Black Advisory Council attended HCSC's fact-finding meetings to share their knowledge and bring the research to life.

We also compiled an analysis of existing youth employment support programs and employment readiness supports offered through HCSC members. We then reached beyond our membership to determine what else was available in the community to support youth who are either unemployed, underemployed or experiencing employment precarity. Several innovative programs were presented to us from across the GTHA, including Magnet, a job connection platform, CivicAction's Escalator: Jobs for Youth program, NPower Canada's jobs training program and Access Employment's mentoring program. We attended a number of events, including the City of Mississauga's Forum on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship where we had the opportunity to interact with and gather further information from an even broader group of local youth and businesses.

Interviews with key stakeholders who work with youth and/or within the employment sector were critical to gaining a further understanding of the challenges, patterns and attitudes surrounding today's youth and the issue of youth unemployment.

Youth Participation

HCSC recognized early in the process that we needed to engage with young people to develop an action plan for youth employment. We invited a diverse group, aged 16-30, to participate in a panel discussion in the spring of 2015. The meeting was lively, informative and inspiring and resulted in the panellists forming an ongoing Youth Advisory Council of HCSC.

Through our HCSC member organizations and community partners, we recruited 12 youth from Mississauga to share their stories, perceptions and ideas about youth unemployment. Over the course of three moderated panel discussions at HCSC

meetings, four Youth Advisory Council meetings and independent interviews with each member, the youth we engaged provided deep insight into the barriers and opportunities they most strongly associate with the issue of youth unemployment.

Employer and Business Participation

While the barriers and gaps identified through our conversations with youth were fundamental to creating our final recommendations in this report, it was essential to engage employers, experts in the employment sector and small-to-medium business owners to understand their behaviours and attitudes towards hiring youth employees.

“Engaging young people is absolutely central [to tackling the skills mismatch and solving youth unemployment], and more often than not, it is absent. And this is not only about listening, but involving them in processes and programme design.”

— Reeta Roy, chief executive of the Mastercard Foundation, quoted in *The Guardian*, Aug. 20, 2014

A moderated panel discussion with business owner-operators from Mississauga allowed us to hear directly from local employers about their diverse experiences bringing youth into the workplace as paid employees, co-op students and interns. The panellists openly shared both positive and negative perceptions and the discussion produced several insights and recommendations from the employers that enriched our understanding of the unique challenges and barriers experienced on the hiring end.



All of the youth we engaged experienced challenges and barriers to obtaining secure employment, regardless of their backgrounds.

THE IMPACT

**LONG-TERM
UNEMPLOYMENT**
(> 6 months)



POVERTY

**SOCIAL
EXCLUSION**

**FUTURE
EMPLOYMENT
INSTABILITY**

**LOSS OF
CONFIDENCE &
RESILIENCE**



**POOR PHYSICAL
HEALTH & CHRONIC
DISEASE**

**POOR MENTAL
HEALTH**

**HIGHER
CRIME RATES**

**LOST
PRODUCTIVITY**



**PRESSURE ON
HEALTH SYSTEMS**

**PRESSURE ON
POLICE SERVICES**

**PRESSURE ON
SOCIAL SERVICES**

**SKILL
SHORTAGE IN
LABOUR FORCE**

**SLOWER
ECONOMIC
GROWTH**

**PRESSURE
ON EDUCATION
SYSTEM**



THE COST OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The immediate cost to young people who are unemployed or underemployed is of course financial. HCSC Youth Advisory Council member Maame, 25, spent the first 18 months after graduating university working sporadically and looking for work. A recent newcomer to Canada, Maame was compelled to return to her native Ghana for a period of time in order to gain the much-needed work experience she wasn't able to find in the GTHA. She is grateful to have recently found work related to her field of study, and is enjoying the job. But it is part-time, only three days per week and she does not earn enough to cover her expenses. To make ends meet she also works a second job, when the work is available – but this is only occasional. Most months she takes home about \$1200 and out of that has to pay \$437 monthly towards her \$30,000 student loan. Her

financial situation is unsustainable and there is no immediate prospect of relief. While she pursues a full-time career in her chosen field, the financial instability and difficulty of balancing two jobs as well as additional family and personal responsibilities take their toll.

Those without jobs are even more financially challenged, which prevents young people from attaining independence and maturity. Financial hardship also becomes a barrier to seeking and finding work as the cost of a nice outfit for interviews and even the cost of bus fare can become prohibitive. Many young job seekers, particularly those who are experiencing poverty, lack the resources necessary to perform a simple job search.



Another member of our Youth Advisory Council, Travis, 30, is a single father and struggles to make ends meet as he cares for his 5-year-old son and relies on loans to put himself through a two-year college program. The time he spends caring for his child often means he doesn't have the time to spend

Lack of skill development and loss of existing skills become an issue for young people who are unemployed for a longer period, who are intermittently or only partially employed, or whose only work opportunities are in areas outside their career path.

“Youth unemployment creates ripples that extend broadly throughout our community and continue long into the future. Negative impacts are not limited to individual young people. Businesses, the economy and the health of society as a whole are affected when young people struggle to find a job, work only part-time or are underemployed.”

at his school's library using its computers to search for employment or check his email. When the majority of job applications are now submitted online and potential employees are expected to have easy access to email, this is a barrier that places a young man like Travis at a significant disadvantage.

Lauren, 25, another member of the Youth Advisory Council, grew up in Mississauga and graduated with a degree from a well-regarded university. Still, she struggled to find work in her chosen field of communications, instead working a series of lower-paying jobs unrelated to her education to pay down



student loans while living at home with her parents. Frustrated by the lack of opportunities despite her degree and mounting work experience, Lauren eventually decided to return to school full-time, this time accruing further student debt to take a hands-on post-graduate college program to enhance her skills. Through this program, Lauren secured an internship that led to a series of 3-month contracts within the organization where she has now earned a promotion and is in her second year of employment. Although Lauren feels fortunate to have a well-paid position where she is learning and advancing her career, she admits that continuing to remain on contract with no benefits can be difficult. Lauren is still living with her parents, with no immediate plan to move out on her own as the majority of her monthly earnings go toward her student loans.

Underneath these very tangible impacts are a variety of intangible ones. For youth who have grown up vulnerable to poverty, with few role models or mentors, or within unstable environments for a variety of potential reasons, overcoming the barriers to higher education and meaningful employment can seem insurmountable. While sharing his story with the HCSC collective, Travis, the young single father, affirmed that his circumstances make him feel trapped and hopeless. Underscoring the intangible value of positive, supportive mentors and inclusive communities, Travis then stated, “I never thought people like you [community leaders and senior leaders of influential organizations] would care about people like me. It really gives me hope”.

The negative psychological and social effects of being unemployed are well documented and can include loss of self-esteem, loss of confidence, anxiety and depression.¹⁷

When asked during one panel discussion whether they experience any of these effects, every single one of our Youth Advisory Council panellists said “yes”. In fact, whether or not they were presently employed, the panellists admitted feeling anxious

not only about finding meaningful employment, but also about retaining employment and the prospects for their generation overall as they continue to lose traction entering the workforce.

