

ESCALATOR

JOBS FOR YOUTH FACING BARRIERS

**COMPANIES
& YOUTH
MOVING
UP IN THE
WORLD**

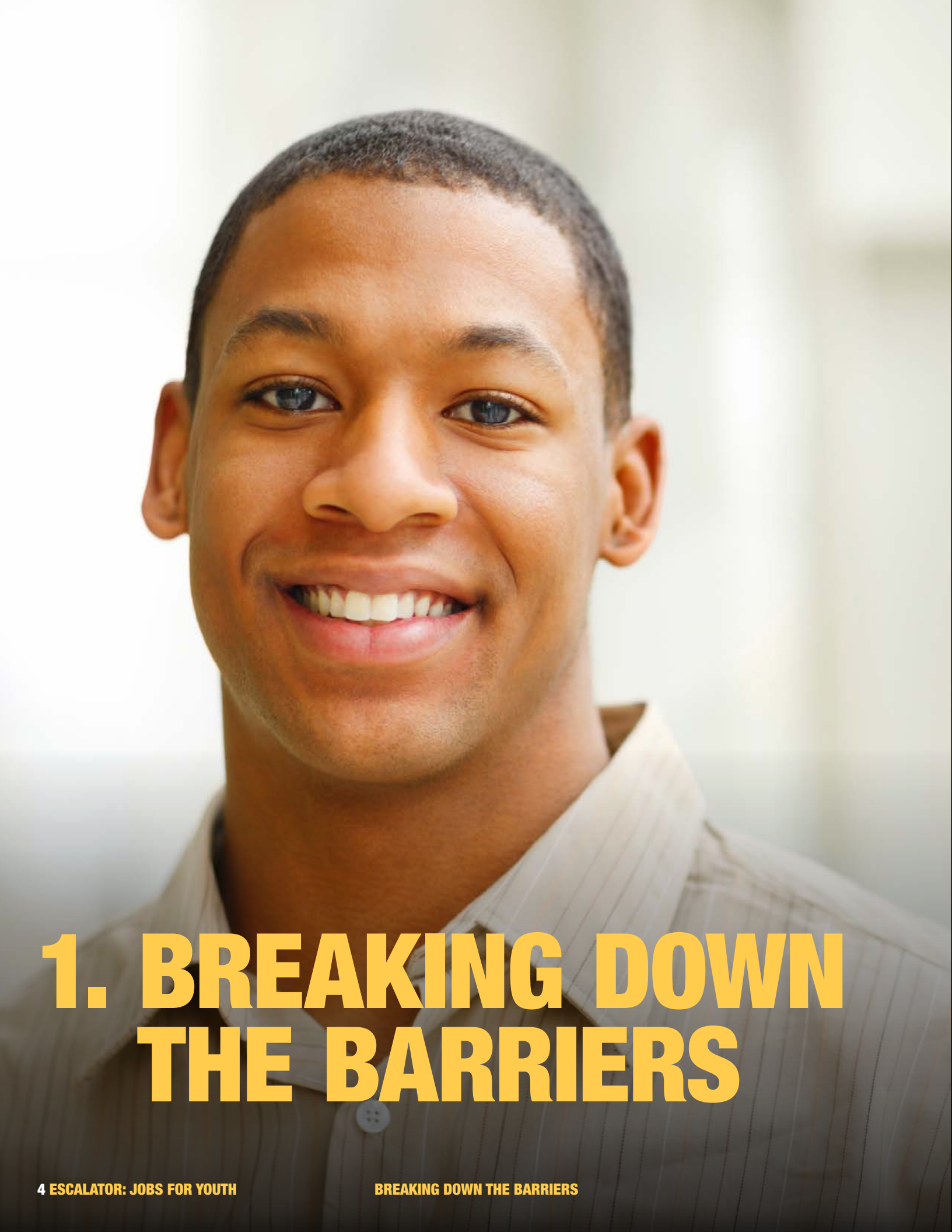
**CIVICACTION BRINGS
TOGETHER SENIOR EXECUTIVES
AND RISING LEADERS FROM ALL
SECTORS TO TACKLE SOME OF
OUR REGION'S TOUGHEST SOCIAL,
ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL
CHALLENGES**

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1. BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

UP TO 83,000 GTHA YOUTH BETWEEN 15-24 ARE STUCK IN LIMBO



A region where *all* young people thrive, and where their talents and drive contribute to the regional economy.

That's our vision for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

If we are to achieve this, we have to break down the barriers that prevent youth and employers from making meaningful connections to the labour market, and build bridges that help us reach greater social and economic prosperity in the region.

We know that youth unemployment is high, about twice the overall unemployment rate. Young people in Ontario (and more specifically the GTHA) are particularly hard hit. In 2013, the unemployment rate for Ontario youth from ages 15-24 was upwards of 17%.¹ In 2014, it's estimated to be even higher.

Up to 83,000 GTHA youth aged 15-24 are Not in Education, Employment or Training – a category called NEET.² That's about 10% of the youth in the region.

According to the Province of Ontario's *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development*, adolescents (aged 13-19) are primed for exciting opportunities. These youth are at a developmental stage when positive experiences, like a supportive first-job opportunity, can help them navigate their life transitions and challenges.³ Within this group of youth facing barriers to employment are those who, with some support, are ready for work.

So what are the roadblocks to opportunity

for these youth? Many young people face barriers because of their socio-economic status, demographic background, or other circumstances.

In 2012, the Province released Ontario's *Youth Action Plan*, which included a commitment to work with the private sector to see how to break down barriers to employment and mentorship. In 2013, the Province's *Stepping Up* – a strategic framework to guide, focus, and maximize collective action to support young people – noted that certain groups require more targeted supports and opportunities to succeed. Racialized or newcomer youth. Aboriginal youth. Youth living in poverty, or in conflict with the law. Youth in and leaving care. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer youth (LGBTQ). And youth with disabilities or special needs.

Many of these groups are represented strongly in the NEET category. Often, these youth are ready for work, or would be with a little boost. What's holding them back? The roots of high unemployment rates are complex. Yet through extensive consultation with youth, CivicAction has identified four common barriers:

1. Systemic barriers weaken the social networks of our target youth. Often, these young people lack connections to positive mentors or role models who could help them navigate the job market, expand their networks, get job-ready and develop life skills. So they're unprepared to start work.

2. A lack of meaningful opportunities means many youth can't gain the experience to

Of the 880,000 youth in the GTHA, up to 9.4% are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). We want to close the gap between those that are NEET and those that aren't.

DIVERSE GROUPS OF YOUTH FACE COMMON BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Racialized Youth

Youth in Poverty

Youth in Conflict with the Law

Newcomer Youth

Youth In and Leaving Care

Aboriginal Youth

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,
Two-Spirit and Queer (LGBTQQ) Youth

Youth with Disabilities or Special Needs

Our work is focused on the common barriers:

1. Weakened social networks as a result of systemic barriers;
2. A lack of meaningful opportunities;
3. Lack of accessible and affordable transportation; and
4. Racism and structural discrimination.

get a job. Existing opportunities are often short-term, with few prospects and limited training or mentorship to build transferable skills.

3. The lack of accessible and affordable transportation can hinder economic opportunities. Youth in marginalized neighbourhoods are often unable to reach their workplaces in a timely or inexpensive manner. Certain parts of the region have no public transit service outside of peak hours, or at all.

4. Many young people experience racism and structural discrimination when applying for work. For instance, some employers perceive that certain segments of youth have negative attitudes, lack a work ethic, or lack motivation to do entry-level jobs. Human resource systems can introduce bias, through recruitment and screening processes. This discrimination can shut the door to many young people, even when inadvertent.

These are not new problems. Youth unemployment has been high since before, and certainly after, the global economic downturn in 2008. We are also aware of the additional barriers that many youth face. What we need are new approaches. Long-term, sustainable solutions require engagement and leadership by the private sector.

The Government of Ontario partnered with CivicAction to identify ways the private sec-

tor can contribute to tackling unemployment among youth facing barriers. The Private Sector Youth Jobs and Mentorship Initiative is one of 20 action items outlined in the Province's *Youth Action Plan* (2012). Stakeholders, including leaders in the private sector, expressed a belief that business has a stronger role to play in supporting employment opportunities for young people who face multiple barriers.

Why the private sector? Government⁴ cannot tackle this issue alone, and must work in partnership with labour, colleges and universities, community agencies, and employers. The Government of Ontario has made commitments to youth employment, including the *Youth Jobs Strategy* (2013), which supports young people between the ages of 15-29 to find work, build skills, or start their own businesses. But government-funded programs and services can't meet all the needs of our target youth population.

Companies not only have a role to play but a keen self-interest. Engaging our target youth can help employers to meet their skills gaps, draw on a larger labour pool, represent diversity of the local population, and continue to grow and seize opportunities. Moving forward, the public, private and community sectors have to work together in true partnership.

The harsh reality is that when young people are left behind, this costs us all. Youth face a



“A first job means more than a paycheque. It can mean increased self-confidence, access to mentors, exposure to opportunities beyond your neighbourhood, understanding the value of education, and it builds the belief that your current circumstances do not define your future possibilities.”

–Susan McIsaac, President and CEO, United Way Toronto, and Director, CivicAction Board



loss of potential, confidence, self-reliance and self-esteem. Society bears a huge burden in lost productivity and taxes, on top of higher expenditures related to social supports. And businesses lose out on the talent they need to sustain growth and development.

We must support youth – especially youth facing barriers – to succeed in the workforce. We must remove barriers to getting that first positive experience in the workforce, so they can realize their full potential and contribute to building more vibrant communities. If we don't invest now, we'll pay far more later.

CivicAction spent several months working with employers, youth, community agencies, labour and governments, harnessing their wisdom, and charting a path forward – a regional action plan that will address unemployment among youth who face barriers (see Appendix 1 for scope of work). This work has led to a set of proposed cost-effective and results-oriented solutions. These actions will link youth facing barriers to employment with more job opportunities and support to enter the labour market.

The actions connect with and complement the larger ecosystem comprising youth, community agencies, business and government, for a holistic approach to the problem.

These solutions articulate how to work more effectively with business. They recognize

that employers have different ways of working, depending on their size and sector. They understand that youth can have different levels of readiness for the workplace, but similar potential. And they focus on proven interventions around the core challenges of long-term youth unemployment, which we heard throughout our consultations. We'll leverage the wealth of existing infrastructure that remains committed to serving our target youth populations, and work with organizations poised to make these changes.

We call this action plan *Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers*. Because it's about the many steps needed along the way to successfully connect youth to their first job. And it's about companies *and* youth moving up in the world.

In developing this strategy, we have started to build real momentum – our escalator is moving up and we invite everyone who can make a difference to join us.



2. INVEST NOW OR PAY LATER

BUSINESS HAS TO BE INVOLVED AND CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

What happens when significant numbers of young people – youth who could otherwise be assets to our workforce – are on the outside looking in? For youth, society and the business community, the costs are enormous.

Costs to Youth

All young people have strengths. It is in our collective best interest to nurture them, and give youth every opportunity to fulfil their potential and contribute to the resiliency of their communities.⁵ According to *Stepping Stones*, today's youth are more likely to hold many jobs in their lifetime, and perhaps have multiple careers. Youth need a wide set of skills to ensure success in life and the workplace, and to manage and respond to tomorrow's challenges.⁶

Without offering the opportunity to develop essential skills or personal networks to enter the labour market, we put young people at risk of poor economic, social, and personal outcomes.

