Enhancing Employment Programming for Vulnerable Youth

Research Synthesis Report

DECEMBER 2023

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The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 450 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations. SRDC has offices located in Ottawa and Vancouver, and satellite offices in Calgary, Hamilton, Montreal, Regina, St. John's, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Ensuring that youth in Canada have the skills and experience needed to succeed in the labour market has been an ongoing priority for the Government. The Youth Employment Strategy (YES) was launched in 1997 to support youth between the ages of 15 and 30 to gain knowledge, skills, and work experience through a range of program streams (e.g., internships, wage subsidies, skills training) that has evolved over the years. A summative evaluation (ESDC, 2015) reported mostly positive outcomes for youth across recent program streams, but found that Skills Link, one of the streams focused on vulnerable youth, had mixed results. For example, Skills Link participants showed a slight increase in the use of social assistance and earned less than a comparison group across a five-year period. However, participants were more likely to be employed than the comparison group, and those who had some post-secondary education had higher earnings. Mixed results such as these suggest that there are differences in the way participants experienced Skills Link, likely related to variation in both individual and program characteristics. It also highlights the need for data that includes program and service delivery characteristics to help us identify the conditions that lead to the best outcomes for all youth and greater cost-effectiveness.

In 2018, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) engaged the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to support the implementation of management recommendations in response to the summative evaluation, focusing on 1) further examining program design improvements that can achieve strong results and cost-effectiveness, 2) exploring existing data sources to enhance evaluation, and 3) revising the performance measurement strategy to include more detailed and robust data collection including program content. Working with the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)[1] and ESDC's evaluation and youth branches, SRDC developed a two-phase project to 1) identify effective practices and innovations in program design and delivery through additional analyses of Skills Link data, literature review, and consultations with service delivery organizations, and 2) develop a demonstration project with service delivery organizations to test the use of pay-for-performance funding models to encourage innovation in programming for vulnerable youth.

This project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and spanned five years until its completion in 2023. This period included key shifts in the skills training and employment sector,

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[1]   OLES is now known as the Skills for Success Program.

including the recognition of social-emotional skills as critical for the modern labour market – culminating in the launch of the Skills for Success framework in 2021; an increased commitment to reporting outcomes and demonstrating the value and effectiveness of programs; a concomitant increased need for enhancing measurement capacity in the sector; and a strengthened focus on youth facing multiple systemic and individual barriers, especially those from underrepresented groups. These trends were reflected within the project, particularly in the social-emotional skills training enhancements made by all service delivery sites in the demonstration project, and the associated development of more flexible service delivery models tailored to the needs of diverse vulnerable youth, as well as more expansive outcome and performance measurement approaches.

The knowledge generated from this project is timely as it aligns well with the most recent priorities identified as part of the new modernized Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS). The Government of Canada invested over $109 million in YESS as part of the 2021 budget with a focus on funding programs that provide flexible and tailored services to help vulnerable youth overcome multiple barriers (e.g., wraparound supports, mentorship) and encouraging collaboration and capacity building across the sector (e.g., employers, educators, service providers). These priorities remain especially relevant today as youth were amongst the groups most impacted by job loss during COVID-19, especially Indigenous, newcomer, Black, or racialized youth (Department of Finance, 2021), and they continue to face challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and its long-term impacts on individuals, communities, and the labour market.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Phase One (Research synthesis)

The primary objective of this early phase of work was to identify best practices and innovations in the delivery of employment programming for vulnerable youth, including those from underrepresented groups such as women, newcomers, official language minority communities, and Indigenous youth. This included exploring innovations and program characteristics that are associated with strong results and improved cost-effectiveness.

This objective was achieved through:

- Conducting a literature review examining emerging best practices and innovations in youth employment programming, especially for youth facing multiple barriers;[2]

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[2] SRDC conducted a comprehensive literature review in response to a delay in our access to the 2015 Skills Link evaluation data. The results of the data analysis were initially planned to inform subsequent

- Expanding on an earlier ESDC analysis of Skills Link data to examine differences in outcomes by the characteristics of the programs and providers; and

- Consulting with service delivery providers to explore potential obstacles to achieving positive outcomes and innovations to enhance results.

This research synthesis provided an important framework for the next project phase by highlighting effective practices and potential enhancements to youth programming and important considerations in improving data collection and outcome measurement.

Phase Two (Implementation)

Building on the research synthesis, the objective of this phase was to develop a demonstration project to test the effectiveness of pay-for-performance funding models to encourage best practices and innovation in the delivery of employment programming and skills training for vulnerable youth. This was achieved through:

- Developing and implementing a demonstration project, featuring enhanced service delivery models, comprehensive evaluation frameworks, and customized pay-for-performance funding models with four service delivery organizations;

- Conducting outcome research with each organization that examined both intermediate outcomes (e.g., social emotional skills, employment readiness, career adaptability) and the longer-term outcomes they support (e.g., employment) where appropriate; and

- Conducting implementation research that explored how each organization responded to the performance-based funding strategy and evaluation activities (e.g., challenges, lessons learned, value-add over traditional funding models) as well as collecting insights into innovative program features and how they align with youth success.

The results of this demonstration can help inform future investments under the modernized YESS, including identifying practices that can enhance positive outcomes and cost-effectiveness, and important outcomes that can inform youth progress towards employment goals.[3]

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engagement with service delivery organizations. However, SRDC was able to begin engaging practitioners without access to the data by leveraging best practices identified through the literature review. Once data access was available and the analysis completed, SRDC used the results to help inform the design of the demonstration project in Phase Two.