Even physical health can be detrimentally affected by joblessness at a young age. A recent Swedish study conducted a 14-year follow up of approximately 1,000 students leaving secondary school and concluded that early unemployment can contribute to adult health problems, specifically a higher rate of tobacco smoking and mental health symptoms.¹⁶

Another study, *A Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* (2008) found evidence that poor academic performance and poor overall achievement creates a “domino effect beginning with limited access to employment and snowballing into physical and mental health issues related to hopelessness and alienation and the establishment of racialized poverty.”¹⁷ These factors, coupled with social exclusion, nutritional and other health deficits resulting from poverty, poorly designed communities and a lack of economic opportunities for youth are directly related to an increased risk of violence among youth, according to the report.

The Cost to Society

There are clear economic costs associated with youth unemployment. We have also learned that youth unemployment can contribute to later health issues, which in turn has the potential to increase the burden on publically funded health care. Young people who are not earning also represent increased demand on social services. A study conducted by researchers from Columbia University and City University of New York estimated that the cumulative lifetime burden to society of youth who aren't in school or working is \$1 million per youth.¹⁸

Lost earnings also mean lower tax revenue to support government spending. The Canadian Council on Learning estimates the collective loss of tax revenue from high school dropouts – who experience

higher unemployment and lower wages – at \$15 billion over 35 years.⁶

Youth unemployment also has a direct negative impact on economic growth. A TD Bank study estimated that the underutilized capital represented by these workers will cost Canada billions of dollars over the next 18 years, or 1.5% of our GDP.²⁰ With a higher-than-national-average rate of youth unemployment, Mississauga will feel this impact even more significantly.

The Cost to Employers/Businesses

Many businesses already face a challenge finding employees with the right skills for the work available. Some are experiencing a generalized labour shortage. The skills gap is costing the economy approximately 3.75% of GDP per year, according to a 2013 study by the Conference Board of Canada.²¹ For many businesses, the average age of employees indicates that within 5-10 years they will see a large portion of employees retire. This will create a significant labour gap unless young workers are hired, mentored and developed.⁶

Employers who are not hiring younger workers are missing out on key benefits associated with this demographic, including high levels of technological acuity and innovation that many younger workers bring to the job – qualities essential to building a 21st century workforce.

IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS

1. Lack of access to meaningful mentorship opportunities

Mentor relationships between young people and older, supportive and more experienced adults, are crucial to the personal, social and educational development of youth.²²

Many youth have these relationships built in to their lives as parents, family friends, teachers and other positive role models naturally assume mentoring roles. Unfortunately, many vulnerable youth are less likely to find these naturally-occurring mentors in their lives.²³

When setting educational or career goals, youth without mentors to help guide them are at a disadvantage, and even youth with solid natural mentors such as their parents feel the need to seek out additional advisors who can offer career-specific knowledge and a network of new contacts.

Our Youth Advisory Council members unanimously agreed that meaningful relationships with mentors who can help guide them along their career journey would be one of the most valuable tools as they look to enter or advance in the workplace.

Our Youth Advisory Council member Sachin explained, “mentorship and experiential learning are critical to learn how to apply theoretical learning to the ‘real world.’” For youth who have never spent time in a professional environment, someone to model themselves after, who can explain to them the ins and outs of office etiquette, politics and processes can mean the difference between success and failure.

“It’s an important step for youth to find that they can reach out to people they want to learn from and build relationships with. I’ve found that more often than not, professionals and executives are open to beginning a conversation and supporting the development of others,” he said.

Building relationships of varying degrees with both formal and informal mentors has been invaluable to Hazem. “I was quite introverted when I began university, but stepping outside one’s comfort zone is a natural step towards both personal and professional development. Mentors help with that, both to invest in you and to challenge you - and now I have made it a duty to support youth myself through mentorship and to continue investing in them and challenging them as well.”

While there are organizations within Mississauga and Peel that connect youth with mentors, this type of arrangement is usually confined to a short-term period, after which the relationship tends to dissolve. Our youth stated that in order for them to reap the true benefits of a mentoring relationship, they would prefer a longer-term arrangement with a mentor committed to supporting their growth throughout transitions in life.

2. Lack of connectivity between sectors

Youth unemployment has been recognized as an issue across Mississauga and the Region of Peel by many community agencies, social services, educational institutions and stakeholders who work directly with youth. In fact, there are a large number of groups who have been working to address the problem for several years. Supports

exist for youth experiencing unemployment or underemployment through valuable services such as help preparing resumes and cover letters, job fairs, connecting youth to internships and cooperative education placements and offering referrals to other resources. Networking events, mentorship initiatives and youth entrepreneur grants also provide opportunities for youth to learn, make new connections and create sustainable work opportunities for themselves. In short, there is information available and organizations with the expertise to give youth the boost they need to enter or move up in the workforce.

The challenge for youth lies in the lack of connectivity between these services and sectors. Rather than building a complete system where young people, as early as adolescence, are supported in their

additional barriers such as poverty, transitioning out of care or with limited educational experiences, it exacerbates the challenge of accessing services because they might not have the tools (such as in-home internet) or support system to guide them in the right direction. The frustration and disillusionment that can result from such obstacles can discourage youth from continuing to reach out for support. Coupled with repeated rejection, this can erode confidence and resilience and lead people to withdraw from the workforce altogether.²⁵

Not only does the existing siloed system pose challenges to youth, it doesn't serve the organizations doing the work well either. Without connectivity, efforts are being duplicated by multiple parties where resources could be pooled to have

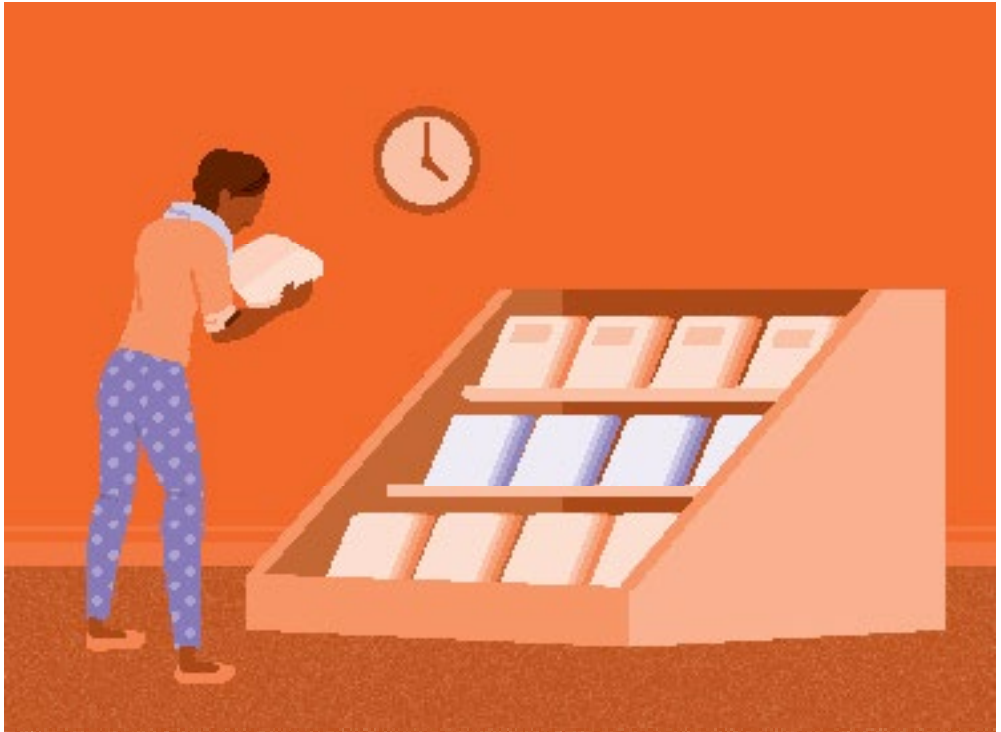
“Many youth lack role models to inspire them, or people who can help them prepare for an interview or deal with the early weeks on a job site. Others have been conditioned to believe that they have little to offer, or learn all too early that their postal code alone will act as a bar to employment.”

