YOUNG WORKERS LEFT OUT:

THE INTEGRATION OF TORONTO YOUTH IN THE CITY'S LABOUR MARKET



PREPARED BY

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INTRODUCTION

The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is the City of Toronto's official youth advisory body, as well as a non-partisan advocacy organization that strives to improve the quality of life for Toronto's youth. In working together with City Councillors and through fostering partnerships amongst various organizations, the Cabinet is dedicated to providing young people with a forum in which they are able to build an equitable, accessible, and youth-friendly Toronto.

The TYC has several Working Groups that focus on issue-specific projects and initiatives. This report has been created by the Equity & Employment Working Group, a team composed of young people working to fight the City's rising rate of youth unemployment, and improve access to jobs for marginalized youth. This term, their work composed of reaching out to young people across the City and hearing their stories as it concerned employment, or lack thereof. From the interviews, to the research, to the editing, every part of this report that you are reading was crafted by a young person. As such, not only is this report youth-centred, but it is youth-led.

This project required the efforts of many people. First and foremost, of course, this report would have not been possible without Mana and her team who bore my amateur editing with good grace and patience. The youth whose stories you will hear from warrant special thanks. Thanks also go out to the many organizations and businesses that agreed to be interviewed.

Now, what comes next from this report? It will serve as a springboard for our advocacy around the employment inequities faced by young people. And, of course, there is always more to learn and more stories to hear—especially from young people dealing with systematic inequities, like ableism or anti-black racism.

In the meantime, take this report as not only one step in understanding the challenges Toronto's young people face, but also as groundwork for the advocacy you will see from the TYC in the next few months to ensure we get the equitable, accessible, and youthfriendly Toronto we deserve.

Edna Ali Executive Director

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established in 1998 by Toronto City Council, The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is the official youth advisory body to the City of Toronto. The TYC advocates on youth issues with various youth organizations across the city, and promotes youth involvement in policy development.

Within the TYC's structure there are several working groups that focus on issue-specific projects and initiatives affecting youth (i.e. housing, transportation, etc.). The mandate of the Equity and Employment Working Group is to fight the city's rising rate of youth unemployment, and improve access to jobs for marginalized youth.

Our team consists of a diverse group of youth from various parts of Toronto, with different life experiences and a spectrum of interests. The team met regularly over the span of a year at City Hall to discuss the common barriers facing youth in their labour market integration.

Our goal was to better understand the reoccurring trends that hinder their ability to seek out employment that is both secure and desirable, while also acknowledging that these barriers run deeper for some communities more than others. The rationale behind these interactions was not only that youth are the future of our economy, but also a shared inherent understanding that having a rewarding and stable vocation enhances an individual's quality of life.

This report is the result of the collaborative efforts of our working group members. We held over 30 consultations with relevant stakeholders who provided insight that reflects the larger community's knowledge of the issues embedded within the topic of youth unemployment.

These stakeholders include youth between the ages of 15-24, local business owners, as well as non-profit organizations that offer youth services from different wards. Each member's report is showcased, giving the reader the opportunity to explore this topic from various lenses.

Despite this diversity in perspectives, our report demonstrates that there are common trends that create barriers which prevent youth from either entering the job market, or securing stable employment that are on par with their qualifications and aspirations. These barriers exist with respect to:

- Lack of access to and knowledge about jobs
- Precariousness of opportunities
- Unfeasible requirements
- Discrimination (race, gender, sexuality, cultural, etc.)
- Stigmatization of youth workers
- Inequity in networks and social capital
- Underemployment of qualifications
- Mental health gaps

These issues were raised in numerous consultations, therefore demonstrating that there are larger trends at play which are limiting the development and prosperity of Toronto's youth population. To name just a few, these trends include:

- a lack of training and skills opportunities for those entering the job market
- limited job streams and opportunities open to employing youth
- disproportionality in parttime and temporary jobs for youth.

Positive and effective policymaking is about targeting societal issues that affect a large group of the population, and we believe that the analysis and research invested in this report can help inform policies that positively impact the living standards of the cities' youth.

We hope you enjoy reading this publication by the TYC's Equity and Employment working group, and that the countless meaningful conversations that took place throughout its production comes across to our readers.