While the unemployment rate for youth in general is high, it's even higher for specific populations of young people.

Research by RBC for CivicAction drilled down to understand employment for three groups in particular: Aboriginal, visible minority, and newcomer youth. The results show a gap between youth overall and certain groups, and emphasize the need for action.

- The total youth unemployment rate is 28% for youth aged 15-19 and 18% for youth aged 20-24.⁷
- For Aboriginal youth, 35% of those aged 15-19 and close to 20% of those aged 20-24 are unemployed.⁸

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH FOR CERTAIN GROUPS

Youth (15 – 24) in specific groups face unemployment rates that are higher than for non-visible minority youth

Non-visible minority	19.5
Visible minority	23.9
Black	28.0
Korean	27.4
South Asian	24.6
Southeast Asian	23.9
West Asian	23.9
Chinese	23.7
Arab	23.6
Aboriginal	24.9

Source: Statistics Canada. 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Data is for the Toronto CMA.

- For visible minorities, the unemployment numbers are nearly 33% of 15-19 year-olds and over 20% of 20-24 year-olds.⁹
- For newcomers, 31% of those 15-19 and 21% of those 20-24 are unemployed.¹⁰

The lack of economic opportunities costs our target youth who face barriers to employment far more than a paycheque. When job prospects are dim, when barriers to entry are high, when hope seems remote, some youth may believe they have little to offer the workforce, and can become disengaged.

A lack of economic opportunity is cited among poverty and racism as one of ten roots of youth violence, as noted in 2008's *Review of the*

A TD Economics study identifies the “scarring effect” – a period of unemployment at time of entry into the labor market, which is associated with persistently lower wages many years thereafter. TD estimates the scarring effect in Canada to be \$12.4 billion over the next 18 years.¹¹

For high school dropouts specifically, the loss of earning potential is enormous. The Canadian Council on Learning reports that collective lifetime loss (each dropout over a 35-year span) at \$307 billion.^{12 13}

Roots of Youth Violence report to the Ontario Government. When combined, these roots of youth violence can lead to conditions – also known as immediate risk factors – that put some young people at risk of being involved in serious violence:

- A deep sense of alienation and low self-esteem;
- Little empathy for others and impulsivity;
- A belief that they are oppressed, held down or unfairly treated, with no part or stake in the broader society;
- A belief that they have no way to be heard through other channels; and
- No sense of hope.¹⁴

Youth who face barriers to employment may experience the shame and frustration of not being able to support their families, and additionally of relying on government support. This accentuates the sense of isolation, alienation and clear messages of “otherness” and exclusion.¹⁵

How can today's youth develop the resiliency required to ensure their employability, future earning power, overall well-being and fulfillment? It's critical that youth are supported to gain skills through further education, training, and work experience in their early adult years.



Costs to Society

If job opportunities fail to materialize, the costs to youth lead to broader societal costs we all bear – lost output, and increased pressure on social supports (e.g. health and social assistance, etc.).

One study, conducted by researchers from Columbia University and City University of New York, calculated the short- and long-term economic burden for youth in U.S. who aren't in school or working. The cumulative lifetime burden to society was conservatively estimated to be \$1 million per youth.¹⁶

The message is clear. If we don't give youth facing barriers the support to successfully transition into the workforce, the costs to society are staggering.

Costs to Employers

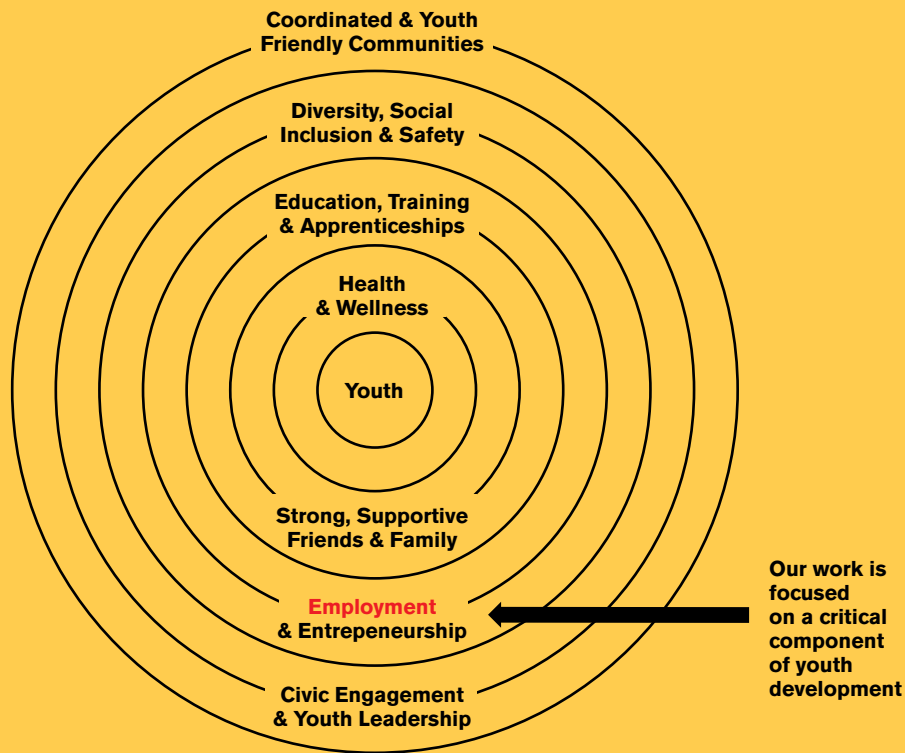
Companies also experience a direct economic impact. When tens of thousands of young people are effectively excluded from job opportunities, this greatly narrows the local labour pool. Companies can't plan their workforce as effectively, or enjoy as diverse a workforce.

Moreover, many employers are hindered by an inability to fill skills gaps – an economic and competitive disadvantage.

These gaps have several dimensions. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario notes that for some employers, the skills gap is one of poor core skills.¹⁹ For others, the gap means an absence of workers with the right credentials, or simply a shortage of workers period. Some of what's labelled a skills gap may actually be an experience gap.

The Canadian Council on Learning estimates the collective loss of tax revenue from high school drop-outs at \$115 billion (over 35 years), and the lifetime private health care costs at \$623 billion.¹⁷ With 20% of Canada's youth living in the GTHA, 9.4% of those being NEET, that has major consequences for this region.¹⁸

KEY THEMES IN STEPPING UP



Stepping Up is Ontario's strategic framework to guide, focus, and maximize collective action to support young people. The smaller circles closest to the core represent important early interactions for youth, while those further out represent the channels through which they grow to become members of the broader community.

Leading business organizations in the GTHA and Ontario have placed a high priority on developing a 21st century workforce and taking steps to reduce the skills mismatch.

In *Toronto as a Global City: Scorecard on Prosperity – 2014*, the Toronto Region Board of Trade called again for “a better match between the skills of Toronto’s labour force and the skills demanded by the market place”.²⁰ In a 2014 survey, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce found roughly 25% of businesses in Toronto can’t fill a job because they can’t find someone with the right qualifications.²¹ The Chamber called on businesses to play a greater role in training.²²

The private sector can benefit from hiring youth facing multiple barriers. Many of these benefits are identified on pages 32-33, they include: productivity gains, avoided turnover costs, lower wage and recruitment costs, tax incentives, enhanced brand image, deeper employee engagement, tech savviness, and a diverse workforce that is reflective of their customer base.

The skills gap in Ontario is a long-term threat to the viability of many businesses. It already costs the economy roughly 3.75% of GDP per year, according to a 2013 study by The Conference Board of Canada.²³

3. MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUTH AND EMPLOYERS



Supporting entry into work is imperative for youth, society and businesses. With tens of thousands of youth facing barriers to employment – a situation that leads them to be discouraged and disconnected – the costs of inaction are huge. As are the opportunities when we decide to take action.

We set out to understand how some leading initiatives in the GTHA and around the world are tackling this issue and engaging business. Our focus wasn't necessarily on creating new programs or organizations, but on doing things differently to achieve the desired outcomes.

To inform discussions with leaders and youth across the region, we enlisted a pro bono team from Accenture to analyze more than 100 possible interventions pertaining to youth and jobs. These efforts revealed missed opportunities to maximize private sector involvement:

- the majority of interventions are government-funded and non-profit-led, with the private sector involved as a secondary stakeholder;
- scaling is a significant challenge due to resource constraints, program requirements, and difficulties recruiting suitable youth;
- few interventions report on success – and even fewer have rigorous evaluations; and
- most interventions focus on the job seeker rather than employer needs, and don't always align with business objectives (limiting the case for employer support).

While traditional approaches have been focused on government and non-profit organizations, a new approach would better align employment and training services with demand in the private sector. Don Drummond's Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services report recommended that employment and training programs be better organized and evaluated against labour-market success factors.

Our work led to 10 possible actions with great potential for private sector leadership. We then prioritized four initial actions to increase the role of employers in preparing our target youth for work and preparing employers to hire them. Why these 10 actions? They:

- have the potential to get more youth facing barriers into jobs faster;
- highlight systemic changes rather than short-term fixes;

- focus on the demand side (i.e. direct needs of employers), in addition to the supply side (i.e. needs of job-seeking youth);
- break down barriers that prevent employers from accessing young talent and that prevent youth from achieving employment outcomes;
- target youth facing multiple barriers that are the most job-ready (i.e. with moderate training, mentorship, and experience); and
- focus on how private sector employers can increase opportunities for job-ready youth, while meeting their business objectives.

There are many causes of youth unemployment, and of the barriers that many youth face. No single action will solve them all. As a society, we must address issues ranging from education to housing, poverty to addiction, and crime to discrimination.

Private sector employers are not in the business of youth outreach or social work. They know that partnerships with community agencies are essential to provide wraparound services and life skills training our target youth need. However, they *are* in business. And these businesses have openings for first jobs, and employees who want to contribute to the community. The benefits of these actions – in terms of meaningful job opportunities, filling skill gaps, and overall economic opportunities – are mutual. GTHA employers can do well by doing good.

Though we focus on four initial actions, the remaining six have merit and should be pursued in the medium-term. With these actions, one size does not fit all. The suite of four initial actions offers opportunities for youth at different stages of their journey to work. Youth closest to employment, who may lack the right network, credentials or experience, stand to benefit the most.

These four initial actions are complementary. For the greatest impact, we need to offer them in tandem, to achieve exciting synergies (e.g. mentoring and training as a source for job candidates). Initial launches could cluster around geographic areas with high concentrations of youth facing barriers, and potential opportunities.

For each action, we have outlined the key components to a successful launch in the GTHA, and next steps. Moving forward, it's important to identify who is best placed to drive immediate impact, measure progress, learn, refine, and scale.

CivicAction assembled a task-force and working group, with senior and rising leaders representing key stakeholder groups. We held 11 focus groups with youth. (See Appendix 2 for a summary). We convened 6 roundtables across the GTHA to consult employers, community agencies, labour, government and youth across the GTHA. Our goal: to identify potential private sector-led actions that would benefit both youth and employers.

4. TAKING ACTION



ACTION 1 REGIONAL MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE: CONNECTING YOUTH WITH ROLE MODELS

The Call for Action

Would you want to navigate new terrain without a map, GPS or guide? When appropriately delivered, mentorship can provide youth with positive role models to help chart a path from where they are to where they might want to be.