— *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*²⁴

educational goals, through secondary school and the life transitions they inevitably face as they strive to become independent, the current system operates for the most part in silos. There is no over-arching strategy bringing sectors together to focus on the common goal; instead there are multiple organizations across sectors - both large and small, public and not-for-profit - doing what they can to provide assistance to their youth stakeholders.

This creates a difficult-to-navigate system for youth seeking support. For youth experiencing

greater impact. Government funding is also often allocated for youth employment programs for short-term periods, a model that doesn't enable potentially sustainable, scalable programs to thrive. When funding runs out, the programs must shut down, be absorbed, or reapply for additional funding. The inefficiency of the system fosters a culture of continuous stopping and starting so that one year youth might have access to a program that would be extremely beneficial for them while the next year the program might not exist, leaving them in limbo or creating the need



for another agency to absorb that client. In an environment where financial resources are scarce, duplicating efforts and continuous turnover only augment the problem.

3. Lack of awareness about how to access existing services

Our discussions with our Youth Advisory Council and youth focus groups made clear that in Mississauga, young people are not widely aware of the existence of youth employment services, nor are they aware of how to access those services.

One of the main reasons for this, as theorized by the youth we spoke to is that relevant services aren't being advertised or promoted to youth in the most effective ways.

Hazem, of our Youth Advisory Council believes online platforms and social media are effective ways to engage youth who are accustomed to

communicating, researching and learning via the internet and its tools. By tailoring advertisements to them, making services easily accessible online, as well as using more modern platforms, he believes more youth would actively seek support in their employment journey and be better connected to opportunities and the means to achieve them.

For youth who lack supportive families and networks, engagement with services present another challenge. They might be too busy working menial jobs to make ends meet to take the time to seek out and contact support services. Vulnerable youth without a mentor or other guidance may not even realize there are agencies and grants that could assist them in pursuing meaningful employment without a trusted advisor to point them in the right direction.

With a system of services that is as disconnected as the current state in Mississauga, it becomes increasingly difficult for youth to learn about the many services that could help them, forcing young



people with varying needs and backgrounds to rummage through seemingly endless websites and prerequisites to determine which service best fits their unique situation.

Unfortunately, with funding as scarce as it is, broad advertising campaigns and accessible, well-crafted online platforms are costly, and difficult for agencies to fund or sustain.

Hazem and a business partner have invested their own capital to launch a start-up called CareerPal, an online mentorship platform geared towards youth, which also promotes job creation, professional development, and connectivity between youth job seekers and potential employers with a heavy focus on mentorship along the way. As evidenced by this significant personal investment, creating a fulsome hub for youth requires not only funds, but a high level of time commitment, understanding, and buy-in from community stakeholders.

One online tool that youth we spoke to are not leveraging is online social network LinkedIn. A 2015 Forum Research study found that LinkedIn is the second most popular social network in Canada, topped only by Facebook.²⁶ Thirty per cent of Canadians use LinkedIn, according to the study, and visit the site an average of twice weekly. This usage differs vastly from the usage our Youth Advisory Council and youth panellists reported, the majority of whom don't have a LinkedIn account. With the exception of a few dedicated users, the youth who are LinkedIn users reported to us that they rarely update their profiles, search for employment or network through the site. The reasons cited for lack of use were vague, but centred mostly on a lack of awareness about the value and tools the site provides as well as the fact that the site is not highly used amongst their peer groups.

With the Forum Research study stating LinkedIn's popularity as highest among middle-aged Canadians

(45-54 years of age), connecting youth to the site as a means of better understanding the current landscape of employment and connect to peers and more seasoned workers (particularly those in positions of hiring power) would be a logical step towards creating awareness in youth.

Even youth with substantive support networks report a lack of information about where they can turn for additional help when seeking employment opportunities. Some simply don't recognize that they can reach outside their existing social networks to make connections to people who might be able to provide insights into the job market or expand their networks.

Zakaria, 25, is a member of CivicAction's Escalator Champions Council and participated in one of our HCSC youth panels. He reports knowing and seeing, "a lot of young people frustrated that they didn't have the right networks ... There is a barrier in being unable to access the social networks to connect to the hidden job market."²⁷

The hidden job market is often an unseen barrier for youth who aren't aware of the value of professional networks. Complicating this is the fact that youth are often intimidated by the prospect of "networking" or aren't sure how to go about it. Some of the fear emanates from a lack of confidence, while some is due to the fact that youth don't know how to network. Again, this highlights the powerful influence a strong mentor can have on the career pathway of a youth, as this person is a natural facilitator for making new connections as a starting point for youth to gain self-esteem through positive interactions.

4. Lack of understanding of hiring process, relationship-building and applied skills

Without the experience to inform them, youth are at a major disadvantage when competing with more seasoned workers for entry-level positions. A study conducted by website The Ladders found potential employers seek first and foremost the right

qualifications for the job and readiness for hire, such as interpersonal skills, critical thinking and collaborative experience, as the characteristics they seek in candidates.²⁸

Unfortunately, these skills are the same ones employers report young employees are lacking. An employer survey conducted by Adecco indicated that 44% of employers who responded identified communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration as the areas with the biggest gaps amongst young employees.²⁹

Our youth panellists agreed with the conclusion that they, and their peers face a skills gap when it comes to applying soft skills in a workplace, but reiterated that without the opportunity to try, their learning curve will take much longer to correct.

One youth who participated in a focus group said, "we learn everything in theory at university but don't have the chance to 'practice' those skills. In a workplace there's another entire language you have to learn that you don't get while you're in school".

Within the workplace, young employees also find challenges in negotiating workloads, asking the right questions and building relationships across a hierarchy. They often aren't primed on appropriate office etiquette, such as how much time to spend on their cell phones or proper dress, which can have lasting impressions on colleagues and superiors. Simple email or meeting etiquette are other factors that can impact a new professional relationship if handled poorly, setting the young employee up for less successful relationships early on.

A common way for youth to gain experience and work on applying these much-needed skills is to take on unpaid work placements or internships. While these arrangements can be extremely rewarding, they also present challenges for young workers.