[3] A comparison group design was initially planned to allow us to conduct quantitative impact and cost-benefit analyses. However, the realities associated with the pandemic presented both methodological and ethical challenges, as it was more difficult to recruit youth while those that were recruited had elevated levels of need. As a result, the enhanced services developed for this project were offered to all

CURRENT REPORT

The current Research Synthesis report summarizes the research activities of Phase One while the design and implementation activities of Phase Two are documented in the Implementation Report. As part of background research, SRDC first reviewed the academic and grey literature to identify best practices for youth employment services and interventions, developing a preliminary conceptual framework to guide subsequent consultations with service delivery organizations. Second, SRDC conducted additional analyses on previous Skills Link evaluation data provided by ESDC to examine differences in outcomes by characteristics of the programs and providers. Third, SRDC engaged several service delivery organizations to validate the preliminary conceptual framework. This process also served to identify potential partner sites for the Phase Two demonstration project.

The report is organized into the following four sections:

- Literature review and conceptual framework

- Skills Link data analysis

- Validation and engagement with service delivery organizations

- Conclusion.

recruited youth, and the evaluation focus shifted to pre-to-post outcome analysis, with qualitative assessment of cost-effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review is structured around two approaches to understanding youth employment interventions. The first approach focuses on the *employment* dimension. We reviewed interventions and best practices that are used or recommended in youth employment programs, drawing from published reviews and evaluations of youth employment programs and from published consultation findings with youth, service providers, and other relevant stakeholders. The second approach examines the *youth* dimension. We reviewed developmental approaches that are commonly used to guide youth interventions, drawing from the academic literature, policy-relevant frameworks, and approaches used by practitioners in the field. We then integrated both approaches to develop a preliminary conceptual framework of the service pathway to employment for barriered youth. This preliminary framework informed consultations with service delivery organizations to further explore and validate best practices and innovations that enhance positive outcomes for youth.

YOUTH IN THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET

When it comes to the labour market, youth are "last in, first out" (Expert Panel on Youth Employment,[4] 2017, p. 6). Youth are disproportionately more likely to experience unemployment — for example, the recent unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 was 11.4 per cent, 2.4 times the rate for adults aged 25 to 54 (Labour Force Survey, October 2023). Youth are also more likely to have precarious employment, linked to the proliferation of part-time and contract jobs, which often have little benefits, minimal training, and low wages (Expert Panel, 2017).

Some youth may experience additional barriers and challenges that place them at greater risk of unemployment. For example, youth aged 15 to 29 were less likely to be employed if they had not yet acquired a high school diploma (53.9 per cent employed) compared to youth who completed postsecondary education (86.2 per cent; Expert Panel, 2017). Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, and recent immigrant youth all experience significantly greater unemployment rates than their counterparts (Expert Panel, 2017). For example, the recent unemployment rate for

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[4]   The Expert Panel on Youth Employment will be subsequently referred to simply as the Expert Panel in the remainder of the document. The creation of an Expert Panel was announced as part of Budget 2016 to assess the barriers faced by youth in the labour market and to examine innovative practices. The panel conducted extensive consultations with youth, experts, employers, community organizations, and service providers. They released an interim report in 2016 and a final report in 2017 with recommendations for the Government of Canada.

First Nation youth living off-reserve was 16.4 per cent (Labour Force Survey, October 2023). These individuals are also more likely to fall into the category of youth who are "not in education, employment, or training" or NEET. This group of youth are of particular concern because they can easily become isolated and disconnected and may lack the skills to re-enter or enter the labour market.

NEET youth

A series of reports based on the Labour Force Survey provides an overview of the NEET youth population in Canada, grouped into youth aged 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 29. **Youth aged 15 to 19** includes both youth who should still be in school, and youth who are transitioning to postsecondary education or the labour market. The NEET rate in this age group has decreased over recent years to 6 per cent (in 2016), which has been attributed to the increasing rate of youth remaining in school (83 per cent in 2016; Brunet, 2018). **Youth aged 20 to 24** are a mix of youth who are still attending school (43 per cent), working (45 per cent), and NEET (12 per cent; Brunet, 2019). Some youths are at greater risk of NEET status, including youth who do not have a high school diploma (37 per cent NEET), and Indigenous youth (23 per cent NEET, not including those who live on reserves). **Youth aged 25 to 29** have the highest NEET rate of the three age groups at 15 per cent (Brunet, 2018), with 73 per cent working and 12 per cent in school. Having only a high school diploma or less is associated with a higher probability of being NEET. In particular, women with a high school diploma or less have a NEET rate of almost 50 per cent.

There are various economic and social forces that can lead to an increase in NEET youth including: economic downturn, insecure and competitive labour market, discrimination in the labour market, low educational attainment for Indigenous youth, lack of mentorship and supports, and lack of motivation and incentive to seek employment (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). The most recent example is the COVID-19 pandemic that had unprecedented impacts across Canada on education, employment, health, and social services. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, the NEET rate for youth aged 15 to 19 rose to 9 per cent, although it decreased to 6 per cent in 2021 (Layton, 2022). For youth aged 20 to 24, the rate rose to 14 per cent and 15 per cent the following year. For youth aged 25 to 29, the NEET rate rose to 17 per cent and 18 per cent the following year.

Not all youth are affected equally by these forces, however. Some youth are at greater risk for becoming NEET because of personal risk factors (e.g., racialized or visible minority, low socio-economic status, poor health, disability, substance use), family risk factors (e.g., poor housing, immigrant status, parents with low educational attainment, unemployed parents), and social risk factors (e.g., experience in foster care, experience in the criminal justice system, negative experience in education; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). For example, the impacts of COVID-19 varied

across the population, with females aged 25 to 29 without a high school diploma and immigrant youth aged 15 to 19 experiencing particularly higher increases in NEET status (Layton, 2022). It is important to recognize that NEET youth are a complex and heterogeneous group that have different needs depending on their age, background, and experiences.