Mana Sadeghipour Equity and Employment Lead



WHERE WE ARE NOW



EMPLOYMENT IN CANADA IS HIGHEST SINCE 1976 (STATS CAN 2017)



UNEMPLOYMENT IS 5.7% (STATS CAN 2017)



THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IS DOUBLE THE NATIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, WITH TORONTO AS THE CITY SUFFERING THE HIGHEST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AT 57 PERCENT (ZOLTOK 2015)



AMONG EMPLOYED YOUTH, 25 PERCENT ARE IN JOBS NOT REQUIRING THEIR LEVEL OF EDUCATION (ZOLTOK 2015) AND ONLY 50 PERCENT OCCUPY A PAID POSITION (MISSISSAUGA NEWS 2013)

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

After interviewing various Toronto high school students on their experiences with unemployment, their responses were analyzed to identify specific trends in unemployment in Toronto. It was found that the majority of students had not known where to look for a job. They were not aware of any platforms or databases that could provide truthful and trustworthy information relating to their employment wishes. Many of them were not aware of the few resources at their disposal, because these resources were not marketed towards high school students. The students that had failed to find employment all agreed that previous job experience was always the deciding factor in their employment endeavours.

Their other job qualifications were disregarded if they had no previous job experience. This led many of them to feel pressured to lie about previous experience to get a job; this feeling of pressure was found in students from all over Toronto.

Some students stated that they had created fake work experiences for their resumes. Not only is this wrong, but it teaches young adults to have a misconception on truth and employment. A common statement amongst the high school students was:

"How can we get our first job when it requires previous work experience?"

This contradiction, according to the students, was the main reason unemployment is heavily prevalent amongst high school students.

All the students that had successfully gotten a job with no previous work experience said the reason for it was because they knew someone on the inside that was able to give them a chance to prove themselves. Unfortunately, for the majority of students that do not have these connections, work chances are not easily given. Some students said that they begged employers to give them a chance, and in a rare occurrence, they agreed. For the students that were not looking for employment, this cycle was not of importance, but for the students keen on finding employment, especially their first ever job, this cycle was very difficult to break.

To summarize, after interviewing multiple Toronto high school students, it was found that those looking for employment could be categorized into two main groups: those that had connections and were therefore provided with employment, and those that were denied jobs because they had no previous work experience. For the latter, employment is very difficult because there is no opportunity for experience when almost all jobs look for previous experience; the high school students are pushed into an unemployment cycle, impossible to break. Because of this cycle, it is important to make a change regarding youth unemployment in Toronto.

ACCESS TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: THE KIDS NEED JOBS TOO!

The proportion of young people employed in full-time or permanent work has fallen significantly over the last four decades, despite unemployment standing at levels comparable to those of the mid-1970s (Stats Can, 2017). It is pertinent to understand that there is an alarming need to improve the access to adequate and paid training, as well as resources that will aid Toronto's prominent youth in thriving as the future leaders of the city, and the country at large.

Barriers to employment for young people in Toronto include, but are not limited to, the following:



Transportation

Opportunities become limited for the youth population that rely on public transportation but do not live near the subway line, nor own private automobiles to navigate around the city.



Experience

Adequate on-the-job training and a lack of character-based hiring techniques prevent young people from entering the in the industry in which they find interest.



Housing

A lack of physical access to certain working locations is created as a result of the housing conditions youth may find themselves in, particularly those living in cheaper housing outside of the City centre. There is no doubt that there is a large and able working labor pool in the city of Toronto; however, not all people who are in search of employment, have the technical know-how to navigate around the thousands of job postings that appear online and on bulletin boards in and around the community. It is fair to say that being able to secure employment entails much more than being aware about a vacancy and tendering one's resume. From drafting a wellrounded resume, to understanding the nuances of writing a cover letter and following up with potential employers, several youth run into several problems while searching for jobs that often discourages them entirely. More often than not, large organizations outsource their hiring processes to external human resource companies; who often times, might be disconnected from both the hiring company and the applicants.

As a result, individuals who have not had experience dealing with both external humanresources contacts as well as directly with organizations will be at a disadvantage in comparison to someone who has been through the system several times. This is not to say; however, that there are no jobs that exist that are easy to navigate. The city is filled with job postings for general labour jobs which often pay a little above minimum wage and care less about prehiring scrutiny. However, these jobs often include tedious and repetitive tasks that require high physical strength and are often so precarious that a majority of employees are temporary.