Working long hours without pay can be especially draining, even on a short-term basis. With the high

cost of living, increasing student loans and no guarantee of a permanent position with the organization, often young interns must work a second part-time job to have money coming in. Not only is this exhausting, it contributes to the existing stress of an uncertain future and insecure employment.

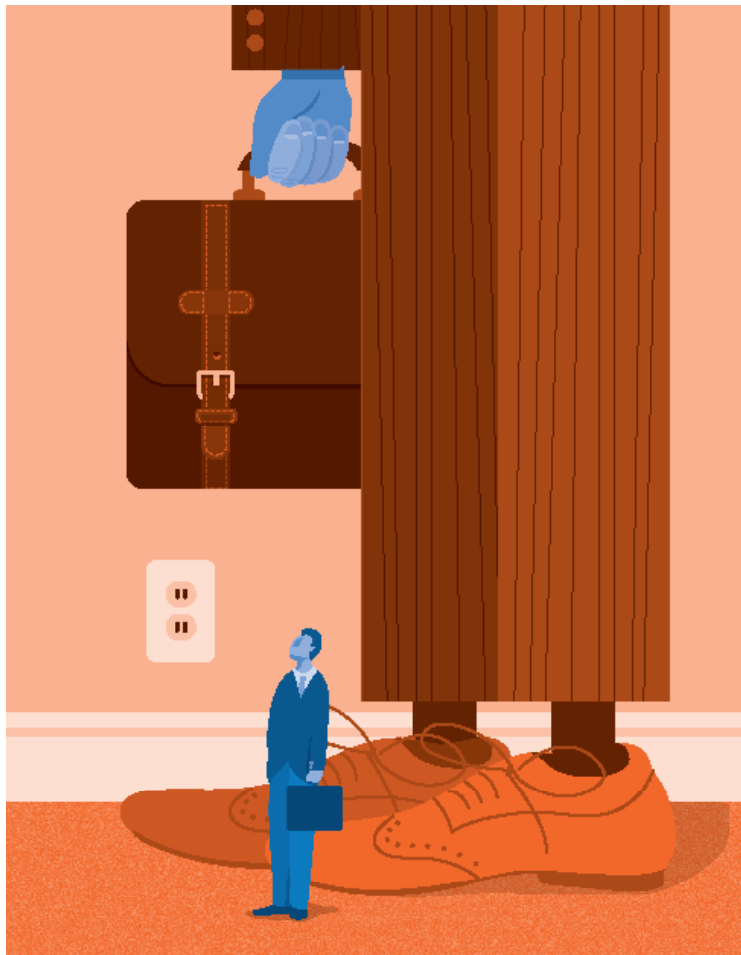
Maryam, 24, participated in one of our youth panels and shared her experience of taking on unpaid work when she wasn't able to find a full-time job after she graduated from university. After remaining unemployed for the better part of a year, she took on a position as an unpaid intern at an accounting firm. After several months, she was fortunate enough to be offered a long-term position, but that isn't the case for many young people. For those living in low-income situations especially, the possibility of attaining a full-time job only after an unpaid period isn't a realistic option. For those youth, working menial jobs that aren't aligned with their skills or passions are a financial necessity, and they will often choose to continue in those jobs over pursuing additional education or careers they are passionate about simply because they cannot afford it.

Youth Advisory Council member Lauren believes internships provide valuable opportunities for youth to develop the applied skills and understanding necessary to succeed, if the circumstances are right. She and a number of her friends have completed internships as components of their academic programs. While they provided valuable insight into the inner workings of an organization, she found that within a short period of six to eight weeks, there is little opportunity to make your mark. By the time the placement is coming to a close, the interns have only started to understand the work, the processes and the professional relationships enough to contribute in a valuable way.

Unfortunately, Lauren has also seen friends enter into arrangements where they are asked to perform tasks entirely unrelated for the role the intern was hired for, as well as those where the intern is promised a paid position once the internship period is completed only to have the employer renege, or offer only another

unpaid contract. These experiences undermine the value of youth employees while negatively affecting their perception of an employer-employee relationship, setting the young worker up for potential failure in his or her next professional endeavour.

Employers who recognize the needs of a young employee and who can nurture their growth and the development of the applied skills needed to succeed in their role and within the professional team are one of the most valuable assets to the training of young talent.



5. Widespread anxiety and a lack of confidence

Decades ago, a university degree was considered a golden ticket into a stable, well-paying job for Canadians. Over the past number of years requirements for specialized degrees, post-graduate degrees and diplomas have risen as organizations seek to hire and retain top talent in their bid to stay competitive. As the number of degree-holders has grown, the value in the degree has lessened and become, in many fields, the base standard of education required to be considered for a role.³⁰

As a result, competitiveness has drastically increased in both academia and the workforce and the pressure young people feel to perform has skyrocketed.

The Canadian Organization of College and University Student Services conducted a study in 2013 surveying more than 30,000 students, from over 30 Canadian institutions. Ontario respondents stated that within the 12 months preceding the survey, 40.7% had experienced stress significant enough to affect their individual academic performance, and 89.7% reported feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do.³¹

Along with increasing competitiveness and feelings of overwhelming stress in academia, post-secondary graduates and those entering the workforce directly after high school are experiencing high levels of anxiety about their futures.

Said Anchit, 22, “every time you apply for something and you’re not hired or called back, it makes your anxiety go up.”

One Youth Advisory Council member shared the experience of working on three-month contracts, saying “never knowing whether I will be employed at the end of three months is very stressful. It also makes it hard to plan ahead for things I want to do in

According to a 2011 estimate by the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health, problems such as anxiety and depression cost the Canadian economy more than \$50 billion per year due to illness, missing wages and higher costs for insurers and health care. The two biggest stressors of those surveyed were finances and work life.³²

my personal life, because I don’t know where I’ll be working and if I’ll even be able to afford a social life.”

The connection between meaningful employment and a person’s health has been well-studied. Beyond the financial benefits of a good wage and full-time hours, employment also provides a person with a sense of identity and purpose while enhancing opportunities for personal growth and reducing isolation through increased social interactions with colleagues. Unemployed people, both those who have lost their jobs for a variety of reasons, or those who are struggling to enter the workforce have a reduced life expectancy and experience a greater number of health problems than their peers who are employed.³³

Dismal job prospects and continuous rejection only intensify the feelings of anxiety and over the long-term can break down the confidence of a young person to the point where they might withdraw from the labour force altogether, disillusioned with the future they felt they were promised by getting an education. Youth who are vulnerable due to family, racial, economic or other circumstances are at an even greater risk, as their hope diminishes further when they see no positive outcomes occurring around them.

Youth panelist Travis presented this feeling frankly: “I feel trapped.”