Barriers to the labour market

While NEET youth and youth in general can experience a wide range of barriers to employment, some common themes emerge. Through extensive Canada-wide consultations with stakeholders in youth employment, as well as youth themselves, the Expert Panel (2017) identified six themes that capture the most common barriers that youth face:

- **Uninformed:** Young people need better access to labour market information and in formats that are youth-friendly (e.g., concise, immediate, concentrated, mobile-friendly) and help navigating a sometimes confusing system. Organizations and governments also lack data on work experiences of young people to inform the supports they provide.

- **Underrated:** Some employers perceive youth negatively (e.g., entitled, lazy), which discourages them from hiring young people. Many employers also do not see the value that youth can bring to their organization (e.g., innovation, creativity), which can be reflected in youth being hired for unpaid internships or volunteer positions.

- **Uncertain:** Many employers are shifting towards part-time and contract positions. While this can lead to more jobs for youth, they often have no benefits, minimal training, and low wages. Youth also face challenges in the gig economy, which can be good experience, but is related to lower wages, unsafe workplaces, and Employment Insurance ineligibility. Youth entrepreneurs also lack capital and the social networks to succeed.

- **Underprepared:** Employment is more than getting a job, but about long-term employability. Youth need basic skills such as reading and working with numbers, as well as soft skills such as working with others and critical thinking. Being prepared also includes being able to market oneself and engage in effective career development and job search.

- **Unaccepted:** Canada's diversity is not always reflected in workplace cultures or employment programs. Systemic and indirect discrimination can be significant barriers for youth, especially Indigenous youth, recent immigrant youth, LGBTQ2+ youth, youth with disabilities, youth with mental health challenges, racialized youth, youth with criminal backgrounds, and youth struggling with homelessness.

- **Under-resourced:** Indigenous youth are the fastest growing segment of the population but continue to experience significant barriers and lack of resources, including gaps in education

funding, high dropout rates, needing to travel away from home, and racism and discrimination that stem from a legacy of colonization.

These barriers formed the foundation of a series of recommendations put forth by the Expert Panel, which includes enhancing YES with greater supports and more flexibility, rethinking the delivery of youth programming, enhancing the use of civic technology, engaging more employers, and providing additional supports for young entrepreneurs (see Expert Panel, 2017 for full recommendations and details).

APPROACHES TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Traditionally, employment programs are focused on the *supply-side* of the labour market, addressing barriers that keep youth out of the labour market including lack of information (uninformed), lack of work experience and skill gaps (underprepared), and lack of resources and limited social networks (under-resourced). Increasingly, however, interventions are incorporating or focusing on the *demand-side* of the labour market, addressing the skill and employment needs of employers, and more broadly, sectors and industries. Employer-focused approaches include treating employers like customers, and engaging employers to inform or actively be involved in program design and delivery. This ensures that youth gain skills that are in-demand while employers are able to improve and grow their workforce. Some employer-focused approaches also attempt to change employer attitudes, behaviours, and workplace policies to make them more supportive of youth strengths and needs. This includes helping employers see the value in youth (underrated), create more accepting and inclusive work environments (unaccepted), and offer better quality job opportunities for youth (uncertain).

Leveraging both types of approaches can help us address one of the critical factors that have been cited for high youth unemployment — the mismatch between youth skills and workplace needs (e.g., Choudry, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2002; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Zizys, 2014). Employers often report difficulty finding skilled workers to fill vacancies but see youth as lacking job-readiness skills and work experience. In the past, a youth starting an entry-level position would need fewer skills because there would be opportunities to train and accumulate experience over time at the company. Today, as labour market practices have shifted away from permanent jobs and long-term employment, employers need workers who are work-ready and can meet immediate needs. Even entry-level positions can now require two to three years of work experience (Zizys, 2014). There is also concern that youth are being prepared for jobs that will become obsolete. For example, the work environment is quickly evolving with increased automation, the rise of precarious work, and the growing gig economy — all of which point to the increased importance of workplace training to maintain skill relevancy (Bell, Benes, & Redekopp, 2016; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Without engaging employers and industry, youth may not be trained in the skills they need in a changing market.

Below we describe both youth-focused (supply-side) and employer-focused (demand-side) approaches. First, we provide a broad overview of common interventions and components that prepare youth for the labour market. Then we provide a brief discussion about how employers can be engaged to enhance youth-focused programs. This is followed by a review of some key characteristics of effective programs and examples of innovative practices in youth employment programs.

Youth-focused (supply-side) approaches

a) Intake and assessment

In previous research, career development practitioners[5] stressed that assessments should be viewed as a process that can be tailored to individual situations and needs (Myers, Fowler, Leonard, Conte, & Gyarmati, 2011). To do so, practitioners need a comprehensive set of approaches, tools, and practices at their disposal. For example, using the **Stages of Change** model can be effective for clients who are more ambivalent about engaging in employment (Myers et al., 2011). The Stages of Change model recognizes that change is gradual rather than dramatic (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). People move through a series of stages including Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance, and Termination (i.e., of effortful maintenance). It is estimated that less than 20 per cent of people making life changes are in the action stage, and yet, 90 per cent of programs are intended for people in the action stage.

During intake and assessment, practitioners can focus on the early stages of pre-contemplation and contemplation. For example, **motivational interviewing** (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) is a brief client-centred behavioural intervention that helps people make change in their life by clarifying and resolving ambivalence about behaviour change. Originally developed within the addictions services field, there has been little research on its application in employment. However, at least one study has found that use of motivational interviewing was related to higher employment rates, although its relation to other employment outcomes was more mixed (Ford, Dixon, Hui, Kwakye, & Patry, 2014).