Mentors can help youth who face barriers to employment learn where jobs exist and how to get them. They can share life lessons and life skills. Just as important as navigating the job market, role models can help youth understand what's required to succeed.

For our target youth, a mentor who has more recently entered the workforce (e.g. millennials) will have firsthand experience about how to get a foot in the door and the essential skills needed.²⁴ Mentors can support the sort of self-discovery and exploration of career paths that helps youth understand how their unique gifts can lead to a job.

A positive mentoring relationship can also help break down misperceptions, promote acceptance and build trust. Youth who have an ally in their success may feel increased hope.

Employers, too, benefit when they mobilize and support their staff to become mentors. Mentorship allows a wide variety of companies, including SMEs, to deepen involvement in their communities. Mentorship is a cost-effective way for employees to develop valuable soft skills. And it's an investment in our region's talent pipeline.

Over time, mentors can also gain insight into how employers may inadvertently put up barriers for certain groups of youth, and learn ways to attract a diverse array of talent.

Meeting the Need

Many mentoring programs exist across the GTHA, some focused on supporting our target youth. However, many employers are unaware of these programs, which are often just one part of what community agencies offer youth to prepare them with life and employment skills.

Often, a lack of dedicated funding limits the scope, reach, sustainability and scalability of these programs. Without a centralized database of youth mentoring opportunities, employers have limited access to mentoring programs run by community agencies that hold vital access to, and relationships with, otherwise hard-to-reach youth.

Targeted Action: A regional youth mentoring coordinating body

Many private sector employers are seeking meaningful volunteer opportunities for their employees, for personal and professional development. The 2020 Workplace cites that 80% of 13-25 year olds surveyed seek to work for an employer that cares about its impact and contribution to society.²⁵ Companies are also looking to give back to the communities where they operate.

A regional mentoring coordinating body makes it easier to connect employers to community agencies and will be a true partnership model. Centralizing mentoring programs will be an asset to employers and agencies. Establishing common guidelines for participating mentoring programs will also help improve employment outcomes, for youth and for employers.

Making it Work

For this to succeed, a number of organizations will need to play a role. The coordinating body will establish guidelines and assure program quality, recruit employers, link them to community agencies that run mentoring programs across the GTHA, train mentors, and evaluate the program. Ideally, employers will promote and sponsor the coordinating body and recruit mentors. Community agencies will recruit youth and orient both them and incoming mentors.

Employers should mobilize their workforce, in particular millennial employees, who are early enough in their career to relate to young people preparing for their first job, and want to give back to their communities.

Community agencies play a vital role in this partnership model. First, it's essential to recruit community partners that work with youth at the margins. The challenges these youth face can be overwhelming (e.g. hunger, health concerns, housing, violence, neglect, etc.). Our target youth look to community agencies for support with these and other needs – challenges that often hold them back from fully participating in opportunities to better themselves.

Second, community agencies can share mentoring best practices, and help employers learn about working with youth facing barriers. Third, agencies can be involved through referrals and access to wraparound supports, as needs arise for young people during the mentoring relationship.

THE FOUR ACTIONS

1. REGIONAL MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE: CONNECTING YOUTH WITH ROLE MODELS

2. EMPLOYER-DESIGNED TRAINING & INTERNSHIPS: CLOSING THE SKILLS GAP

3. ENGAGING SMEs: BRINGING JOB OPPORTUNITIES INTO THE OPEN

4. TRANSPARENCY OF THE JOB MARKET: CONNECT THE DOTS BETWEEN SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Our target youth themselves are a key partner. They will be asked to commit to the program, and provide feedback for continuous improvement.

We are looking for an existing non-profit organization to act as the regional coordinating body. To succeed, this organization should have:

- a mandate and priorities aligned with our vision;
- a strong record of employer engagement and serving youth facing barriers to employment;
- the ability to help secure necessary funding required to sustain the initiative; and
- a willingness to work with agencies outside their network through launch and rollout.

Along with the private sector, the role of government as a major employer, is to mobilize the participation of their own employees as mentors. The government also plays a critical part in: 1) continuing to invest in agencies participating in this initial launch; and 2) ensuring that agencies are adequately supported to provide ongoing referral and wraparound services to youth facing barriers to employment.

Measuring Success

- **For youth:** Increased access to mentorship opportunities that support all stages of the job search, and to a diverse group of mentors to start building a professional network. Beyond the number of youth engaged, success will hinge on whether mentees feel more confident/prepared for work, and whether their network has expanded.
- **For employers:** Increased numbers of employers involved in mentorship programs. For these companies, success also means a positive impact on their brand and reputation, a way to provide volunteer opportunities to their employees and grow their skills, and a chance to expand the support of communities where they operate. Mentors can develop a deeper understanding of the barriers facing youth and the opportunities to improve practices in their own organization.
- **For mentors:** A greater variety of mentoring opportunities (e.g. group, speed, one-on-one) will cater to the interests and abilities of a wider pool of mentors who want to support youth. Mentors will also get their own devel-

opment opportunities (including training as mentors), as well as volunteer recognition and support from their employer.

- **For community agencies:** Agencies will gain access to a larger pool of screened and trained mentors, and develop long-term corporate relationships. Staff can focus resources on youth outreach, engagement and wrap-around supports, while ultimately increasing access to mentoring for more youth.

NEXT STEPS

6-12 months

1. Secure an existing organization to serve as regional coordinating body.
2. Confirm partners and convene working group for initial launch including employers, community agencies, and youth.
3. Establish terms of a partnership model between lead organization, employers, community agencies and youth.
4. Establish targets and set goals for the initial launch.
5. Develop guidelines leveraging best practices and resources of existing mentoring programs, particularly those focused on employment outcomes and/or youth facing barriers.

12-18 months

1. Evaluate progress and refine the partnership model as needed in order to roll out to more employers and community agencies.
2. Establish connections to job training and recruitment programs, in particular those aimed at employing youth facing barriers. We envision that employers seeking entry-level or low-skilled labour will see value in hiring the mentees. Action #4, increasing transparency of the job market will support this.



EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

“The health and future of our society requires that every generation is engaged effectively. When 10% of our youth population faces significant barriers to education engagement and employment, our entire society suffers socially and economically. One way the private sector can support at-risk youth in overcoming these challenges is through mentorship programs connected to education and employment.”

–Caroline Booth,
Senior Vice
President and
Chief Procurement
Officer, TD Bank
Group



SUCCESS STORY

JEROME CLARKE-SINGH “RIGHT CONNECTIONS CAN LEAD TO A NEW CAREER PATH”

Jerome was born and raised in London, England, where he was caught up with the wrong crowd and had a few brush-ups with the law. His family moved to Canada when he was 16, to put him and his twin brother back onto a positive path. Growing up in Brampton, he connected with the right circle of mentors, gained experience through part-time jobs, and went on to partner with another young entrepreneur to begin working as a cinematographer.

“Having the experience working in part-time jobs helped me envision a career path, boosted my self-confidence, and helped me gain appreciation for the value of education,” says Jerome. Jerome is dedicated to making a difference in his local community, and is currently studying law.

CASE STUDY

Can a regional coordinating body deliver enhanced employment outcomes for youth, mentors and employers? The Mentoring Partnership, a program of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), while not focused on youth aged 15-24, is an encouraging model to learn from.

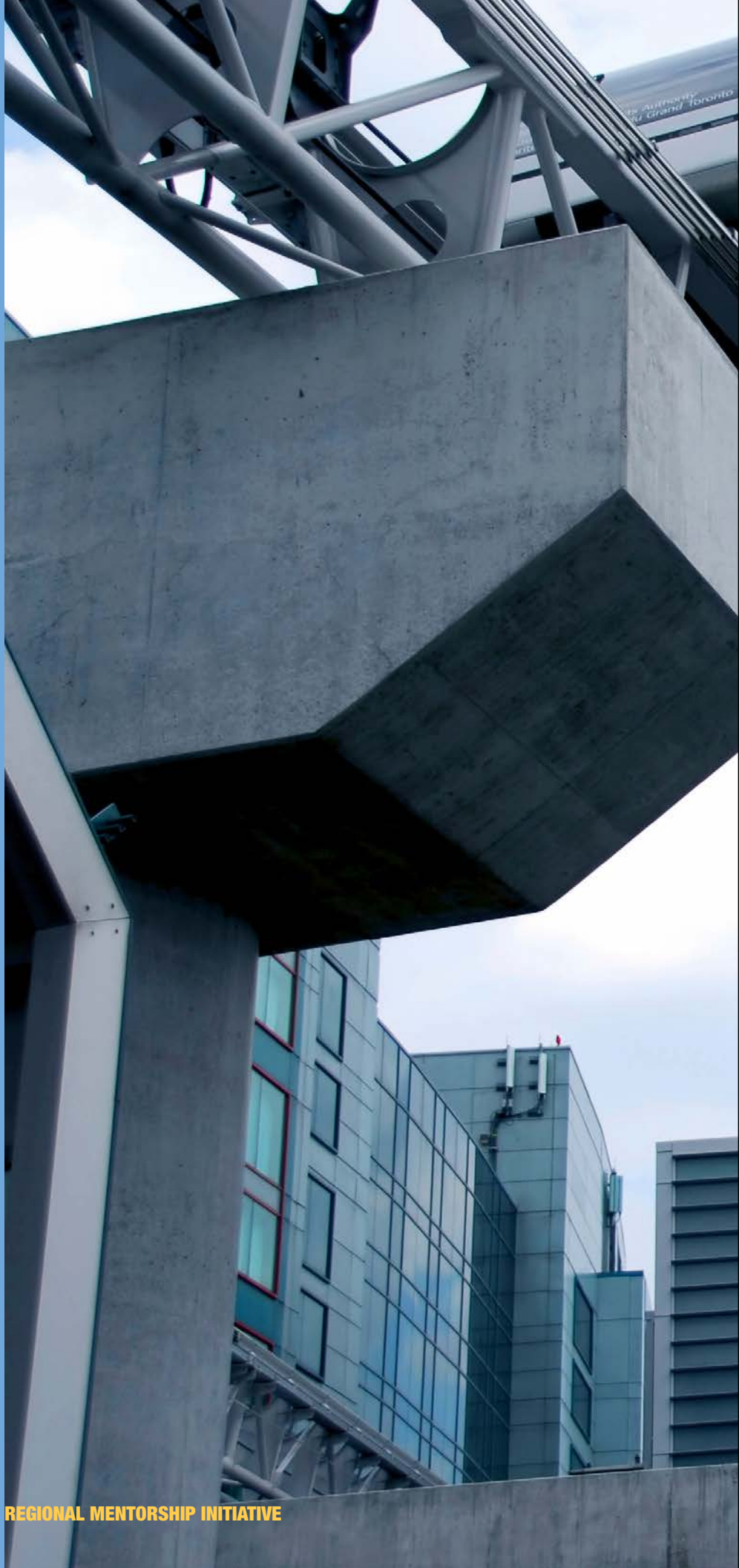
TRIEC has successfully facilitated over 9,000 occupation-specific mentoring relationships between recently-arrived skilled immigrants and established professionals. There are parallels to our focus; skilled immigrants, like our target youth, lack the social capital that leads to opportunities.

The Mentoring Partnership supports the collaboration of 13 community agency partners, and has worked with over 25 employer partners annually during the last 10 years.