**EVERY TIME YOU APPLY FOR SOMETHING
AND YOU'RE NOT HIRED OR CALLED BACK,
IT MAKES YOUR ANXIETY GO UP.**

— Anchit, 22



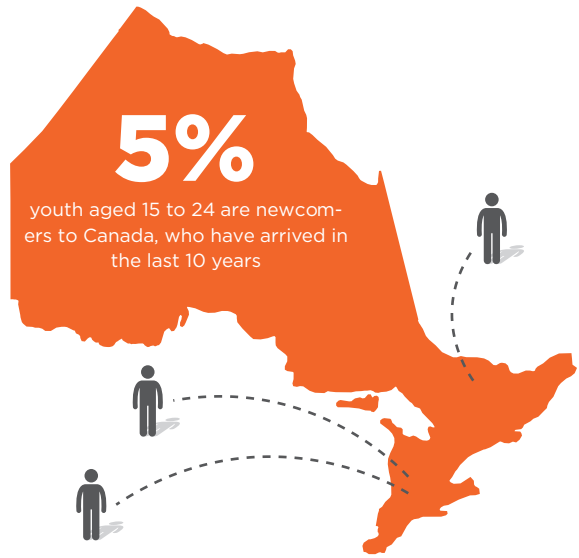
6. Racialized/marginalized youth & youth with disabilities experience discrimination

“Businesses and employers stereotype. I was fired once because I missed a day of work, meanwhile a co-worker who was White missed five days and was still employed. I see people from other backgrounds getting away with stuff and if I were to do it I would be fired.”

—Youth (Report on Consultations into the Well-being of Black Youth in Peel Region - F.A.C.E.S. of Peel Collaborative)

Young people with disabilities, mental health issues and those from racialized populations or low-income neighbourhoods face additional barriers in seeking employment. Many barriers take the form of discriminatory attitudes and practices, while others come as a result of a disadvantaged background. For example, young people whose families earn a low income or are unemployed may not have access to the same network of contacts or to the same role models and encouragement that are available to young people from an affluent background.³⁴

Sociological research has shown that teens whose contacts help them enter the workforce achieve higher earnings and a better career pathway nine years after graduation. Black youth, women and



high-achieving teens rely more on school contacts than on relatives and a social network to help them find jobs.³⁵

The population of Mississauga is richly diverse, creating a vibrant, multicultural community. According to Peel Counts 2011 released by the Region of Peel, 49% of Peel residents are immigrants, many of whom identify as visible minorities. In Ontario, 5.05% of Ontario youth aged 15 to 24 are newcomers who have arrived in Canada in the last 10 years.³⁶ However, that diversity is not reflected in the workforce in Peel and Mississauga, even within organizations who directly serve these diverse communities.³⁷

In the Census Metropolitan Area of Toronto, which include Mississauga, Black youth are unemployed at a much higher rate than non-visible minority youth at 30% versus 19.5% , and report experiencing discrimination or prejudice based on race.³⁸ In fact, the Black population is the second-largest racialized group in Peel Region,

with the least amount of social services, including employment services, geared to them. Aboriginal youth in Ontario are also much more likely to be unemployed, with the unemployment rate sitting at 21.2% in 2015.³⁹

One Youth Advisory Council member who identifies as a Black female reports that she has experienced prejudice and discrimination firsthand, as have many of her racialized friends and acquaintances. Her experiences reflect the qualitative findings in the Report on Consultations into the Well-being of Black Youth in Peel Region from the F.A.C.E.S. of Peel Collaborative, that Black youth in particular report feeling “bombarded by subtle messages labeling them as ‘underachievers’ and ‘lazy’.”

White people, those born in Canada, and immigrants who have lived in Canada for at least 20 years are more likely to have attained secure employment, meaning a permanent, full-time position with benefits and regular working hours.⁴⁰

Another group who faces significant barriers to employment is youth with disabilities, with an astronomically high unemployment rate in Ontario at 30.4%.⁴¹

Succeeding in the workplace for young people is clearly tied to the level of education attained, since two thirds of job listings require post-secondary education. Many youth with disabilities in Ontario begin their careers at a disadvantage as their group has a 26% lower university participation rate and an 11% lower college participation rate than their peers without disabilities.⁴² Although post-secondary education institutions are working towards becoming accessible and provide programming targeted to youth with disabilities, more can still be done.

There are fewer internships and co-op placements for students with disabilities than placement for youth without disabilities. This is the result of both simple physical barriers that prevent access, and a widespread misconception that people with disabilities are less skilled, have higher rates of absenteeism or require accommodations beyond that organizations are willing to provide. In reality, 75 percent of Ontario businesses who have employees with disabilities report their performance meets or exceeds their expectations.⁴³

Youth Advisory Council member Anchit, 24, who uses a motorized wheelchair for mobility has frequently experienced barriers associated with physical accessibility, something that has prevented him from both applying to and securing employment.

“Something as simple as a small raised ridge or a narrow doorway can prevent me from being able to physically access a building,” says Anchit. Before attending an interview, he will do his best to visit the location beforehand to assess what physical barriers he might have to overcome between the parking lot and the interview room. “I’ve had to cancel interviews or turn down jobs because there was no way for me to actually get inside the building. It’s something that causes me a lot of anxiety.”

According to the Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, 70% of Canadian small business owners have never

hired someone with a disability despite having difficulty filling position vacancies. One of the major reasons small business owners cite is that they believe the accommodations needed to ensure an employee with a disability can perform and succeed is financially impractical. Bob Stark, Chair of the Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities states that business owners believe the average cost to physically accommodate a person with a disability is \$10,000. The actual average cost is \$500.00, and in fact, 57% would actually cost nothing.⁴⁴

7. Potential employers underestimate the value of youth employees

Employers appear to discriminate against younger workers. This may be based on discriminatory attitudes and beliefs about young people and/or on an unwillingness to invest the time required to orient and mentor people entering their first job. Many of our youth panellists spoke about the frustrating bind of not being able to get a job without having prior work experience. They expressed their strong desire to be able to showcase their skills and personalities to potential employers through an interview process, but state they rarely get to that stage, presumably because their resumes are dismissed for lack of experience.

Many employers, particularly within small or medium businesses lack the resources to properly hire, train and mentor young employees which can lead to frustration and unmet expectations for both parties.

Our panel of business owner-operators shared mixed opinions on the value of hiring youth. One employer stated that she strongly supports hiring young workers and her business has had many positive experiences with both young employees and students on co-op or internship placements. She spoke of the need to have realistic expectations when hiring youth for one of their first work experiences and to ensure there are supports in place to help them succeed.

Other panellists, while having past positive experiences with youth spoke of the skills gaps in young workers that prevent them from seeking to employ

more youth. A lack of skills such as basic office and email etiquette, spending inappropriate amounts of time on their personal phones and a general need for higher-touch supervision were highlighted as specific reasons employers were reluctant to hire youth.

We heard from both our Youth Advisory Council members and experts who presented to the HCSC meetings that frequently, employers perceive young workers as lazy, unreliable and lacking in the skills needed to succeed on the job. Whether these attitudes were reinforced by actual interactions with young employees or not they appear to be pervasive and detrimental to the prospects of youth.

Our youth panellists spoke about what they would like employers to know about the value youth bring to the workforce, such as the energy and passion to drive innovative ideas. Other messages the panellists would send to potential employers included the desire for more value to be placed on soft skills, and an understanding that youth add to the rich diversity of an organization. They strongly believe that if their growth was fostered in a supportive work environment with positive mentorship and opportunities to learn from skilled colleagues, not only would the employer develop a more talented and loyal young employee, but also enrich the organization by cultivating future leaders. Even if a young employee moves onto another role in a different organization, the value his or her success brings to the economy in terms of contributing to a skilled labour force is tremendous.