Part of assessment is learning about the youth and determining what types of services and programming would best suit the youth's strengths and needs. In a systematic review of youth employment evaluations, profiling participants was a common feature of successful programs (Kluve et al., 2016). In some cases, detailed profiling and assessment can lead to individualized

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[5] These findings are based on a series of consultations conducted with provincial representatives and Canadian providers of career development services and skills development programs. Although not youth specific, the clients served included those with complex needs and facing multiple barriers.

tailored support. This support extends beyond addressing basic needs and includes finding the right fit of programming. Understanding youth motivation, drive, and career interests can ensure that youth are engaged in career pathways that are a good fit for them, including entrepreneurship if appropriate (S4YE, 2017).

Minimally, if detailed assessments and individualized learning plans are not available, it is still important to understand the general level and intensity of support a youth needs (Kluve et al., 2016). For example, some youths are already work-ready and need minimal supports before engaging in work experience. Others may need some employment training to build their skills before any work placements. Yet, others may face multiple barriers and struggle with low skills and need pre-employment training before engaging in any further programming. As an example, Vancouver's Streetohome Foundation developed a helpful Employment Readiness Continuum (Guyn Cooper Research Associates, 2018) illustrated below in an adapted form:

- **Work ready (Temporarily disconnected):** Stable housing, less extensive history of homelessness, willingness to engage in training and employment, have high school diploma or equivalent, enrolled in school, some work experience, stable or redeemable relationships with family, addictions and health problems stabilized.

- **Significant barriers to employment (Unstably connected):** Frequent changes in housing, repeated episodes of homelessness, disengaged from school, some level of connection with family, lack of basic necessities, health or addiction problems, behavioural challenges, low skills, criminal involvement, little employment experience.

- **Most disadvantaged job seekers (Chronically disconnected):** Long-term homelessness, complex needs, severe mental health problems and addictions, diagnosed disability, more extensive criminal record, unstable relationships, or no connections.

Knowing the employment readiness of youth can facilitate service planning and developing learning plans or pathways for youth that meet them where they are at.

b) Intervention components

One of the most common interventions is **skills training**, which has been identified as an important component to successful programs (e.g., CCHRC, 2002; Collura, 2010). The types of skills that an intervention focuses on can depend on the needs of the youth and their distance from the labour market. For youth who are more work-ready, technical and vocational training can prepare them with the skills needed to transition into specific occupations, including earning required safety and other technical certifications. For those who are lower skilled and distant from the market, training in employability skills may precede any technical training. Employability skills can include strengthening basic skills such as reading, writing, document

use, numeracy, and digital skills (core Essential Skills), and strengthening soft skills, such as oral communication, working with others, critical thinking, and continuous learning (soft Essential Skills). There is growing evidence that Essential Skills training can have significant impacts on employment outcomes when working with vulnerable or lower-skilled individuals, especially when training is informed by employers or contextualized for the industry (SRDC, 2017). Recently the Government of Canada launched its new Skills for Success framework that builds on the success of the Essential Skills framework, but is updated to reflect the evolving modern labour market and emphasizes social emotional skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity and innovation, and adaptability (Palameta, Nguyen, Lee, Que, & Gyarmati, 2021; see also the Implementation Report).

Employability skills are also increasingly focused on these types of social emotional skills (also called personal qualities, personal management, or personal development), such as responsibility, self-discipline, and positive attitudes (see section on *Social and Emotional Learning*). These employability skills are in-demand by employers and provide youth resilience in a labour market that increasingly includes less stable careers and more job changes. As noted by the Expert Panel, "A job is not success. Employability is success. Employability is about resilience" (2016, p. 9). Career development practitioners also emphasize the importance of adopting such a human capital or investment focus. The end goal is not simply getting a job, but developing skills and competencies that remain with the individual (Myers et al., 2011).

Interventions can also include **career exploration and development** activities. Most youth are still early in their career development and need opportunities to try out different careers, explore a range of options, and build confidence, self-esteem, and employability skills before making a commitment (Expert Panel, 2014; McCreary Centre Society, 2014). As part of an investment focus and ensuring that youth have the skills to adapt and be flexible in a changing labour market, career adaptability is increasingly important (Palameta, Dowie, Nguyen, & Gyarmati, 2016). Career adaptability includes being able to make decisions and take appropriate actions to find the right career or occupation given one's interests and skills (career decision-making self-efficacy), developing a strategy for reaching one's career goals (career planning), having a clear idea about what kind of job to search for (job search clarity), and being able to confidently complete tasks related to finding a job (job search self-efficacy).

Some of these career adaptability skills can be strengthened through **employment services** that can include creating cover letters and resumes and practicing interview skills. Employment services can also connect youth to employers through networking opportunities, job fairs, and job matching. Some employment services may help youth find work placements. **Work experience** is seen as a critical ingredient to help youth transition from skill building to the workplace. It gives them familiarity in a workplace environment and an opportunity to practice and hone their skills. Even when youth have skills, they may be overlooked for positions because they lack work experience (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Work experience can include co-op

placements that combine study with work experience, and internships or work placements, which can be unpaid, paid, or provide course credit. Others have engaged employment social enterprises as an innovative solution to provide supportive employment opportunities for youth transitioning to the workplace (CfEE, 2017). Employment social enterprises are businesses that create training and employment opportunities for job seekers who are facing barriers entering the labour market. Some lighter touch interventions to expose youth to the world of work might include mentorship opportunities with mentors in the workplace, workplace visits, simulated workplace training, and job shadowing (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Zizys, 2014).