Corporate partners promote the mentoring opportunity internally to staff and identify suitable, qualified mentors. Community partners deliver the program by matching mentors with skilled immigrants and supporting the mentoring relationship.

After completing a four-month mentoring relationship, 70% of mentees have found a job in their field (at the appropriate level) within six months, and over 80% within one year. Through the mentoring relationships, employers also changed their perceptions towards hiring new immigrants. Employers continue to seek new hires through The Mentoring Partnership because of the value they've experienced from having new immigrants in the workplace.

The Mentoring Partnership model has been adapted by more than 10 other Immigrant Employment Councils across Canada, through the ALLIES National Mentoring Initiative, as a proven strategy to improve employment outcomes for skilled immigrants.







ACTION 2

EMPLOYER-DESIGNED

TRAINING & INTERNSHIPS:

CLOSING THE SKILLS GAP

The Call for Action

Certain industries anticipate increasing demand for entry-level workers, and fear a skills gap will limit their growth and productivity. Without access to adequate training opportunities, many youth lack the skills – technical and/or soft – to qualify or succeed in entry-level positions.

Where can youth facing barriers to employment gain these skills?

Many entry-level internships target post-secondary students. What about youth that haven't completed school? Training programs that do support youth facing barriers to employment don't always align with employer needs. While providing valuable experiences, many programs don't necessarily result in employment. And few leverage the potential investment from companies to build the workforce in sectors facing skills or labour shortages.

To close this gap, it's vital for employers to work jointly with governments, educational institutions and non-profit agencies to design, deliver, and recruit for these programs. A collaborative approach will ensure the required supports that young people need to prepare, secure and ultimately keep their first job.

The education system has primary responsibility for developing the relevant skills of young people. However, businesses also have a responsibility to provide workers – current and potential – with the demand-based training they need to be successful employees.

Meeting the Need

An employer-designed, non-profit-led model will improve the current training systems designed for youth facing barriers to employment.

Targeted Action: An employer-designed training & internship program.

This program model will address gaps in the current training landscape. Many large employers train new recruits, and provide internal training for entry-level positions. However, most programs are for new or continuing students. They are not generally equipped to provide the wraparound services and life skills training our target youth need.

Employer-designed curricula place business needs at the centre of training design, ensur-

ing candidates graduate with the skills required in the workplace. Having a non-profit partner, meanwhile, brings the experience, connections and resources that employers need to fully support youth facing barriers to employment.

Making it Work

This programming is most successful when an employer (or group of employers) provides the in-class training, with a non-profit organization acting as the administrative backbone.

Securing early employer champions can solicit buy-in and commitment from other employers in the region. A non-profit organization, led by a Board of Directors in industry, would help recruit, train, and place youth into internship positions. To succeed, the program should have:

- **Employer-designed curriculum.** Training materials and curriculum designed by industries and companies, including best practices for diverse learning styles and needs of certain groups (e.g. methods of knowledge transfer in Aboriginal communities or unique needs of youth with learning disabilities).
- **Employer-sponsored fundraising.** Employers champion this effort, and fund start-up/operating costs, and internships. Private sector funding gives employers a commitment in training a future workforce.
- **Industry collaboration.** Companies can tackle a common challenge – getting entry-level employees with critical skill sets to fill current and future workforce needs. A broad platform with built-in resources and support will help all companies commit to supporting youth training.

The program should focus on the most promising youth candidates – those that are motivated to succeed. Community agencies play a key role in identifying potential participants, and ensuring they can access the supports they need (e.g. housing, healthcare, mentorship). Employers need that readiness from interns, as much as youth need it for themselves. Achieving and tracking high success rates will help the program obtain the necessary buy-in to grow.

Measuring Success

- **For youth:** exposure to employers, valuable on-the-job experience with specific skills, and

IT is one industry that's primed for training and internship for entry-level positions. This is a fast-growing sector compared to the economy as a whole, has a high need for skills, and is attractive to youth. Toronto is home to about one-third of the country's tech companies, employing more than 178,000 people, making it an ideal target.²⁶

a reference for future work placements.

- **For employers:** improved process of attracting and retaining youth, and reduced risk of hiring as a result of short-term placements and certified training (through industry-lead programs). By pooling resources, a coalition of employers increase their impact on reducing barriers to employment for our target youth.

Youth who face barriers to employment and employers alike gain from this type of program through:

Training: a cohort of job seekers trained with broad employment skills that are in high demand; youth trained with skills targeted to the specific industry/sector; and a curriculum designed with employer outcomes in mind, to serve specific needs and skills gaps.

Internship: through experiential-based learning, short-term employees gain the foundational skills to succeed in a job; employers can train and develop potential employees with low-risk; youth have the job experience to secure continued employment or another position in the industry.

Ongoing employment: employees are trained with requisite skills; the current employer shapes on-the-job training, best practices, and work habits; youth get the experience to help other youth understand program requirements.

Next Steps

1. Identify skills gaps in the GTHA and establish a winning coalition of employers to invest in training. Connect with a larger group of employers to provide internships.
2. Document the model and track successful outcomes (where participants go) to inform ways to adapt and expand. Leverage the delivery model and best practices, to define a roadmap for program start-up and success.
3. Adapt the model for other sectors. Conduct a deeper dive of alternate, low-skill model options. Programs aligned to industries with anticipated skills shortages will be the most successful in the long term, with outcomes aligned to business needs. For example, tourism and hospitality employs 315,000 people across the Toronto Region, and is another potential target sector.²⁷

CASE STUDY

What kind of training and internship model could have an impact on our target youth? The Technology Service Corps (TSC) program, delivered by the non-profit NPower, has achieved great success in the U.S. with sites in New York and Dallas, and is expanding to the Toronto region. TSC is an intensive 15-week program (classroom training based on an industry-designed curriculum, and professional skills training from corporate volunteers), a technology certification, and a 7-week paid internship from an industry partner.

More than 80% of NPower alumni are either employed or pursuing higher education within one year of completing the program.

In the long-term, a program like this can have exponential economic impacts. The average cost invested in participants is about \$5,400 per student and \$8,400 for an employed graduate – a modest investment that will reap a lifetime of rewards. According to NPower, the Social Impact Value comes to \$170,000-\$280,000 per student.

Any way you calculate it – the lifetime earnings differential of program graduates (compared to a minimum wage career), the additional government contributions, and the possible ripple effects (contributions to the community, breaking a cycle of generational poverty, etc.) – the individual and social return on investment is huge.



EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

“The rising number of young people who are unemployed, under-employed, or lack skills needed for sustainable employment is a growing challenge. Through IT skills training and certifications for youth we are providing the expertise necessary for careers in IT, while addressing a skills gap in the Canadian marketplace. The private sector is uniquely placed to provide our young people with specialized skills and tools for success in today’s workplace.”

–Paul Semak, Vice President Sales, Central Canada, Cisco Systems



SUCCESS STORY

CARLOS MCDONALD **“A BETTER START”**

Carlos McDonald was raised in care, and is determined to give his family a better start. This father of a 4-year old daughter is doing his best to make ends meet to support him and his family, and recently went back to school. “This is a call for the private sector to do a little bit more when it comes to putting young people to work,” says Carlos, a member of the Youth Leaving Care Provincial Panel and CivicAction’s Taskforce. “As a young father having my first job allowed me to provide financial support to my daughter. It’s important for my family’s future.”

ACTION 3

ENGAGING SMEs: BRINGING JOB OPPORTUNITIES INTO THE OPEN

The Call for Action

Almost 9 in 10 (88.5%) private sector jobs in Ontario are related to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).²⁸ As we learned in our roundtables and interviews across the region, these employers have a need for entry-level workers. Yet SMEs often have limited resources for recruiting and hiring. They seldom use job boards, and rarely seek to recruit youth through local agencies.²⁹ Moreover, existing job banks and employment infrastructure serving youth are small-scale and often operate at the community level.

There's an opportunity to engage SMEs and connect them to recruiting and matching services that meet their needs. Why would employers be motivated to hire outside their traditional networks? They will if they have: 1) Human Resource support for identifying and hiring talent; 2) access to low-cost, personalized services; and 3) successful experiences bringing on reliable, trustworthy entry-level employees.

As they become engaged and feed job postings into centralized platforms, SMEs will help us paint a bigger picture of entry-level demand. With that aggregated view, youth and community-based employment agencies will gain better data to track opportunities, match candidates, and identify skills gaps.

Meeting the Need

We know that our target youth often lack the social networks to find employment. As a result, they may experience difficulty accessing jobs in their own backyard.

Focusing on the SME segment of employers will help youth facing barriers to employment access more “hidden” jobs – opportunities that they otherwise need those networks to discover.

We can also help employers access low-cost Human Resource support, and connect to youth who are ready to work. And, we can help community agencies understand collective demands and trends, and find more entry-level opportunities across a greater range of employers suitable for youth.

Targeted Action: Engage networks of SMEs to share their labour needs, get support with their hiring, and participate in centralized and accessible job recruiting and matching platforms. These platforms can connect SMEs and our target youth, starting with a specific community.

We need to reach out to SMEs, understand their needs, and enable them to recruit and

hire youth. Starting with a local, small-scale launch will allow us to test and refine the best approach.

To do that, we can leverage existing networks, such as business improvement associations (BIAs) or partners that provide services to SMEs (e.g. accountants) and/or have a significant vendor base (e.g. banks or telecommunications companies). These networks can help reach out to SMEs, build awareness of services that exist, and get them to share their postings on centralized platforms.

There's no need to invent a new platform. We can partner with existing platforms, which are often designed for large employers, and help them reach new audiences. By working in partnership, we have an opportunity to expand SME participation on virtual job boards, leading to improved labour market information for all.

Solutions should connect employers and job-seekers in similar geographic areas. Some employment barriers that youth face are a function of geographic isolation, transportation challenges, and the disconnect between their community and perceived job opportunities. A neighborhood-based solution will address these barriers and engage key stakeholders.

Making it Work

Pick the right areas to start: In the first stage, start with a narrow geographic focus to test the process. We should select communities that have:

- a significant employment base (including SMEs);
- populations of youth that face multiple barriers to employment;
- existing social infrastructures (e.g. a community hub or similar centres); and
- sufficient potential partners (e.g. local branches/offices of large corporate partners that service SMEs, and well-connected industry associations, BIAs, chambers of commerce, etc.).

Connect multi-sectoral partners to ensure end-to-end linkages: Establish partnerships with business associations, large corporate partners, and community-based youth-serving agencies to engage SMEs in the initial launch.

Identify advisors who can mentor SMEs and encourage them to hire local youth.

Engage technology partners: Involve them at an early stage in the design and execution of the pilot, to determine how best to aggregate SME opportunities onto a robust platform. The platform proposed here should be the same as the one used to increase transparency of the job market (see action #4).

Measuring Success

Some measures are quantitative, like the number of agencies connecting youth to local opportunities, and the percentage increase in those opportunities (job openings that are now publicly accessible). Others are qualitative, such as the level of satisfaction of SMEs with hiring and job outcomes.