Culling from that, it is also important to note the difficulty faced by youth, in finding worthwhile jobs that aid them in reaching their career goals. In addition to precarious employment and lack of employment security as a temporary worker, youth often face the dilemma of having to choose between a non-paid volunteer position in a field they find interest in, or a paid job in which a pay-cheque is the only benefit they derive from the experience. As a result, they often have to choose the job that pays them, while sacrificing a volunteer position that is more in line with their career goals - or in more dire situations, take on both commitments to make ends meet. Youth need to find employment opportunities that allow them gain transferable skills in which they can use for future jobs.

Some youth, as a result of these situations they find themselves in, undertake an entrepreneurship path. Interviewed were many young people doing just that. For instance, one self-starting multimedia artist, who is also a student at York University, revealed that he had grafted a peculiar employment path for himself in a manner where he can balance completing a bachelor's degree, with self-starting endeavours including photography, videography, graphic design, merchandise creation as well as visual arts. This 22-year old Nigerian international who came into Canada to further his education has been unable to find a paying part-time job in the visual arts industry as result of lack of access, and as such, decided to support himself financially by creating, marketing and selling his goods and services as a business-owner. This is not to say that entrepreneurship is the only means to do this, but to show the extent to which youth are willing to go in order to make ends meet.

In order to maintain the continuity of Toronto's workforce, youth need to be well-equipped with paid internships, practical apprenticeships, and permanent, career-developing full-time jobs.

BRIDGING THE GAP: YOUTH UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN TORONTO

The effects of these severely low rates of youth unemployment/underemployment persist across an individual's life time and have been linked to an overall decrease in job quality as well as to an inflation of academic credentials (Zoltok 2015). Beyond the individual, this crisis affects the stability of both the local and national economy.

Six interviews were conducted to gauge the state of youth unemployment/ underemployment in Toronto and the GTA. Respondents are between 18 and 24 years of age of mixed gender and ethnic/racial identities. Most respondents are currently full-time university undergraduate students; one respondent is a graduating highschool student. Questions were not in formal categories, but were structured using the following logic: general information, employment status, job satisfaction (for employed respondents), job searching (for unemployed respondents), barriers to employment, and helpful employment resources.

The majority of respondents reported being employed in restaurant or retail industries, with common job positions including sales associate and server/host. The majority of respondents held part-time positions as they were also currently full-time students. Moreover, the majority of respondents reported being employed in their most current position for six months to two years. Although the majority of respondents reported "no opinion" or an "overall satisfaction" regarding their employment, all respondents reported that they intended to look for alternative employment within the next two years. Half of the respondents reported their intention to look for alternative employment within the next six months. Regarding this short window of time before post-secondary graduation to secure employment or find alternative employment, one respondent states:

"I WISH MY SCHOOL HAD MORE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS IN PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT SITUATIONS BECAUSE MUCH OF OUR POST-GRADUATE SECURITY IS DEPENDENT ON OUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND PERCEIVED USEFULNESS TO THE ECONOMY."

Regarding job fields, zero respondents reported that their current employment was related to their field of study. Zero respondents reported having secured opportunities for alternative employment. The majority of respondents reported "lack of experience" as the primary barrier to employment. As another respondent puts it:

"THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WHEN JOB SEARCHING IN MY FIELD IS GETTING EXPERIENCE. EVEN ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS SOMETIMES REQUIRE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WHICH I THINK IS CONTRADICTORY. I FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO DO MORE SCHOOL TO BE COMPETITIVE OR DO MORE VOLUNTEER WORK- WHICH IS [BASICALLY] FREE LABOR AND NOT SUSTAINABLE FOR SOMEONE MY AGE."

Other common responses included lack of knowledge to job opportunities, resume writing, and interview preparation. Co-op programs were cited as a helpful employment resource; the majority of respondents did not mention any existing youth job placement programs as a helpful employment resource.