8. Small and medium-sized enterprises lack resources to onboard and train youth

In the Region of Peel, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are plentiful, making up approximately 35.5 per cent of the 126, 150 business establishments registered in 2014⁴⁵

SMEs often take the opportunity to hire interns or co-op students from local educational institutions such as Sheridan College, University of Toronto Mississauga and the school boards to fulfill their needs for additional staff, providing students practical, hands-on experience.



We heard from both youth and employers that while these arrangements can be highly beneficial for both parties, one of the biggest challenges they face is the lack of resources SMEs have to properly onboard and train youth employees.

While large organizations have robust, experienced human resources teams to appropriately onboard new employees, smaller businesses may have only one employee who handles those matters, sometimes the owner-operator themselves may be performing the HR function. In other situations, the person filling the human resources

requirements isn't an HR professional but the function becomes a small part of their overall portfolio in order to reduce costs. This can result in a less thorough onboarding experience, and for young workers who lack experience, a less than positive introduction to their new workplace can make them feel confused, unsure what questions to ask and overlooked.

Fewer resources within SMEs can also mean supervisors of young workers, interns or co-op students don't have the time to take to get to know their new employee and properly train them for their new role.

“According to the Peel Halton Workforce Development Group, around 22% of employers don't hire youth, largely because their jobs require higher levels of skills and experience.”⁴⁶

This lack of training and communication can create a strain on the developing employer-employee relationship as employers become frustrated that their expectations aren't being met, while employees feel unsupported. In the end, the experience is disappointing to both parties. Employers are then less likely to re-engage in a youth work experience while youth leave without fully developing the skills they'd hoped to and sometimes with a sense of disillusionment about what working in the “real world” is like.

An additional challenge with similar repercussions exists due to the frequently mismatched goals and/or needs between employers and educational institutions/students on placement in businesses. While the need for students, especially within SMEs is continual, employers find it difficult to fulfill their business needs within the rigid timelines and curriculum requirements of schools.

Explained one SME owner-operator from Mississauga, “we don't have trouble finding students but they only have certain time periods they're able to do placements which means we can't get help when we need it.”

Compounding the timing issue is the need to find students whose skills and programs of study fit the role the employer has to offer, a process that can be both time-consuming and complicated. The schools, on the other hand must help match their students with placements that can help them fulfill the required learning outcomes of their curriculum.

One Youth Advisory Council member experienced a placement like this first-hand, saying, “my internship was supposed to be geared toward graphic design, but I did almost no design work. I did learn a lot about the way a business works and the politics of an office, which I can use in the future, but I spent most of my time doing tasks like photocopying rather than learning from the designers.”

Another youth who participated in a focus group had a similar experience. “My co-op placement was really interesting when I was given work to do. Unfortunately, my supervisor was so busy with their own work that some days they didn't even have time to speak with me. I never wanted to interrupt to ask questions because everyone was so busy, but I also wanted to help out so it was hard to know what to do.”

There is work being done in Mississauga amongst several organizations seeking to streamline and simplify the process of onboarding either paid employees or interns and students, as well as enable organizations to properly train and mentor new recruits.

Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board both offer ministry-approved programs called Specialist High Skills Majors that allow grade 11 and 12 students to focus their learning on a specific sector, such as communications technology, while earning credits to graduate high school. Part of the program requires students to participate in an experiential



Source: Skills Canada Ontario and Bulkforce Canada

learning component where they can apply the skills they've learned in the classroom in a professional environment. Teachers and supervisors within the placement organization meet prior to the semester in order to ensure the expectations on each end are understood and achievable and they remain in contact throughout the placement via email, student reports and in-person visits.

Both school boards also offer co-operative education programs as well as opportunities to participate in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), where students complete a co-op placement in skilled trade. Co-op programs are also available for students who are not earning credits, enabling the development of essential skills to help them transition into the community or workplace after high school.

These, and other experiential learning opportunities available to Peel students such as Dual Credit programs in partnership with local colleges, skilled

trades days and job shadowing among others allows them to apply and extend their classroom learning in a community or workplace environment. It also creates additional opportunities for students to plan their pathways, whether they choose apprenticeship training, college, community living, university or the workplace. Setting both employers and students up for success has established a co-op placement model that creates value for everyone involved.

Beyond secondary school, leaders at University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), Sheridan College and Mississauga Board of Trade are working towards launching an onboarding strategy aimed at supporting SMEs through this process to improve outcomes for employers and recruits. Funding secured from federal, provincial and municipal governments would enable the group to provide professional HR liaisons at no cost to the employer who would assist with the on-boarding process, follow up and reporting to the educational



institution. The ultimate goal is for a smooth and productive work experience with a view to eventually have the employer as a consistent resource for student work terms. In the long-term, this group believes that as employers experience better results, they will appreciate the value of students, eventually offering paid internships, work terms and ultimately permanent positions.

These are two examples of some of the work being done to address this significant barrier, but we also know that youth who do not have the support of a school system as they enter the workforce or an internship will continue to face challenges until the culture of hiring practices and training within businesses shifts.

9. Stigma towards trades and other non-professional career paths

The Ontario Ministry of Finance estimates that due to the aging workforce and short supply of qualified workers, the shortfall of skilled trades workers needed to fill vacancies will rise to at least 200,000.⁴⁷

Despite the rising demand for well-trained workers in the construction, automotive, technology and other industries, there remains a stigma attached to these “non-professional careers”.

While organizations touting the benefits of a career in the trades, along with secondary schools and colleges have done an excellent job in recent years bringing attention to this dichotomy, there has been little movement in the numbers of young people entering the trades.

The stigma begins early, with students in high schools required to pursue certain academic pathways that will ultimately determine what type of post-secondary career/education they will be eligible to pursue. Despite school boards introducing dual credit models, which allow students to keep their options open in multiple streams, data from the Ministry of Education examining course selections in 2014 shows that 60% of students taking applied math were taking three or more applied courses and that only 11% of students in applied math take no other applied courses.⁴⁸

Youth who participated in our focus groups confirmed the negative attitudes students express about applied courses in high school as well as skilled trades.

Samantha, 17, takes primarily courses in the academic stream at her Mississauga high school. However, her younger sister attends an alternative school where students are able to learn hands-on trades such as auto mechanics in addition to language and math courses. Samantha’s sister is thriving and plans to pursue a career in the trades, but Samantha reports, “everyone [at Samantha’s school] thinks of people in applied classes as the dumb kids. Not really anybody would think about doing a trade because they all plan to go to university.”

She also reports that students who attend her sister’s school are looked down on by other teens, and often by parents as well. “They think the students [at alternative schools] either aren’t as smart as everyone else, or they are behavioural,” she says.

Parental opinions are influential in the way youth view occupations, and many are simply misin-

formed about the options in the trades and that that type of career can provide an extremely comfortable lifestyle. According to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, most tradespeople earn over \$60,000 per year while the average Canadian earns approximately \$40,000.⁴⁹

According to surveys conducted by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, one in four parents say the trades are for weak students.⁵⁰

Youth whose parents are immigrants may face additional difficulty garnering support to pursue non-professional careers. Often, their parents have come to Canada so their children have access to more opportunities than they would have in their country of origin and want to see their children thrive in highly respected careers. Trades in certain countries and cultures are viewed as roles for the lower classes and are therefore not desirable.