Youth entrepreneurship is seen as an underdeveloped source of employment for youth. Although the rates of youth entrepreneurship were low between 2000 and 2012, it has been rising through 2012 to 2016 (Expert Panel, 2017). Entrepreneurship may represent only a fraction of youth employment, but it can have a big impact. Entrepreneurship accelerators and incubators shared that those who try to start their own business, regardless of the end result, come away with important skills including adaptability, resilience, and the ability to self-advocate (Expert Panel, 2014). To succeed, youth entrepreneurs need supports and training to build their confidence and develop their skills, and access to capital and social connections to support the launch and growth of their business (Futurpreneur Canada, 2014). One of the recommendations of the panel is to develop greater supports for young entrepreneurs, including greater intergenerational mentorship initiatives, with tailored supports for immigrant entrepreneurs (2017).

Mentorship is increasingly recognized as an important support not only for young entrepreneurs, but for all youth exploring careers and transitioning to the workplace. During consultations, youth and youth stakeholders highlighted the importance of a knowledgeable mentor, especially one who can offer a long-lasting relationship with regular check-ins (Expert Panel, 2016). As part of their recommendations, the panel also called for employers to develop more opportunities for youth to receive mentorship from leaders outside their networks (2017). Mentorship can serve many functions, including providing general psychosocial support to youth. The World Bank identified it as one of the core enabling interventions that support the re-engagement of youth who are out of school (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Mentorship includes befriending youth to build mutual trust and confidence, helping youth self-reflect and find direction and goals, coaching youth to take action and engage in behaviours that allow them to acquire skills and reach their goals, and advocating and networking on behalf of the youth (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019).

While many intervention components focus on building skills, knowledge, and relationships, it can be sometimes just as important to provide financial and practical supports. This can include **wage subsidies or tax credits** that create incentives for employers to hire youth who may have less experience or skills, as this offsets some of the financial risk. Other **financial incentives** support youth as they complete training or work experiences. Youth who are experiencing

multiple barriers and challenges have emphasized the importance of financial incentives or other types of funding. Without financial support, they often have to take on menial jobs to support themselves and do not have time and space to engage in training (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). One of the key recommendations from the Expert Panel was to broaden the eligibility of Employment Insurance for young people, recognizing the proliferation of precarious work, which would provide financial support for a greater number of youth (2017).

In addition to financial support, youth facing multiple barriers often benefit from **life skills training** and **practical supports**. Life skills training can include developing self-management skills, communication skills, and conflict-resolution skills, which support independent living. Youth have also emphasized the importance of practical skills such as learning how to file taxes, and practical supports to obtain clothing for interviews, purchase uniforms or tools for a job, or obtain identification, a social insurance number, or a driver's license (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Addressing barriers such as the need for childcare and affordable transportation can sometimes make the difference between participating and not participating in training.

c) Follow-up

Kluve and colleagues (2016) found that continuous **follow-up** and engagement with youth was important for the success of programs. Programs can collect information to evaluate the effectiveness of their program and also collect important information about how youth are doing in case their programing needs to be adjusted (e.g., type, intensity). Collura (2010) also highlighted follow-up services as a best practice, which can take the form of placements, follow-up support services that are offered for a year after a program has formally ended, or engagement and support through an alumni network. **Retention supports** within employment can be particularly important for those facing more challenges, such as new immigrants or people with disabilities (Myers et al., 2011). This can take the form of job coaching and mentoring supports. When youth complete a program, organizations can use an exit assessment to determine the capacity of the youth to maintain employment or other progress (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). This can inform the type and intensity of retention or follow-up supports needed.

Employer-focused (demand-side) approaches

While some employer-focused approaches attempt to change employer attitudes, behaviours, and policies (see below), in most cases, it involves augmenting youth-focused approaches by engaging employers in program design and delivery. In this way, youth training programs better reflect needs in the labour market, and more pathways are created to transition youth from training directly into work experience and potentially stable employment. Employers can be engaged to inform many of the interventions described above. Zizys (2018) introduced a useful

continuum of employer engagement that extends from lower levels of interaction (employer-sensitive) to higher levels of interaction (employer-engaged).

- **Employer-sensitive:** Involves being aware of employer and labour market needs (e.g., knowing which occupations are growing, and communicating with employers about job openings and requirements)

- **Employer-led:** Involves designing activities and programs that are driven by employer needs (e.g., employers advise on program design and delivery to meet their workforce needs)

- **Employer-engaged:** Involves a two-way process, where employers not only express their needs, but are actively involved, and may be advised on workplace practices and policies to support youth and skill development (e.g., employers advise on skill training, and implement new supports in the workplace)

Some large-scale Canadian demonstration projects have shown that such approaches can be associated with positive outcomes. Although not specifically geared toward youth, these projects included participants under the age of 30. An example of a lower-level engagement program is **Foundations**, a career pathfinding and skill upgrading training program for Canadian newcomers (Palameta et al., 2016). Participants used tools and resources and worked with the instructor to create an inventory of their skills while also understanding the skill requirements of their target occupations. Participants could then enhance targeted skills needed to reach their occupational goals. Results showed gains in career adaptability, which were associated with finding higher wage jobs, while other skill gains were associated with obtaining jobs of higher skill level and being employed after a year. An example of a higher-level engagement program is **Pay for Success,** a sector-based training program for lower-skilled job seekers that intensively engaged a single large employer in the garment manufacturing industry (SRDC, 2017). An organizational needs analysis was conducted with the employer to identify job performance expectations and skill requirements. This was used to tailor and contextualize Essential Skills training, leading into technical training and work experience. Results demonstrated that gains in skills identified as important for job performance were related to subsequent success in the workplace. This project is consistent with other emerging evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of skill development programs when they are informed by employer and labour market needs.