Next Steps

1. Select target communities based on need and potential impact.
2. Establish a working group with partners, including SMEs, to assess and segment SMEs' needs, then develop and implement a strategy for a specific community.
3. Launch outreach to SMEs to highlight the benefits of participation, offer them helpful information and services related to hiring and online platforms, and showcase the youth in their communities.
4. Test SME engagement and steps to drive postings onto a platform, and monitor outcomes for SMEs, youth agencies, youth, and other partners.
5. Make adjustments to the model.
6. Create a strategy to scale up the solution – from one community (short-term), to adapting the solution to more communities (medium-term), to feeding into an integrated public-private labour market for all job seekers in Ontario and Canada (long-term).



EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

When Peter Tolia finished high school, he didn't know what he was good at or what he should do. At the YMCA, he took advantage of a subsidized career counselling service and uncovered his talent in landscaping. For more than 12 years, Peter has run Tolia Landscaping and Plowing Inc. in Mississauga. As someone who prospered from having mentors and a helping hand, he in turn looks to give a break to young people. "Hiring young people is a pipeline for new talent in my company. This is about getting young people to work, and building our future economy?"

ACTION 4

TRANSPARENCY OF THE JOB MARKET: CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN SUPPLY AND DEMAND



The Call for Action

Young people can't access work if they don't know which opportunities exist and what skills are needed to meet them. Business, governments, think tanks, professional associations, and others collect and make available reams of data on labour market trends. Much of this information can be difficult to access and digest. It can be dry, confusing, and poorly packaged for youth, and may not be focused on those facing barriers to employment.

Government isn't the only entity collecting this data. Online jobs boards have huge amounts of real-time data, as jobs are posted that list skill requirements and compensation, and as users register. Most of this data, however, isn't made publicly available.

Industry associations, unions, planning boards, and private sector companies themselves also collect labour market data about specific industries or organizations. Again, much of it isn't publicly available; the data that is published tends to be high-level and not particularly useful for youth. There is little to no coordination among producers of labour market information.³⁰

Youth outreach workers and agencies – and youth themselves – need clearer information on job needs, openings, wages and placement rates. A report by the Advisory Panel on Labour Market Information for Canada's Forum of Labour Market Ministers found that wage, job description, and job requirements was the most sought after information by community agencies, academia, governments, business and labour, while 72% of respondents cited the need for information about vacancies.³¹ This will be invaluable to the nearly 100,000 area youth disconnected from the labour market, and the nearly 1 million youth in the region overall.

Meeting the Need

We require a more centralized and coordinated approach to informing young people (especially those facing barriers to employment) about jobs and opportunities: a better platform to connect supply to demand.

Targeted Action: Leverage technology solutions that aggregate data and provide broad access to youth in a highly intuitive manner.

For youth facing barriers to employment, this will make it easier to access the information they need to land a first job, a critical step to a sustainable career path. For employers, the wider and easier availability of the right data will help to reduce the skills gap and labour shortages.

Making it Work

Get access to information about jobs

In creating a GTHA prototype, we aim to work through existing technological infrastructure and relationships.

Technology companies (e.g. LinkedIn, Monster, Workopolis) are sitting on mountains of data due to the number of users and jobs posted on their sites. Other existing platforms such as Who Plus You or the federal government's job boards are additional sources of data. At the intersection where supply and demand meet, the technological infrastructure already exists with players who can mobilize the resources needed to expand these services to better serve youth. Governments also hold data on jobs and employment trends, and can help inform youth about growing sectors and future opportunities.

The challenge is to package and make public the job market information in a way that's clear, relevant and digestible for our target youth.

Reaching youth

To increase transparency, we will need to go directly to youth, putting the information right into their pocket, through their mobile devices using applications such as BBM, Twitter, or Facebook. Today's youth have a reliance on communications technologies and networks to access information.³²

A 2014 study from MediaSmarts found that Canada's youth are highly connected. In fact, 39% of students sleep with their phone. By grade 4, nearly one-quarter of students have a mobile device. That percentage rises to 52% by grade 7, and 85% by grade 11. The study found that cellphones and smartphones are the primary devices used to access the internet.³³

It is vital that this action must leverage digital technology. That includes working with government, the private sector, and others to open and source data, test it, and adapt it with input from key groups (youth and SMEs). A high-profile public contest could be held to develop an

85%

of grade 11 students have a mobile phone

engagement tool (e.g. an app) that gets messages out in real time, tailored for young people by young people. As the Advisory Panel report noted, with youth we have to make the most of new media to get them the information they need.³⁴

Additionally, an ideal prototype would map local opportunities. The aforementioned Advisory Panel survey also found that local area information was the most cited gap in current data gap.³⁵

We will also aim to promote new information and tools to young people through their trusting relationships – youth workers, youth-serving agencies, guidance counsellors, parents, community centres and peers.

Working with key partners, we will work to enhance existing platforms. This has two phases.

- **Phase 1** will include a platform that connects youth with labour market opportunities in a clear and straightforward way. Ideally, the platform will include job vacancies, required skills and compensation. It will be important to show vacancies geographically, as many youth may find it difficult to move too far beyond their community for opportunities.
- **Phase 2** will focus on adding wrap-around services and career planning tools – who will be hiring, future requirements, where entry-level jobs can lead, how/where youth can develop skills (i.e. available training, bursaries, social services), and mentorship opportunities (i.e. action #1).

Measuring Success

The overall goals are to facilitate connections between jobs and job-seekers, and help youth identify skills gaps and prepare themselves to meet them. Metrics of success include: the number of connections made between employers and job-seekers, the number of users from the target group, the number of opportunities posted for this group, insights on how youth access information, and increased satisfaction levels among youth in accessing job information.

Next Steps

1. Explore partnerships with government(s), partners (universities, colleges and chambers of commerce), and technology companies, and set up a working group that includes youth facing

barriers, youth workers, employers, and community agencies, to scope, test, and adapt an existing prototype.

2. Engage government(s) as partners in increasing the transparency of their labour market information. Governments continue to open up data. As they do, we recommend they prioritize the collection and accelerate the release of labour market information, and better coordinate among ministries to most efficiently capture and share that data. This will allow young people to identify demand, and employers and educational/training institutions to find and allocate resources to prepare potential workers.

3. Open up and encourage opportunities for young people to develop an app to extract and present the relevant information.

CASE STUDY

With 277 million users worldwide, including 9 million in Canada, LinkedIn has already demonstrated how a technology platform can enable new connections for employers and job seekers.

For employers, LinkedIn offers a way to share their job openings with a wide range of prospective candidates in the market. They can use matching functions that allow them to score candidates on appropriateness of the job based on key criteria, which makes it easier for employers to hire. By encouraging standardized job titles and listings of must-have skills, which make LinkedIn's algorithms work better, everyone benefits by aggregating information on available jobs.

Companies and organizations get other benefits too. They can promote themselves as a great place to work and market their offerings. Employers can now post student and entry-level positions for free.

For youth, LinkedIn can do more than connect them to job postings and employers. Leveraging the data provided by its millions of users, LinkedIn can also help youth understand what education/training, skills, and qualifications are needed in different roles. It can start them on career exploration, and connect them to professional contacts.

ROUNDING OUT THE 10 OPPORTUNITIES

The four proposed actions for initial launch are a starting point, but the remaining six opportunities remain important.

We aren't reinventing the wheel here. What we're doing is making that wheel turn more effectively and faster, by leveraging existing infrastructure and working with organizations primed to implement the next steps.

Some of the proposed actions may be appropriate only for certain segments of our target youth and employers. Yet together they promise progress for youth facing barriers to employment.

> Policy and practice

Assess company policies and practices to be more youth-centric (e.g. human resource policies, remuneration and procurement policies). Remove barriers that can inadvertently discriminate against certain youth based on postal code, gaps in work experience, etc.

> Assurance of job readiness

Help build broad understanding of workforce readiness through a youth accreditation certification. Participation in certain programs and activities would certify youth as ready for the workplace.

> Transportation

Provide transportation support (e.g. transit passes, subsidies, taxi-sharing, carpooling). Help ensure youth who are motivated and willing to work are able to get to prospective work places.

> Experiential learning

Reduce risk of hiring through on-the-job training programs (e.g. internships, co-ops and apprenticeships). Provide youth with more opportunities to gain meaningful experience and get on a career ladder.

> Financial resources

Dedicate corporate social responsibility dollars or create continuing mechanisms for investment (e.g. Training Trust Funds) towards programs that develop and prepare youth.

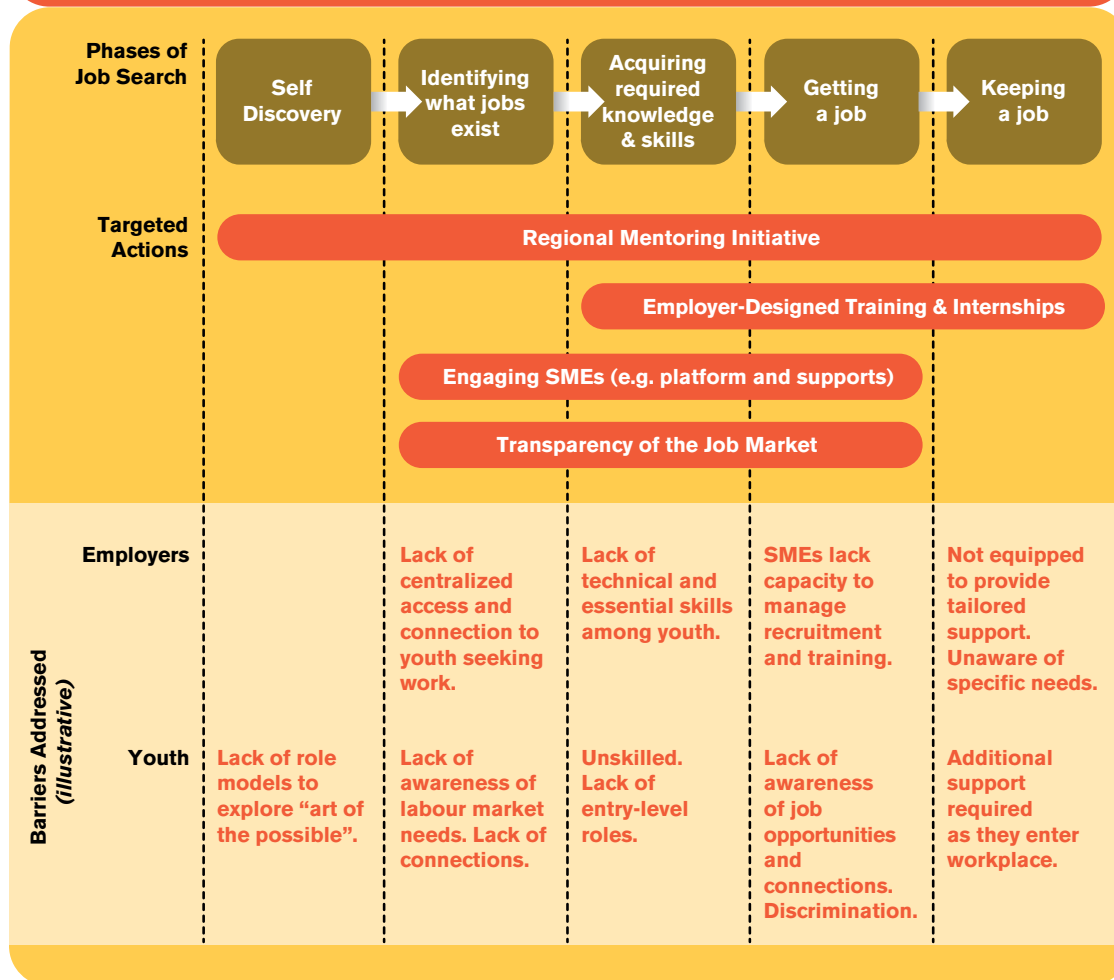
> Employer recognition

Recognize youth-friendly business practices (and hiring of youth facing barriers), through existing award programs. Employers would be certified as youth-friendly, enhancing their brand image.

5. OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS



THE FOUR TARGETED ACTIONS ADDRESS KEY BARRIERS THAT YOUTH AND EMPLOYERS FACE



If we fail to help our target youth break down the barriers to employment, we already know the cost of inaction. Taking the right actions – by mentoring, training and recruiting youth, and broadening their awareness of job opportunities and employer needs – will open up social and economic opportunities for youth and employers.

The range of circumstances of youth who are shut out of employment, and the complexity of the barriers they face, underscores the need for an ongoing multi-pronged strategy.

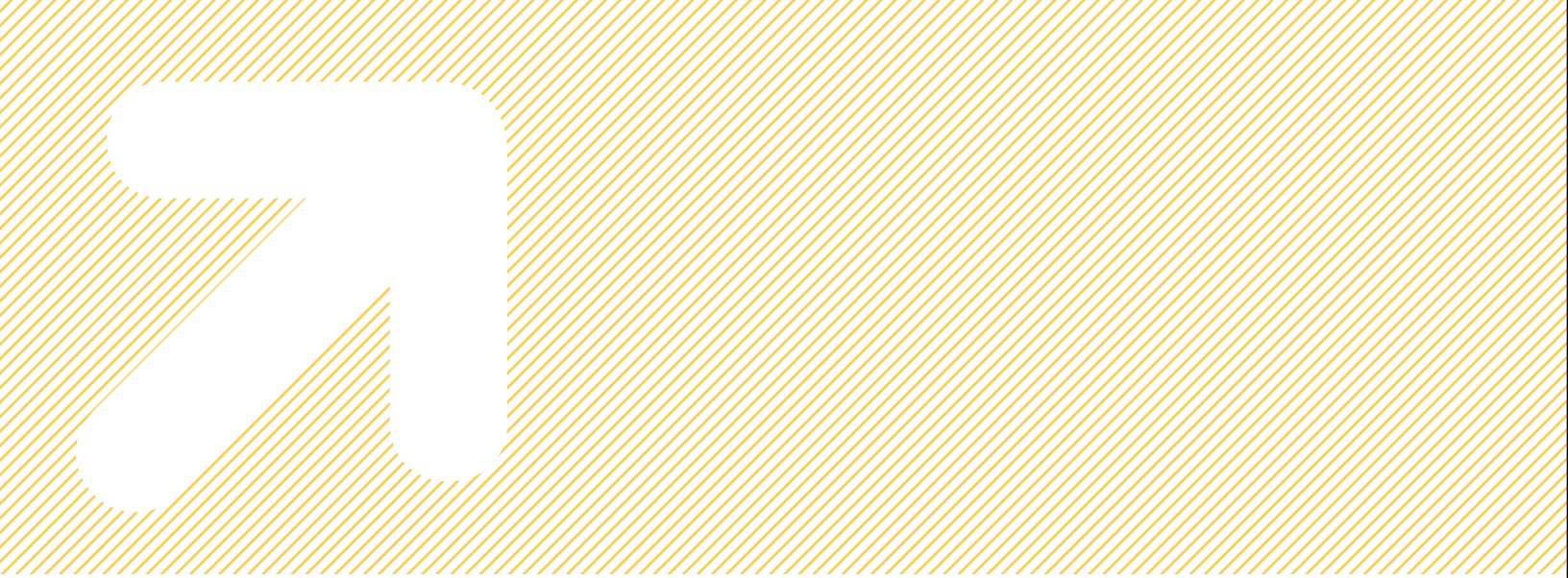
Government supports and community agencies are integral to helping youth get on a solid path. Employers, too, can help to clear that path.

Landing a job that holds promise for a positive future is just one piece of a complex puzzle – but it's a vital piece.

A Positive Next Chapter: Meaningful Opportunities for Youth

The four actions proposed here will chip away at some key barriers – barriers to networks, to skills development, to information on job opportunities and requirements, and to experience. Together, these actions will give youth role models to act as their guide to employment, provide focused training, and link them to timely information on employer needs.

For any youth, a job is an important step in completing the transition to adulthood. For our target youth, employment offering meaningful work can be a ticket out of difficult situations. For youth facing barriers to employment, work experiences provide so much. Knowledge of occupational skills and workplace settings. Employment history. Networking opportunities. Transferrable technical and soft skills, which can shape young people personally and professionally.



Positive relationships with adults. Confidence and a sense of responsibility – something that's often in short supply for youth who face so many added challenges to entering the workforce.

Overall, providing youth facing barriers to employment with significant, career-shaping opportunities can change their trajectory. The actions described here can help these youth to write a positive next chapter in their lives.

Making Businesses More Competitive

For employers, as well as youth, the results of the four actions can spur economic progress. Which employers benefit by supporting youth facing barriers to employment to succeed on the job? This presents a particularly strong value proposition for two groups: employers with anticipated skills gaps for entry-level employment; and SMEs that lack a critical mass of young workers. In the end, *all* employers can gain in many ways by getting involved in these actions.

Based on research conducted by RBC and Accenture independently, we've identified five primary and eight secondary benefits for employers that build on the altruistic drive to make a difference in their local communities. Primary benefits are largely quantitative, and help us to measure the bottom line impact of hiring our target youth. Secondary benefits are difficult to quantify, due to data availability or their qualitative nature, but are still important to capture.

Primary benefits

- **Productivity gains.** Many employers anticipate a skills gap, and worry about its effect on their operations, growth and competitiveness. Ontario's foregone GDP due to low educational attainment, and the subsequent skills gap, is an estimated \$24.3 billion.³⁶ Investing in targeted training programs will give youth the skills to succeed, and help their employers seize opportunities. Employers should see their own training and development as an investment that contributes to better employee and organizational performance.³⁷ Employers can also support external programs that advance the skills of young candidates by helping develop curricula, providing financial support, and hiring out of these programs.
- **Avoid turnover costs.** Studies show that employers who invest in training (internal or external) experience much lower turnover. Canadian voluntary turnover rates are trending upwards. Youth who receive training programs will be less likely to leave their job than other youth.³⁸ That will mitigate the time and costs of bad hires and their replacements.
- **Lower wage and recruitment costs.** Payroll and recruitment are two of the largest expenses that the private sector incurs – a company can spend 20-50% of its revenues on wages, depending on the industry.³⁹ Employers can derive cost savings in two ways: 1) lower cost-per-hire, by hiring from existing training programs aimed at our target youth; and 2) lower

55%

higher employee morale from employers that invest in programs like youth mentorship

wages, by hiring youth who qualify for provincial subsidies.

- **Financial incentives and subsidies.** Targeted tax subsidies encourage employers to adopt certain behaviours. The Province of Ontario offers several subsidies pertaining to youth (e.g. money to offset training and wage costs).⁴⁰
- **Avoid private sector income loss.** Early employment history influences later success. Being unemployed at a young age can have a long-lasting impact on an individual's earnings prospects. Lower lifetime wages results in lower discretionary spending and threaten private sector revenues and the GTHA's economic growth, as described by the scarring effect. In the GTHA, youth unemployment visibly impacts consumer consumption and costs the private sector over \$1 billion per year.⁴¹

Secondary benefits

- **Workforce planning and talent pipeline.** An ageing population demands planning for a shift in workforce demographics. It's more cost-effective and attractive to hire young, dedicated employees (and develop them for leadership positions) than to hire from outside. Youth facing barriers are an excellent source of candidates.
- **Corporate citizenship and brand image.** Addressing unemployment among youth facing barriers fulfills corporate citizenship objectives while advancing the profile of a company in the market. Public recognition of a company's engagement with youth raises the profile of a business as an employer of choice, and attracts socially-conscious consumers.
- **Higher employee engagement.** You're more likely to be engaged if you view your employer as an agent for social change. Companies with highly engaged employees have three times the operating margin and four times the earnings per share than others. Employers that invest in programs like youth mentorship and hiring have 55% higher employee morale and 38% stronger loyalty.⁴² Mentoring also fosters managerial skills.⁴³ Youth, meanwhile, bring upbeat energy to the workforce and immerse the workforce in more social activities, which has spillover effects that can improve productivity.⁴⁴

- **Diverse and innovative workforce.** By hiring youth from diverse backgrounds, businesses will better reflect the population of the GTHA. A diverse workforce also means diversity of thought. That helps businesses achieve greater levels of collaboration and innovation, all while building a deeper understanding of their customer base.⁴⁵
- **Shaping the workforce of tomorrow.** Our target youth, and young recruits overall, are highly malleable employees,⁴⁶ who can embrace best practices and corporate culture.
- **Corporate social responsibility and the social return on investment.** Hiring youth facing barriers to employment meets a company's corporate social responsibility objectives, and has broader returns. For instance, the social return includes an impact on individuals (change the trajectory of our target youth), government (lower the social services burden), and society (overall well-being of the GTHA). The private sector is a major shareholder in shaping the future of the GTHA. Engaging youth facing barriers to employment helps to shape the local community where businesses operate.
- **Attitude and flexibility.** Many employers recognize that youth bring valuable, unique qualities to the workplace – optimism, the ability to anticipate and adapt to change, flexible in work hours and location – that can drive future revenue streams for business.
- **Tech savviness.** Today's youth are among the first generation born fully immersed in the digital age. Hiring young employees that understand current and future digital business trends provides organizations with a long-term competitive advantage.

Together, these primary and secondary benefits demonstrate why these initiatives are not just about opportunities for youth facing barriers to employment. They are also about business competitiveness, and make a case for investment and why the private sector should take the lead.



6. THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Will youth be able to lead productive adult lives, engage positively in society, and contribute to our economic progress? Having the right entry into the workforce can be the foundation.

Our work focused on how employers can contribute to the solution. Yet through our consultations we recognize that we must also look to remove other barriers to action on the part of government and community agencies.

Opportunities for Government

All orders of government can play critical roles in supporting the private sector and the joint approach needed. These roles include continuing to fund and provide key employment services and training, and accelerating work in the following areas to address the needs of our changing labour market and young people trying to enter it:

- **More clearly define the problem and desired outcomes.** There are shared concerns about NEET youth across partners and government. However, in terms of employment and training services, different ministries and levels of government use inconsistent definitions of youth, youth-at-risk, and youth facing barriers to employment. We need to differentiate these subgroups further, find consistent ways to track and measure employment outcomes for target youth, and build greater alignment on a single framework.
- **Reform employment and training systems to be more responsive to needs of employers.** In an economy where 66% of jobs are in the private sector, and 88.5% of these in SMEs,⁴⁷ private sector companies *must* be partners in creating pathways into meaningful employment, and career ladders. For employers as well as for youth, employment services seem fragmented and small scale.
- **Open data and connections.** The existing system doesn't help clarify job opportunities and potential labour supply, or connect the two sides efficiently. Youth and employers alike want access to easy tools – for youth,

to discover entry-level positions, and for employers, to find candidates that are a good match. All orders of government are making promising commitments to “open government” and “open data”. That's a tremendous opportunity – if we can understand what the data means. The federal government's Open Data Portal and Action Plan on Open Government, along with the province's Open Government initiative, will make it possible to engage third-parties to analyze data. We need to accelerate these partnerships to benefit from the rich data that exists.