In Ontario there are over 200 trades that have apprenticeship programs.⁵¹ While youth pursuing post-secondary education at a university or college often accrue high levels of debt in tuition fees and costs of living, a large proportion of youth wishing to enter a skilled trade are eligible for government grants and paid apprenticeships.

10. Lack of opportunities to showcase skills and personality to potential employers due to lack of work experience

The increase in youth unemployment tracks to 2002 and was exacerbated by the economic recession that began in 2008 as many workers postponed retirement or left retirement and returned to work after the technology market crash.⁵² Proportionally fewer youth and more persons 65 years and older are currently participating in Peel’s labour market.⁵³

The increasing cost of living, decline of suitable pensions and longer life expectancies to account for, has forced many older workers to remain in their positions far longer than the historic retirement age of 65. Since older workers typically hold more senior roles, their more junior colleagues are not being pro-

moted and younger workers with more experience are languishing in roles that might be more suitable for entry-level employees.

Lacking the experience employers and human resources professionals seek on a job applicant’s resume, the youth we interviewed believe they are consistently “weeded out” of the hiring process early on, rarely, if ever being offered the opportunity for an interview where their soft skills and personality could shine.

“A lot of people were wondering why I wanted to do it [carpentry], because I was getting really good marks in school, and everybody thought I should be a doctor or an engineer. That just didn’t align with my passion,”

— *Joel Michaud, 26*⁵⁴

Sachin, 20, commented that often “the skills and education people put on resumes can look great on paper but don’t always translate to the real world. It’s hard for an organization to know whether someone is the right fit for their team and culture without spending time with them in person to get a sense of their energy, soft skills and passion.”

Other youth agreed that a culture shift in hiring practices towards a process that reduces the weight placed on a static resume and enables applicants to showcase their personalities, soft skills and transferrable skills would make young people more marketable and attractive to potential employers. Some suggested leveraging technology to achieve this through channels such as short video resumes that allow jobseekers to introduce themselves to employers in a professional but dynamic manner, giving the employer the chance to see the value in the person first, then perhaps request a resume or work samples prior to an interview.

CELEBRATING THE SUCCESSES

There are many existing programs in Mississauga, the Region of Peel and across the province that are engaged in working to reduce the rate of youth unemployment. In the Region of Peel, our school boards are continuously implementing and evaluating programming and guidance geared towards helping students think about their future, what career path they might want to take and what courses they might require in order to get there. Our post-secondary institutions, UTM and Sheridan College both have career management programs dedicated to helping students explore career opportunities, obtain internships, connect with mentors and navigate the job market. Beyond the education sector there are great number of organizations engaged in work that aims to eliminate some of the barriers that stand between youth and meaningful employment. While there were many programs that we came across during our research, there are a few that stood out to us that we would like to recognize.

Every summer since 2009, Peel Regional Police have been welcoming summer students that reflect the diversity of our community into their Youth In Policing Initiative (YIPI). Funded by the Provincial Ministry of Children and Youth Services, YIPI is designed to strengthen relationships with youth by providing a positive learning and mentoring environment, and to promote policing as a career.

The YMCA GTA has brought their Strong Start, Great Future Strategic Plan to life by working tirelessly to provide young people access to employment opportunities.⁵⁵ Through a variety of programs, including; the summer jobs program, youth enhancement support services, Access to Employment program, and the new Youth Job Connection (YJC), the YMCA in Peel is helping hundreds of young people find jobs, build their skills and increase their confidence.

Lorenzo Vaglica, General Manager for the YMCA's Employment Centre in Mississauga noted, "These young people just need a chance, and we are their voice, we help get them that opportunity. It is so rewarding to see the difference in the confidence level of these young people following their internships. It makes me so proud to see how they have developed and what they have achieved."

Success Story

Carl is a young man diagnosed with a disability living in Peel. He was keen to find a job working in a restaurant but was having trouble obtaining employment on his own. With the help of counsellors at the YMCA, Carl was able to revise his resume, learn how to job search, improve his interview skills and prepare for future employment. With this support Carl was able to get a job at Turtle Jack's, where he has been working since 2013. Initially a food prep helper, Carl is now gradually learning how to cook. With the help of the YMCA and the opportunity from Turtle Jack's, Carl's life is forever changed.

CivicAction's Escalator initiative, launched in 2014, is helping to connect youth facing barriers with meaningful employment by focussing on four key actions: building regional mentorship programs, facilitating employer designed training and internship programs, engaging small and medium sized enterprises, and creating transparency in the job market by connecting the dots between supply and demand.⁵⁶ Escalator has been hugely successful since its launch, helping hundreds of young people in their journey to employment, building important partnerships with the private sector and gaining the endorsement of multiple levels of government.

Launched in 2014, Magnet is a new network powered by a job matching technology that connects job seekers to employers based on skills, preferences and talent needs.⁵⁷ The platform, which is free for job seekers, connects people with the opportunities that are most appropriate for them based on their skills, experience and preferences. Connections are based solely on profile matching criteria, when conducting a search, employers will only see a person's level of education, skills and experience, the platform initially omits specific personal information such as names and institutions in order to reduce bias.

Lastly, NPower Canada is a proven workforce development program for diverse under-served young adults aged 18-25 years looking for careers that require IT skills.⁵⁸ Founded in New York, the program came to Toronto in 2014 and has experienced tremendous success to date, with 88 per cent of the Toronto inaugural class employed in IT-related jobs or enrolled in post-secondary education. NPower uses an agile employer-driven model to equip young people with in-demand hard and soft skills to meet the needs of a variety of employers from SME's to enterprise. NPower is currently looking for opportunities to expand beyond Toronto to other regions in the GTA.



ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS: RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking at the top barriers that we identified, we found that they could be categorized into groups, which would help us in developing our recommendations to address youth unemployment. The barriers each fell into one of three categories, system, youth or employer depending on the level of relevance and accountability.

The barriers that were grouped under the system category were those that tended to be more macro in scope. The lack of connectivity between sectors, lack of access to meaningful mentorship opportunities and stigma towards trades and other non-professional career paths are issues that require broad-sweeping change at a system level in order to eliminate those obstacles.

Whereas the lack of awareness about how to access services, lack of understanding of hiring processes, relationship-building and applied skills, and anxiety and lack of confidence are all barriers that have a direct link to the youth themselves.

While, underestimating the potential of youth employees, the lack of resources to on-board and train youth and the lack of opportunities to showcase skills and personality to potential employers due to a lack of work experience are barriers that are more relevant to employers.