There are also other ways to engage employers that do not directly involve training, but instead focus on changing attitudes toward youth and showing employers the value of hiring youth. This was one of the barriers defined by the Expert Panel and a recommendation was made to convene a champions' roundtable of employers who can work towards a goal of hiring more youth and addressing concerns like discrimination and greater inclusion (2017). Employers can also be

supported to revise their organizational practices to include more youth-friendly recruitment strategies (e.g., social media, through youth organizations), and more structured on-boarding activities and learning opportunities (e.g., rotations through the company, mentorship, working with senior staff; Zizys, 2014).

Effective program characteristics

Programs can vary in their length, activities, and the type of intervention components they use. Below we briefly review some common characteristics that have been identified as important for success for youth employment programs. These are based on findings from various systematic reviews of youth employment program evaluations (e.g., Kluve et al., 2016; Mawn et al., 2017), as well as other reviews of the literature (e.g., CCHRC, 2002; Collura, 2010), and consultations with youth, career development practitioners, and other youth-serving organizations or stakeholders (e.g., Expert Panel, 2014, 2017; McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Myers et al., 2011).

a) Multi-component

Two separate systematic reviews of evaluations of youth employment interventions identified multi-component interventions as a key characteristic of successful programs (Kluve et al., 2016; Mawn et al., 2017). Kluve and colleagues found that no single type of intervention (e.g., skills training, subsidized employment, employment services) or single combination of interventions was more successful than others. However, having multiple interventions or components (e.g., skills training and employment services) was associated with success. Career development practitioners also identified combining different types of skill development as a promising practice (Myers et al., 2011). This could include combining academic upgrading or Essential Skills training with a diploma course, or Essential Skills training with industry-specific training. These programs are typically custom-designed programs (e.g., employer-led or employer-engaged) with work experience components that are collaborations between training providers, sector councils, and industry associations. Pay for Success is an example of such a program.

b) Comprehensive and coordinated services

A holistic approach looks beyond employment needs and addresses the youth as a whole, including the range of challenges the youth may be facing in various domains of life (e.g., mental health, childcare, health care, financial services). Programs should aim to not only improve employment outcomes but have an impact on broader well-being and health. This can be supported by providing comprehensive, coordinated, or wraparound services (CCHRC, 2002; Collura, 2010; McCreary Centre Society, 2014). These services are best when they are co-located for easy access and can address the individual barriers that youth may be experiencing. Both

consultations conducted by the Expert Panel (2016) and those with career development practitioners (Myers et al., 2011) highlighted the importance of partnering with other organizations, such as mental health agencies or other social service providers, and possibly pooling resources to provide comprehensive services. This is particularly important for youth with complex needs (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). The Expert Panel recommended that Skills Link "adopt a laser focus on providing wrap-around services to those at risk" (2017, p. 8).

c) Flexible and diverse options to enable individualized pathways

One of the key themes that the Expert Panel heard from consultations was the need for flexible and holistic programming (2016). Flexibility can include flexible pathways through services, and flexible entry, re-entry, and exit points. It can include providing services that align with a youth's need, rather than trying to fit a youth into existing services. In consultations, youth have recommended employment services that are drop-in rather than by appointment, and work placements that are more flexible to meet youth challenges (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Related to flexibility is offering youth multiple options and the time and space to explore before making a commitment. Youth need opportunities to try new things, counselling to help them make decisions, and experiences to build their confidence and self-esteem (Expert Panel, 2016). Youth and career development practitioners have also voiced the need for having a variety of programs to meet a variety of needs (e.g., short, long, different formats, different learning styles, various schedules; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019; McCreary Centre Society, 2014; Myers et al., 2011). Both flexibility and having diverse options available to youth allow youth to carve their own individualized pathways based on their readiness, strengths, interests, needs, and challenges.

d) High intensity contact and early intervention

In Mawn and colleagues review (2017), another common characteristic of successful interventions was high intensity contact (e.g., 884 hours, 6 months). Indeed, having a sufficient dosage to create enduring changes is an important principle of prevention and intervention programs (CCHRC, 2002; Nation et al., 2003). Similarly, research has consistently shown that intervening early is typically more effective than intervening late (e.g., Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, & Borghans, 2014). This has also been identified as a best practice for youth employment programs (Collura, 2010).

e) Positive youth development

Youth are still undergoing significant development neurologically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally, particularly adolescents. A key best practice for employment programs that target youth is using approaches that foster positive youth development (e.g., CCHRC, 2002; Collura,

2010). Indeed, offering programs that are multi-component, comprehensive in their supports, flexible and individualized, and of high intensity all are developmentally appropriate and supportive of positive youth development. See section on *Approaches to youth development* for more in-depth discussion.

Examples of innovative approaches

One of the objectives of this work is to not only identify characteristics that are associated with effective programs, but emerging and innovative practices. We highlight examples of innovative approaches showcased across two initiatives, one in Canada, and one international (see Appendix A for details). First, the Expert Panel (2017) identified exemplary programs in Canada that use a range of innovative approaches to address barriers faced by youth. This includes, for example, connecting entrepreneurs to early-stage companies (uninformed), recognizing companies that support youth (underrated), basic income pilots (uncertain), cohort and peer-based learning support (under-prepared), secure cloud to store IDS for at-risk youth (unaccepted), and networks of Indigenous job seekers and employers (under-resourced).[6]

Second, Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE, 2017) is a portfolio of 19 diverse high-potential youth employment projects across 15 developing countries from six continents. S4YE highlighted a range of innovative practices that emerged from their portfolio, including the integration of occupations of the future into training, delivering training in new ways such as through volunteerism or simulated workplaces, using technology to support youth, applying behavioural insights to shift perceptions of youth and employers, using cost-sharing models, and supporting youth as social innovators and social entrepreneurs.[7]

These two sets of identified innovations cover a broad range of interventions with some common areas of innovation, including employer-engaged approaches, facilitating connections between youth and employers/industry, entrepreneurship opportunities, mentorship, social enterprises, and digital approaches.