- **Further improve integration between different orders of government ministries, departments and local programs.** One impediment to progress is a weak alignment on youth facing multiple barriers.⁴⁸ At the provincial and local levels, different actors work on employment, training and mentorship. They aren't always well-aligned in supporting our target youth. That reduces the impact of programs, and leaves employers confused about priorities and goals. We've seen key steps to improving overall alignment on youth issues, including the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, Ontario's new youth strategy (*Stepping Up*) and a cross-ministry working group on youth. Governments should intensify efforts specifically related to employment and mentorship.
- **Build on a commitment towards target youth.** Government has made significant investments recently, such as the Ontario Youth Employment Fund under the Youth Jobs Strategy. However, these solutions are limited to program duration (e.g. Jobs for Youth), and few opportunities focus specifically on our target youth.

Challenges Facing Community Agencies

Community agencies play a vital role. They have staff trained to engage with and support youth, and who are deeply familiar with the challenges facing young people and the communities they call home. They help advocate for young people and their families, help them navigate different services to find support, and build

GOVERNMENTS NEED TO MORE QUICKLY DELIVER ON THEIR COMMITMENTS

networks with other youth-serving institutions. Formally and informally, community agencies often build bridges between youth, work and potential employers.

The agencies involved in the targeted actions should not be left to bridge the gap between youth and the labour market alone.

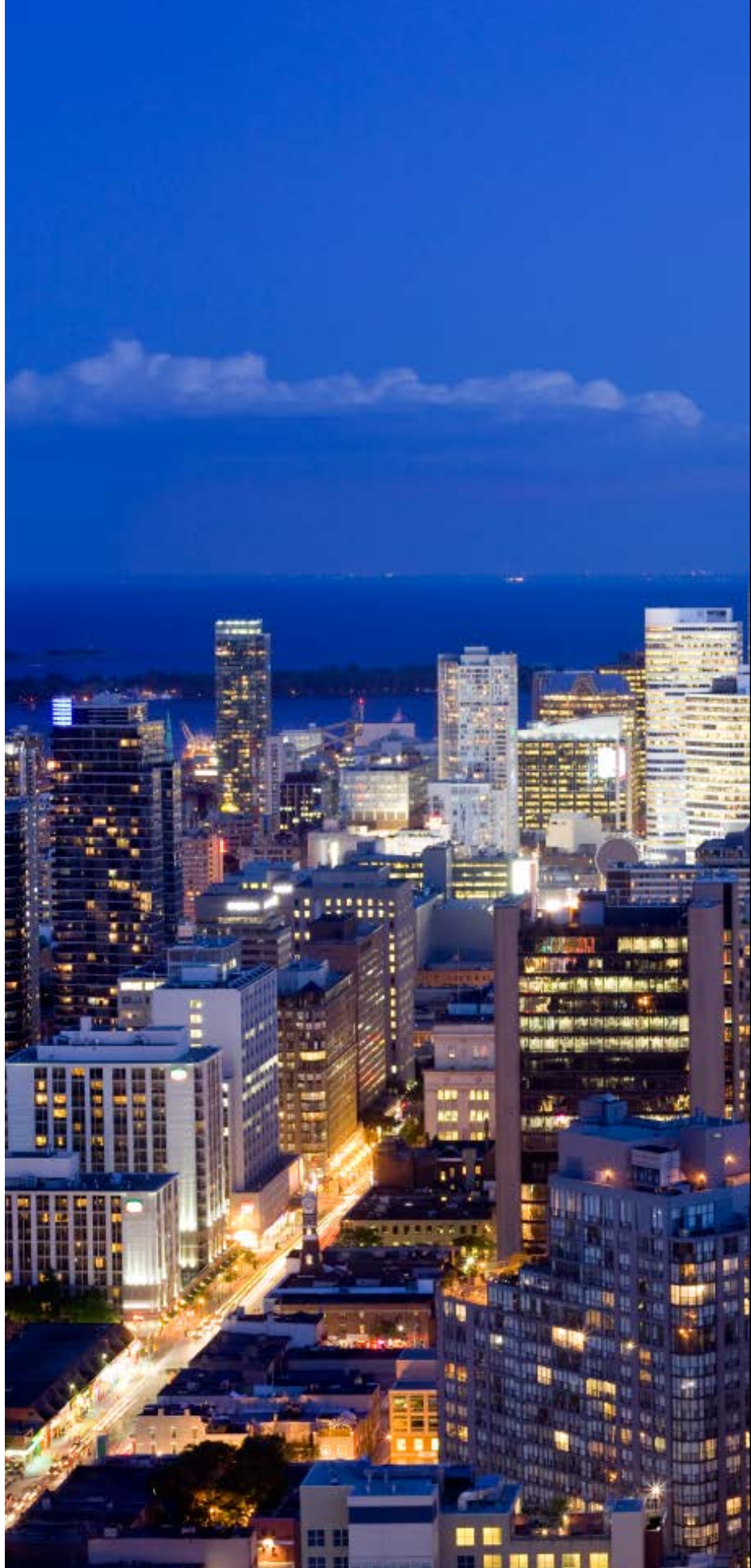
Community agencies report three main barriers to being more effective for the youth they serve and working alongside employers.

1. Lack of access to centralized labour market information. Agencies delivering employment and training services told us they need more data that's relevant to the age and experience of their youth audience. Agency staff lack access to information about the wider labour market, in particular entry-level jobs that may be well-suited to our target youth. It limits knowledge of job opportunities.

2. Scarce community agency-private sector relationships. A lack of a common language, and limited understanding of business objectives and value propositions, results in weak ties and alignment with potential SME or large corporate employers. The community sector needs to be equipped with the business case for support to engage the private sector on their terms and strengthen connections.

3. Inconsistent and unstable funding. Greater investment from the private sector and sustained commitment from governments are needed to ensure the community agencies involved in the targeted actions have the stability and capacity to work with the private sector and coordinating bodies. Short-term funding cycles make it difficult to retain qualified staff. High turnover of youth workers is not in the best interests of youth facing barriers to employment, where trusting relationships have been established.

Lasting partnerships between employers, governments and community agencies are needed to address these challenges.





7. DRIVE TO SUCCEED

The challenges around youth employment, and the added barriers that certain young people face, are significant. But they're not insurmountable.

This isn't a new problem, and we've talked about it long enough. It's time for action.

Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers, provides four initial actions for a strong start. Together we can build steps to establish better footing for youth facing barriers in the GTHA.

We need the involvement of the private sector, in areas where they can make a difference. Governments must work in partnership with employers to achieve the greatest impact.

And we need the full participation, input and voices of youth – solutions that are achieved *with* them and not delivered *to* them.

Youth facing barriers to employment are resilient. Despite all challenges, many youth have the drive and talent to succeed. Providing more equitable access to opportunities to uncover and unlock their full potential is in everyone's best interest.

The barriers to employment young people face are complex, and often beyond their control. We've heard that our target youth often come from a place of hurt, disorder, exclusion and chaos. Moving to a more "ordered" employment environment may not be easy, but is critical to reengage these youth in a meaningful way. To succeed, this work has to connect with a holistic approach to youth employment. The issues are difficult. This can only happen when we collaborate across sectors to

break down barriers – barriers not only to employment, but also to education, health and social inclusion.

Employers can make a difference by starting with the four initial actions we've put forward, and continuing with the six additional opportunities identified for further action. As one example, we need more work on employers' Human Resource policies, to ensure that companies have recruitment and hiring without bias, and fill opportunities openly and fairly.

Companies need to have both the desire and the culture to help youth succeed. Supporting youth to strive harder and hope more deeply only to hit another wall does more harm than good.

Looking at these actions together, *Escalator* is a viable action plan that addresses labour demand as well as supply. It's a plan that will help our target youth gain access to beneficial employment opportunities, and help local employers meet their staffing and broader business goals.

For businesses, investing in opportunities for youth facing barriers to employment isn't just the right thing to do; it's also the smart thing, and has a positive and demonstrable return on investment.

Increasingly, companies understand that their own prosperity often hinges on getting more young people into jobs. Making progress is a shared win, and depends on strong partnerships, among companies, youth, government and agencies.



SUCCESS STORY

NUHA HABAY: “INSPIRED”

A daughter of immigrants from Africa, Nuha and her family moved into Alexandra Park in downtown Toronto. Growing up in an economically-challenged neighbourhood makes it hard to find employment and volunteer opportunities for youth like Nuha. However, through hard work and community supports, she secured a corporate paid internship through a competitive law program, and the experience has opened her eyes towards a possible career.

“My internship was an incredibly valuable experience, and never felt like a mere summer job. Every day was different, and there was always a project in which to take part. This has inspired me to pursue an education to become a lawyer in the future.”



In taking on this study of the barriers to youth employment, we engaged leaders across the spectrum. We want to express our appreciation to all of the individuals and organizations that helped to define the problem, assess possible actions, and inform this report (listed in Appendices).

By working together, with full commitment to tackle unemployment of youth facing barriers, we can all help to achieve a more promising future for our youth, our employers and our society.

Next steps

Each of the actions described in this report has its own requirements. Overall, to drive momentum we need to:

1. Build required partnerships and help secure funding to launch next steps;
2. Establish a leadership group required to maintain focus, build in accountability measures, and continue advocating for systemic change and stronger partnerships with governments;

3. Continue to engage and validate actions with key stakeholders;

4. Coordinate a communication campaign to persuade private sector leaders about the business case for support, as well as tailored messaging for youth, when and where there are specific opportunities for them to participate;

5. Engage small, medium and large-sized youth-serving agencies to tap into their local expertise and connections with youth, and connect directly with target youth to communicate with peers; and

6. Measure results and report on progress.



SUCCESS STORY

TYLER JOHNSON **“STRONG, INDEPENDENT AND CONFIDENT”**

Tyler Johnson has persevered since birth. He was born two months prematurely, and over his young life has overcome many personal struggles and stereotypes. Tyler attended 14 different schools from kindergarten to grade 12, was homeless for a year, and has lived independently since he was kicked out of his family home at 16 because he is gay. When Tyler moved into Covenant House, “That drastically changed my life. They got me a job, housing and I started getting involved in the community.”

In 2007, his mentor offered him a job in his office. Tyler seized the opportunity. “I remember the dignity that came with that first paycheck. I remember feeling strong, independent and confident about myself and my future. Our city depends so much on the skills and experience we give our youth, so even in this tough economy we need to continue to make jobs for youth a priority.”

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Project Scope and Approach

Private Sector Jobs & Mentorship Initiative

The Private Sector Youth Jobs and Mentorship Initiative is one of 20 action items outlined in the Youth Action Plan. Stakeholders, including leaders in the private sector, expressed a belief that business has a stronger role to play in supporting employment opportunities for young people who face multiple barriers.

About CivicAction

CivicAction was built on the understanding that governments alone cannot address the challenges we face but that all governments, municipal, provincial and federal, as well as the private sector, non-profit organizations and citizens at large have a role to play in building a prosperous region.

We engage diverse, forward-looking experts to unlock the issues and help build our region. Not always the predictable ones, but change-agents who work well together. A rare mix of people you might not expect to come together but who can and do.