Barriers for System

- 1 Lack of connectivity between sectors
- 2 Lack of access to meaningful mentorship opportunities
- 3 Stigma towards trades and other non-professional careers paths
- 4 Racialized/marginalized youth & youth with disabilities experience discrimination
- 5 Potential employers underestimate the value of youth employees
- 6 Lack of opportunities to showcase skills & personality to potential employers due to lack of work experience

Recommendations

- Knit together existing programs offered by educational institutions, employers and youth employment support services.
- Provide a central portal to information.
- Create streamlined knowledge for agencies, youth, parents/guardians and education systems.
- Support the work of existing agencies.
- Enhance alignment of existing work to increase efficiency in the system.

Barriers for Youth

- 1** Lack of awareness about how to access existing services
- 2** Lack of understanding of hiring process, relationship-building and applied skills
- 3** Widespread anxiety and a lack of confidence
- 4** Racialized/marginalized youth & youth with disabilities experience discrimination
- 5** Stigma towards trades and other non-professional careers paths

Recommendations

- Create streamlined knowledge for agencies, youth, parents/guardians and education systems.
- Use technology to connect youth with job opportunities and mentors.
- Promote job readiness for youth and businesses:
 - Prepare youth to understand the role of the employee and how to find and compete for positions;
 - Help small businesses understand how to become active mentors to young employees, fostering employee commitment to the business;
 - Community networking events
- Encourage and participate in community networking events.
- Provide parents/guardians with resources and opportunities to support the educational and career pathways of their children.

Barriers for Employers

- 1** Potential employers underestimate the value of youth employees
- 2** Small and medium-sized enterprises lack resources to onboard and train youth
- 3** Lack of opportunities to showcase skills and personality to employers due to lack of work experience

Recommendations

- Assist youth in development of soft skills, networking and securing work experience.
- Explore and test opportunities for youth job-sharing between small-medium businesses:
 - Creates a low-risk “try and buy” opportunity for the business and/or a possible pipeline for filling future positions.
- Promote job readiness for youth and businesses:
 - Prepare youth to understand the role of the employee and how to find and compete for positions;
 - Help small businesses understand how to become active mentors to young employees, fostering employee commitment to the business;
 - Encourage and participate in community networking events.
- Leverage funded programs such as Ontario’s Youth Job Connection:
 - Programs may include paid pre-employment training, job matching, paid work placements, mentorship services and/or education and work transition supports

CONCLUSION

From the initial conversations about the anxiety our young community members feel as they consider their futures in the face of economic uncertainty and high unemployment rates, to the recommendations built in partnership with our Youth Advisory Council, our research over the past year has enlightened us to the challenges facing our youth and the work dedicated stakeholders in Mississauga are undertaking to support them.

We learned that to thrive, youth need mentors and supportive communities where information is easily accessible to them. Where they feel anxious and hopeless, they need networks and employers willing to work with them to build on the skills they've cultivated thus far, and who will champion their growth and development in the workplace regardless of their unique backgrounds, race, religion or disabilities.

We also learned that there are many individuals and organizations working to improve employment circumstances for the youth of Mississauga, as well as within the GTA. These successes are worthy of celebration and by creating pathways that connect the dots to build a complete network of support for unemployed and underemployed youth, these successful endeavours can have an even greater impact and reach even more young people.

We are confident that with the support of the HCSC's member organizations, the Mayor of Mississauga and her commitment to reducing youth unemployment, and the continued representation of youth voices as we implement our recommendations, we can – and will – make a real impact for our most vulnerable youth. It is time for Mississauga to take action and make a real difference for our young people by committing to take bold steps to address youth unemployment in our city.

“We have an ethical responsibility to nurture young people, and strategic investments in healthy children, youth and families will pay off for everyone. Without these investments, we jeopardize the health and well-being of all our futures; with them, we secure it”

— *Health Council of Canada*⁵⁹

APPENDIX 1

Healthy City Stewardship
Centre 2015-16

Mayor Bonnie Crombie

City of Mississauga

Michelle DiEmanuele

HCSC Chair (2015 – 2016)
President and Chief Executive Officer
Trillium Health Partners

Janice Baker

City Manager and
Chief Administrative Officer
City of Mississauga

Dr. Eileen de Villa

Medical Officer of Health
Region of Peel

Chief Jennifer Evans

Chief of Police
Peel Regional Police

Bridget Fewtrell

President and Chief Executive Officer
ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment
and Development

Marilyn Knox

President
Trillium Health Partners – Institute for
Better Health

Marianne Mazzorato

Director of Education
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School
Board

Bill MacLeod

Chief Executive Officer
Mississauga Halton LHIN

Medhat Mahdy

President and Chief Executive Officer
YMCA of Greater Toronto

Karen Menard

Director, Research and Innovation
Trillium Health Partners – Institute for
Better Health

Lynn Petrushchak

Executive Director
Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre

Tony Pontes

Director of Education
Peel District School Board

Deep Saini

Vice President and Principal
University of Toronto Mississauga

Helen Seibel

Senior Manager, Corporate Responsibility
AstraZeneca Canada Inc.

Shelley White

President and Chief Executive Officer
United Way of Peel Region

David Wojcik

President and Chief Executive Officer
Mississauga Board of Trade

Jeff Zabudsky

President and Chief Executive Officer
Sheridan College Institute of
Technology & Advanced Learning

Sheldon Leiba

President and Chief Executive Officer
Mississauga Board of Trade (former)
(Member 2008 – 2015)

Ulrich Krull

Acting Vice President and Principal
University of Toronto Mississauga
(Past Chair of HCSC and acting
member for Deep Saini, July 2015 –
January 2016)

John Kostoff

Director of Education
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District
School Board (former)

APPENDIX 2

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Maame Debrah

Hazem Danny Nakib

Travis D.

Sofia N.

Sachin Doshi

Samantha P.

Lauren Hayes

Chris Thompson

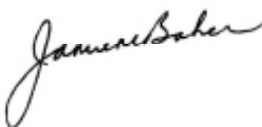
Anchit J.

This report is presented to the community of Mississauga on behalf of the Healthy City Stewardship Centre as a call to collective action in advancing youth employment opportunities in our city. The Healthy City Stewardship Centre is committed to improving the physical, mental and spiritual health of our community members, and in sharing our report we encourage an open and collaborative approach to addressing a key determinant of health for a thriving city - meaningful and secure employment for our youth, now and in the future.

Signed and endorsed by the 2015-16 Healthy City Stewardship Centre.



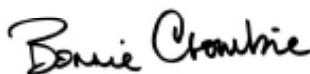
Michelle DiEmanuele
Chair, HCSC



Janice Baker
Vice Chair, HCSC



Lynn Petrushchak
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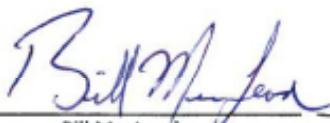
Mayor Bonnie Crombie
Member, HCSC



Marilyn Knox
Member, HCSC



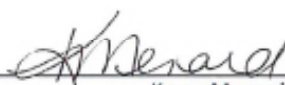
Dr. Eileen de Villa
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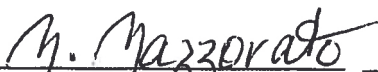
Bill MacLeod
Member, HCSC



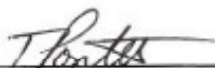
Shelley White
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Karen Menard
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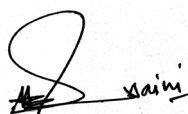
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