APPROACHES TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The period between 15 and 29 years of age is a critical transition period from childhood to adulthood with distinct neurological, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural milestones and

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[6] See Appendix A for a full table of innovative approaches organized by barrier, with examples of organizations or projects that use those approaches (Expert Panel, 2017).

[7] See Appendix A for a full table of innovative practices and specific examples from projects (S4YE, 2017).

changes. This is why the *youth* dimension of youth employment programs is an important consideration when designing and implementing interventions.

In the following sections, we briefly review some of the more prominent developmental approaches that are used to guide interventions for children and youth. These are divided into those that focus on building broad competencies through positive experiences, and those that focus on building foundational component skills. We then introduce an organizing framework that encompasses these various approaches and provides examples of developmental best practices.

Building competencies through positive experiences

One of the most well-known developmental approaches to youth programming is Positive Youth Development (PYD), which focuses on the development of broad competencies by engaging youth in positive experiences and activities. Similarly, Youth Engagement (YE) is a growing best practice for organizations that work with or serve youth that is very much consistent with PYD principles. YE empowers youth as meaningful partners in decisions that are important to them or affect them, including engaging youth in activities related to program development and delivery. Both of these approaches are described below.

a) Positive Youth Development (PYD)

Positive Youth Development (PYD) builds young people's competencies, attitudes, and skills by engaging them in positive activities instead of focusing on reducing problematic behaviours (e.g., Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Tolan, Ross, Arkin, Godine, & Clark, 2016). PYD programs support and empower youth by identifying and building strengths, offering opportunities for youth and adults to connect in bidirectional constructive ways, building a sense of belonging in the community, and incorporating youth perspectives. PYD sees intervention as improving the fit between youth strengths and skills and the resources and opportunities in their environment. When there is a good fit, youth are able to reach their potential and thrive. Program activities can vary, but a program captures the spirit of PYD through its program goals and the atmosphere it creates (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

The **Five Cs Model** is a well-known model that operationalizes PYD into five domains (description from Bowers et al., 2010, p. 721):

- **Competence:** Positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational. Social competence pertains to interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution). Cognitive competence pertains to cognitive abilities (e.g., decision-making). School grades, attendance, and test scores are part of academic competence.

Vocational competence involves work habits and career choice explorations, including entrepreneurship.

- **Confidence:** An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.

- **Connection:** Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.

- **Character:** Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviours, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.

- **Caring:** A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

In some cases, a sixth C is included for Contribution, related to giving back to self, family, community, and society (Lerner, 2004). These Five Cs were determined based on experiences of practitioners and the developmental literature. Positive outcomes from PYD programs can be linked back to healthy development in these domains.

Another well-known model is the **Developmental Assets Model** (e.g., Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998), which includes 20 external assets related to family, school, peers, and community, and 20 internal assets related to the self.

External Assets

- **Support:** Family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighbourhood, caring school climate, parent involvement in schooling

- **Empowerment:** Community values youth, youth as resources, service to others, safety

- **Boundaries and Expectations:** Family boundaries, school boundaries, neighbourhood boundaries, adult role models, positive peer influence, high expectations

- **Constructive Use of Time:** Creative activities, youth programs, religious community, time at home

Internal Assets

- **Commitment to Learning:** Achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, reading for pleasure

- **Positive Values:** Caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, restraint

- **Social Competencies:** Planning and decision-making, interpersonal competence, cultural competence, resistance skills, peaceful conflict resolution

- **Positive Identity:** Personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, positive view of personal failure

A systematic review of 25 PYD program evaluations found that PYD programs are effective in promoting positive development (e.g., self-control, interpersonal skills, quality of peer and adult relationships, academic achievement), and while not the primary focus, they are also effective in reducing problematic or risky behaviours such as substance use (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002).

b) Youth Engagement (YE)

"Youth engagement is about empowering all young people as valuable partners in addressing and making decisions about issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe to be important." (The New Mentality, see Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions, 2023). Core components of YE include positive relationships, positive spaces, and positive opportunities, which are consistent with PYD (Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions, 2023). Guiding principles include:

- Value youth as community assets
- Commit to participatory leadership
- Build authentic relationships
- Strive for health equity

- Meet youth where they are at
- Use a whole community approach
- Put safety first

Youth engagement is increasingly recognized as an important practice for organizations working with or serving youth, especially youth at risk. Youth can be engaged across a spectrum of involvement from being served as clients, informing or providing input into programming, engaging in program development and delivery, to leading or co-leading programming.

Developing foundational skills

While both PYD and YE approaches are guided by the development of core competencies and assets, other approaches explicitly target core or foundational skills that support positive and adaptive functioning and development. The approaches are complementary in the sense that foundational skills support core competencies and assets, while engagement in activities that foster core competencies and assets likely support the development of component skills. Several approaches are described below.

a) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions focus on the development of specific skills that are essential for adequate development and social functioning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Tolan et al., 2016). The immediate goals of SEL interventions are to help children and youth develop social and emotional skills organized into five core competency areas that are the foundation for positive academic, social, and behavioural outcomes (CASEL, 2012):

- **Self-awareness:** Identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, recognizing strengths, self-confidence, self-efficacy

- **Self-management:** Impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, organizational skills

- **Responsible decision-making:** Identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, ethical responsibility

- **Social awareness:** Perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, respect for others

- **Relationship skills:** Communication, social engagement, relationship building, teamwork.