The findings of this report are limited because it is based on a very small, nonrandom sample. Moreover, the interview questions/structure are not constructed using the scientific method. However, the findings are nonetheless significant because they support existing statistics regarding the state of youth underemployment. Salient patterns within the findings include: an inflation of academic credentials, long-term job insecurity, and lack of experience and resources. The consistency of these responses poses as a valuable starting point for program developers and/or city policymakers. Although popular cultural discourse suggests youth unemployment is the result of a lack of human capital and entrepreneurial spirit, this research paper therefore posits that youth unemployment is inaccurately individualized and should, instead, be addressed as a collective issue. Based on the research that was conducted, an effective approach to this issue would likely include a program that is accessible and bridges youth to employers in sectors relevant to their education.

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT OF YOUTH IN TORONTO

The concern of precarious and temporary employment of the young – the inability to secure long-term opportunities and stable workplace experience – is the main topic of this section. From our findings, it should be evident that there is a need for change in workplace attitudes toward Toronto's students and youth, up to age 29. Friendly atmospheres at work in terms of their lack of experience, personal hardships, in addition to an understanding of the difficulty to secure stable employment from managers, supervisors, and business owners is needed if the city is to reverse the negative statistics revealing the struggles stated above.

The nature of our study consists of a series of interviews with business owners, non-governmental organizations (NGOS) and students/youth themselves. The interviews were conducted over the span of several months, mainly over the phone, through email, and in person. Interviews were completed by October of 2017. The individuals whom had participated in the study will remain anonymous, and the businesses reached are as follows: Robarts Library, in the University of Toronto, Stella's Place Young Adult Mental Health Organization, as well as a series of interviews with youth from the Mississauga region. Being able to interact with a large university establishment in addition to a local non-governmental organization and the youth on the ground, this study represents the many hierarchies students must face in order to secure work themselves in Toronto.

A manager from Robarts Library was quick to respond and give feedback. In this interview, answers were structured around what can be done in the future to better suit Toronto's young; chiefly, the banding together of businesses and organizations for a more welcoming workplace (or internship) environment to foster longer relationships in the companies and with the people involved. Partnerships between businesses in order to help youth secure internships were mentioned. This idea is one that would not require much effort from business and organization owners, as they would simultaneously create employees with a strong foundation of trust and desire to work for them personally. This suggestion can go all the way to the top: should the government also get involved in this effort, mentorships (paid, funded by the federal government and businesses in turn) can no longer be a burden without pay, by which students can support themselves while gaining precious experience – a sure-fire way to avoid the stresses expressed by students in the study.

These mentorships can change lives; universities in Toronto have already acknowledged the impact of an older guide in the workplace (or potential workplace), as some mentorship programs have been established, however, without a pay scheme. This is a theme in the Robarts interview, and a valuable piece of information from a manager who has seen many students come and go over years.

In interviewing Stella's Place, a NGO dedicated to connecting Toronto's young workers and unemployed with vital mental health services, more suggestions were brought to the forefront. Mainly, and based off of their line of work, mental health concerns of the youth were spoken of as a main hindrance to youth finding long-lasting work that has the potential to begin careers. An important question this organization asks is: what is being done for youth with diagnosed mental health cases in their search for employment? The city needs to ask itself this often. Our interviewee suggested that this issue needs to be spoken of a lot more in the public eye. The federal government has made efforts to make prescriptions and the like much cheaper for the nation's youth; however, this is only half of the battle. Other issues discussed were:



hesitation from employers to hire youth based on their mental health status



Interestingly, Stella's Place qualifies youth as anyone up to 29 years of age - older than most studies categorize youth, which is usually capped at 25 or so. This finding is useful as it shifts the way we approach the issue of youth precarious employment; perhaps, there are older groups also facing the same issues in establishing long-term work, and thus these findings should be taken with more gravity as these proposed solutions can have an even larger impact than initially thought, should concrete improvements be made. Stella's Place noted that the hesitation that employers experienced can be halted with more concerted efforts from the local and federal governments - as funds increase supporting Canada's youth, employment in Toronto should be acquired more easily as the stress and worries associated with finding a job in order to immediately support mental health services such as counselling, medications, de-stressers such as yoga and meditation, will be worries of the past as the cost will go down. This suggestion can be tied to the mentorship idea from the Robarts interview, as collaboration with all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) can transpire to unfound success for the young looking for work with sensitive struggles in their personal lives. Employers need an attitude shift as well, in order for this system to operate; hesitation to hire based off of mental health concerns, while understandable, should not bar young women and men from establishing meaningful careers. The information gathered from these interviews alone show us the observations of businesses and NGOs, and how they can help structure future initiatives.