We act collaboratively and with purpose to achieve our vision of a region filled with opportunity and prosperity.

Our Unique Approach

CivicAction sets a non-partisan agenda, builds strategic partnerships, and launches campaigns, programs and organizations that transform our region. We do this by taking the following steps:

- Convene leaders from all sectors to identify pressing issues and innovative responses
- Establish a fact base so that we build a common understanding of the opportunity for action
- Develop action-oriented, high impact strategies and build supportive partnerships to execute them
- Recruit a broad base of support
- Create multi-pronged awareness-building strategies

To develop *Escalator*, CivicAction led an extensive 9-month engagement with youth, business leaders, community leaders, service providers, labour and governments in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Together, we identified ways to increase private sector involvement in opening up economic opportunities for youth facing multiple barriers to employment.

CivicAction convened groups of “unusual suspects” – those who don’t normally sit at the same decision-making table – to provide leadership, guidance and advice to support the development and implementation of the engagement strategy.

CivicAction has developed a partnership model to increase jobs and mentorship for youth facing barriers in collaboration with the private sector and other diverse partners. It’s documented for provincial scaling and local replication.

Business and Community Leadership

A key step was to bring together a strategic taskforce of 20 leaders - youth, youth leaders, private

sector leaders, key influencers, unions and community organizations – who wanted to collaborate and become champions of this issue.

To ensure we were engaging a wide range of perspectives, we created a working group of 17 emerging leaders who work in the private sector, and have influence in hiring, along with youth workers who have direct relationships with youth facing barriers. The working group reflected the diversity of GTHA communities and populations of our target youth.

Roundtables and Conversations

We held six roundtables with over 135 participants throughout the GTHA. Each roundtable featured engaging discussions between business, youth, community leaders and government. The purpose was to collaboratively name and define specific issues related to employment and mentorship for our target youth, and identify actions for addressing them.

The roundtables were open and honest discussions about the barriers youth and employers face in making a more meaningful connection in the labour market, as well as ways to overcome these. CivicAction also went directly to youth across the GTHA to hear their perspectives, holding 11 conversations with 170 youth. That included: youth at risk of not completing high school, youth in conflict with the law, newcomer youth, racialized youth, low-income youth, LGBTTO youth, youth-in-care, and youth in secure custody.

In addition, CivicAction reached out to organizations and companies working in the areas of mentoring, job recruiting and matching, and career development. This was done to validate the strategic directions of the action plan and explore potential partnerships.

Background

Ontario's Youth Action Plan

On July 23, 2012, in response to gun violence in Toronto, the Premier of Ontario announced immediate law enforcement measures. The Premier asked the Ministers of Children and Youth Services and Community Safety and Correctional Services to meet with stakeholders, youth and the public to develop a balanced plan – one that focuses on giving young people the support they need to succeed, and that keeps communities safe.

Building on the research and recommendations in the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report, Ontario's Action Plan incorporates and responds to feedback received by both Ministers over a 30-day period. The Ministers heard from young people and their families, community organizations that serve and support youth, representatives of the social services, education, justice and business sectors, and members of the public.

Ontario's Youth Action Plan draws on the expertise and knowledge of organizations and individuals in communities as well as on evidence from programs and services already underway.

Appendix 2: Summary of Stakeholder Consultations & Engagement

The CivicAction team met more than 800 individuals and organizations – including youth, leaders in business, labour, community agencies, academic institutions and governments from across the GTHA – between June 2013 and March 2014 to inform this action plan.

Type	Date	Purpose	Who	#
Strategic Taskforce				
Leadership Group	October 2013 – March 2014	Four meetings and a number of working sessions to provide leadership and direction on overall strategy, prioritize opportunities for action and identify the next steps for implementation	Private sector employers in financial & professional services, technology, construction, transportation, retail, youth with lived experience, youth serving agencies and a municipal agency, college and union	20
Engagement with Youth				
Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities	April 2013 – March 2014	Three meetings to get strategic advice on youth engagement strategy and outreach	Youth with lived experience, youth workers, executive directors of youth serving agencies	22
Youth Conversations	July – December 2013	Eleven focus groups to understand the barriers and needs of youth facing barriers to employment	Youth at risk of not completing high school, youth in conflict with the law, newcomer youth, racialized youth, youth living in poverty, LG-BTQ youth, youth in care, youth in secure custody and Aboriginal youth.	170
Emerging Leaders				
Working Group	July 2013 – January 2014	Six meeting to help develop the fact base, design the engagement strategy, support outreach, priorities opportunities for action and identify the next steps for implementation	Managers and executives in the private sector, government and community agencies	17
CivicAction's DiverseCity Fellows	November 2013	Working session to provide input on possible interventions	Rising leaders from private sector, non-profit and government	27
Employer Survey and Interviews				
Employer Survey and Interviews	July – August 2013	Identify what's already underway, challenges and opportunities for private sector to hiring youth	Small, medium and large employers	35
Meeting with Small Businesses at YMCA	November 2013	Identify specific challenges and opportunities for SMEs	Small employers	5
Roundtables				
Halton-Peel (Mississauga)	October 2013	Develop a common fact base (e.g. identify barriers for youth and employers) and validate criteria and approach to assess possible actions	Youth, youth-led agencies, SMEs, large employers, board of trades, school board, college, community agencies, government	36

Durham (Oshawa)	November 2013	Identify best practices and possible partners, prioritize actions and help build case for support	Youth, youth-led agencies, SMEs, BIA, large employers, college, community agencies, government	22
York (Markham)	November 2013	Identify best practices and possible partners, prioritize actions and help build case for support	Youth-led agencies, SMEs, chamber of commerce, community agencies, government	20
Hamilton	December 2013	Identify best practices and possible partners, prioritize actions and help build case for support	Youth-led agencies, SMEs, college, community agencies, government	17
Toronto CEO Roundtable	February 2014	Validated proposed actions and generate support for implementation	CEOs and senior executives of SMEs and large regional employers	15
Briefing NGOs and Community Agencies	March 2014	Identify best practices to engage youth and businesses	Executive directors of youth-led and youth serving agencies, workforce planning organization and youth workers	26
One-On-One Meetings				
Stakeholder Meetings	June 2013 – March 2014	Gain insights, receive input and explore potential actions, partnerships and implementation strategies	Private sector employers, community agencies, unions, research, chambers of commerce, colleges, government	75+
Events and Meetings				
CivicAction Steering Committee	June 2013	Launch youth initiative and get initial thoughts on scope and approach	Private sector employers, community agencies, board of trades, education, unions, emerging leaders	50
Government Ministries	October 2013 – March 2014	Brief government ministries on initiative, identify alignment with government's goals and initiatives, get input on actions and implementation strategies	Children and youth services, economic development, trade, and employment, training, colleges and universities, community safety and correctional services, community and social services, aboriginal affairs, education	7
If I Ruled TO Conference (Toronto Community Housing)	October 2013	Provide overview of barriers facing youth and employers, and generate ideas on local strategies to expand youth opportunities	Youth from priority and low-income neighbourhoods	100+
Emerging Leaders Studio – Workshop	November 2013	Generate ideas on local projects to expand youth opportunities	Rising leaders from private sector, non-profit and government	55
MEDTE – Hamilton Youth Ideas Forum	December 2013	Provide overview of initiative	Youth-led agencies, college, community agencies, government	12
MEDTE – Halton Youth Ideas Forum	January 2014	Provide overview of initiative	Youth-led agencies, college, community agencies, government	40
Accenture – Stakeholder Meetings				
Stakeholder Meetings	September 2013- January 2014	Accenture met with key informants and advisors to draft list of possible interventions and actions	Executive directors and managers of agencies with youth employment programs, economists, senior business executives, youth, administrators in education, consultants	34

This report reflects the immense guidance and multi-sectoral perspective of the volunteer leaders that comprised CivicAction's Taskforce and Working Group. They contributed their leadership and professional expertise, and invested significant time to provide advice on the scope and strategy, prioritize initial opportunities for action, map out implementation strategies, and review this report.

Appendix 3: List of Taskforce Members

(listed in alphabetical order by affiliation name)

Co-Chaired by **Zabeen Hirji**, Chief Human Resources Officer, RBC and Director, CivicAction Board and **John Tory**, Chair, CivicAction (until February 2014).

Stephen Gardiner

Managing Director, Management Consulting, Accenture

Gabrielle Scrimshaw

President, Aboriginal Professional Association of Canada

Greg Rooney

Senior Vice President Human Resources, AECON

Donna Harrow

Executive Director, African Canadian Coalition of Community Organizations

Cristina Selva

Executive Director, Carpenters' Local 27

Paul Semak

Vice President Sales, Central Canada, Cisco Systems

Jeannette Patoine

Manager, Talent Acquisition Programs, Greater Toronto Airport Authority

Nan Oldroyd

Vice President, Human Resources – Market Division, Loblaw Companies Limited (2011 DiverseCity Fellow)

Jim Vanderveken

Dean, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mohawk College

Kathy Wensley

Director, Canadian Banking Recruitment, RBC

Bill Young

President, Social Capital Partners

Carlos McDonald

Youth Member

Mekwan Tulpin

Youth Member

Caroline Booth

Senior Vice President and Chief Procurement Officer, TD Bank Group

Nan DasGupta

Partner & Managing Director, The Boston Consulting Group

Peter Sloly

Deputy Chief, Toronto Police Service & Director, CivicAction Board

Daniele Zanotti

CEO, United Way of York Region

Medhat Mahdy

President and CEO YMCA of Greater Toronto, President of YMCA Ontario

Appendix 4: List of Emerging Leaders Working Group Members

Alberto Rodriguez

Senior Risk Analyst, BMW Group Financial Services Canada

Tinashe Mafukidze

Managing Director, CatalystsX

Saumya Gautam

Senior Advisor, Organizational Culture and Change, CBC

Jabari Lindsay

Manager, Youth Development Unit, City of Toronto

Steven Mayers

Youth Outreach Worker, For Youth Initiative

Anisa Taraj

Program Advisory, Community Investment Green Shield Canada

Mariah Levin

Manager, Management Consulting, KPMG

Orlando Bowen

Executive Director, One Voice One Team

Adaoma Patterson

Advisor – Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy, Region of Peel

Christopher Penrose

Executive Director, Success Beyond Limits Education Program

Mamta Wadhvani

Manager, Recruitment, The Weston Group

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Leonardo Zuniga

Past Members:

Jonathan Asmis

2015 MBA Candidate, Stanford University

Kathryn Exon-Smith

Senior Recruitment Partner, Campus and Diversity Programs,
BMO Financial Group

**Appendix 5: Acknowledgements
and Recognition**

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RBC: Helena Gottschling, Linda Zvi, Laura Cooper, Rebecca Farkas, and Imtool Momin

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Youth Focus Groups: The 519 Church Street Community Centre, Driftwood Community Recreation Centre, Gateway Centre for New Canadians, One Voice One Team, Ontario Council of Children's Aid Societies, Redemption Reintegration Services, Roy McMurtry Youth Centre, Success Beyond

Limits Education Program, Toronto Community Housing, YMCA Mississauga, and YMCA Newmarket.

Roundtables & Briefings: Community Innovation Lab, Markham Convergence Centre, Mohawk College, RBC, Toronto Pearson International Airport, and YMCA of Greater Toronto.

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Stefan Green

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Daniel Simpson

Intern (former)

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