NEWCOMER YOUTH AND REFUGEES

Employment equity means creating equal opportunities for youth in the job-market and giving them the tools they need when they step into the real job field. Therefore, several NGO's, community centres, employers, and business owners offered their insights on employment and how it can improve to be equitable for youth; especially marginalized youth.

During the consultation phase, different organizations that provide services for newcomer youth were looked at. In addition, some of those centres and organizations have services tailored for newcomers and they offer them a chance to learn some tips and tricks on how to be part of the Canadian job market, access mentorship programs, English supports, and so forth.

Yet, barriers remain for newcomer young people. Highlighted below are key barriers that newcomer youth face during their integration to the job market.

They include the following:



Language Barriers

Some newcomer youth face language barriers, that will hinder their chances to network. In response to that, lots of resources and businesses are starting to develop programs in different language to increase equity



Access

Access to information about employment opportunities, in particular to the "shadow job market" created by networks can be particularly challenging for young people new to Toronto



Stigma and Biases

Stigma about certain cultures and youth groups will hinder employment equity As such, while organizations that provide vital services for newcomer youth are key support mechanisms, gaps that these organizations cannot fill still persist. There is only so much a welcome centre can do in ensuring a young person new to Toronto can have access to the shadow job market. And, of course, these centres do not, nor can they, combat biases that newcomers can face by virtue of them belonging to a particular community. In addition to these programs and services, we need real institutional work done to address the systemic inequities that prevail when it comes to the lack of employment opportunities for Toronto's growing newcomer and refugee populations.



DORIS BRAUNSTEIN

Doris is a senior high school student at Hudson College with aspirations to study medical science in university. She is passionate about social justice, which is why she loves working with the TYC. Her interests include science, ballet, and arts — and is a huge fan of poetry. Doris hopes to expand on her passion for social issues in the future with a main focus on employment, healthcare, and governmentissued institutions.



IANA I. LANCETA

Iana will be a graduate of the University of Toronto this June 2018. Her studies focus on the social determinants that affect one's quality of life as they relate to race, class, and gender identities, economic development, social policy, family demography, and immigrant and minority labourmarket integration. Iana has had the pleasure of applying this sociological framework to the Toronto Public Health's Investment in Youth Engagement and Humanitarian Affairs' University Scholar Leadership Symposium.



REANNE CAYENNE

Reanne Cayenne is currently studying at the University of Toronto, graduating this year in the political science program. She intends to use her education to help bring Toronto's community together through improved conditions in the city. This includes youth employment and equity concerns, for which she dedicates her time at City Hall with others at the Toronto Youth Cabinet.



OSIVUE ITSEUMAH

Osivue is a 22-year old Nigerian-born, York University alumn who is greatly interested in municipal, provincial and federal levels of governance and public policy. Osivue's interests cut-across national boundaries as he is actively involved in the current affairs of both Nigeria and Canada. He hopes to establish a career in public service, where he aims to aid in the delivery of efficient and sustainable educational, health and social services.



JANA TAYFOUR

Jana is a U of T alum with a Masters in Education and curriculum. She is the research lead for newcomer employment equity at The Toronto Youth Cabinet and she also provides workshops to youth about networking and engagement, which she hopes to pursue long-term as a career. Jana's research and professional background is in equity, mental health and youth leadership and journalism. Jana hopes to expand more on these experiences with the Youth Cabinet and other youth organizations in the GTA.



MANA SADEGHIPOUR

Mana is a recent Master's degree at the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University. She received her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Toronto. Mana is passionate about issues related to the democratic engagement, labour-market integration, and social cohesion of vulnerable communities within the Greater Toronto Area. These interests were sparked by her experience interning with organizations such as Samara Canada, Lifeline Syria and Diversity Exchange which encouraged to pursue a career in the public service, so that she could contribute to meaningful policymaking that help improve the living standards of her community.



EDNA ALI

Edna is the Executive Director of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, the City of Toronto's official youth advisory body. Elsewhere, you can find her involved in community projects within her community of Etobicoke-York, or involved with organizations such as the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and Progress Toronto.

En outre, elle est diplômée du Collège Universtaire Glendon en sciences politiques.

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