Research has shown that universal SEL school-based programs are associated with positive outcomes including improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviours, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). In a review of early childhood, elementary school, adolescent, and young adult interventions, Kautz et al. (2014) concluded that early interventions tend to work through improving social and emotional skills more so than cognitive skills. For example, the Perry Preschool Program was a comprehensive social and emotional intervention for disadvantaged preschoolers during the 1960s. While there were significant initial gains in IQ, those gradually dissipated, but social and emotional skill gains were longer-lasting and associated with positive long-term outcomes.

b) Non-cognitive skills, personality attributes, and personal qualities

There is growing interest in social and emotional skills understood more broadly as non-cognitive or psychosocial skills (e.g., not related to IQ or achievement tests), personality attributes such as the well-known Big Five (e.g., Conscientiousness, Openness, Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Extraversion; Goldberg, 1971; McCrae & Costa, 1996), and more generally as personal qualities or character attributes. Despite these different labels and conceptualizations, researchers, educators, policy-makers, and practitioners are recognizing the

importance of these types of skills in predicting socioeconomic outcomes, especially academic and work outcomes.

Personality and personal attributes such as responsibility, self-management, and communication skills are often rated as more important in hiring, retention, and satisfaction with employees than other types of skills, such as reading and writing (e.g., see Kautz et al., 2014). A large number of meta-analyses provide evidence that personality attributes predict academic and work outcomes, in particular Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Salgado & Táuriz, 2014).

These findings are also consistent with the 21st century skills movement in education. The term "21st century skills" has been used to describe the skills required to succeed in the technological and knowledge economy of this century. Common across most of the frameworks developed (e.g., Partnership for 21st Century Learning, Canadians for 21st century Learning) are non-cognitive or psychosocial skills such as collaboration, teamwork, communication; creativity, imagination, and innovation; and critical thinking and problem solving (e.g., Burrus et al., 2013; Hannover Research, 2011).

In light of this growing evidence, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently began a 3-year study on 10- to 15-year-old students across various cities and countries to identify the conditions and practices that support or hinder the development of social and emotional skills (2018). They conceptualized social and emotional skills using the Big Five as a framework to organize component skills and several compound skills:

- **Task Performance (Conscientiousness):** Achievement motivation, responsibility, self-control, persistence

- **Emotional Regulation (Emotional Stability):** Stress resistance, optimism, emotional control

- **Collaboration (Agreeableness):** Empathy, trust, cooperation

- **Open-Mindedness (Openness to Experience):** Curiosity, tolerance, creativity

- **Engagement with Others (Extraversion):** Sociability, assertiveness, energy

- **Compound skills (combination of two skills):** Self-efficacy, critical thinking/independence, self-reflection/meta-cognition.

This project drew from evidence across multiple disciplines and academic literatures (including evidence from social and emotional learning and personality research) showing that these social and emotional skills are important for critical life outcomes, such as school achievement, job

performance, and personal well-being. There is also evidence showing that these skills can change over time. There are patterns of changes seen throughout the life span (e.g., Conscientiousness and Agreeableness generally increase with age) and changes observed after interventions that target social and emotional skills, such as the Perry Preschool Program.

c) Core capabilities: Executive function and self-regulation

Research from psychology and neuroscience point to a set of mental processes called executive functions or self-regulation that are crucial for learning, development, and adaptive functioning (Center on the Developing Child, 2016). These processes in the prefrontal cortex of the brain act like an air traffic control system that allows the brain to ignore distractions, prioritize and focus, set goals, and control impulses. This allows a person to reflect and control their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in an intentional, goal-directed way. These processes include, but are not limited to, the following core capabilities: planning, focus, self-control, awareness, and flexibility.

Our self-regulation system has an automatic and intentional side. The automatic part of the system is fast, impulsive, more driven by emotion, not conscious, and often considered "bottom-up" (e.g., fight or flight response). The intentional part of the system is more reflective, conscious, controlled, goal-directed, and often considered "top-down." We need both to respond adaptively to the environment. Sometimes we need to respond quickly to threats, but in other situations, it is better to think things through and make choices that are beneficial in the long-term. Our core capabilities make sure we maintain a balance between the two parts of the system.

Early childhood and adolescence are critical periods for the development of these capabilities. The prefrontal cortex generates an abundance of brain connections. The connections that are used are strengthened, while the connections that are used less are pruned away. In this way, experiences can have an important impact on core capabilities. Supportive responsive relationships in stable safe environments ensure that the right connections are strengthened and maintained. Core capabilities can be supported in two ways through programming. First, programs can reduce stressful experiences in the environment that trigger the automatic part of the system and overload the intentional part. Second, programs can also provide activities and experiences that train and strengthen core capabilities to better respond to stresses and adversities in the environment.

ARC as an organizing framework

As there is significant conceptual overlap across these developmental approaches, we adopt an organizing framework developed by Khanna, Maccormack, Kutsyuruba, McCart, and Freeman,

(2014). They identified three overarching critical factors that are common across
several prominent developmental approaches: Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence. We
describe the ARC framework below and show how it can be used as an organizing framework for
positive development and resilience, which has also featured prominently in frameworks for
social interventions for children and youth (e.g., Franke, 2010; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019).

a) ARC as an organizing framework for positive development

Khanna and colleagues (2014) reviewed three models used to explain youth thriving: the
Developmental Assets Model, PYD, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT (Deci & Ryan,
2000) outlines three psychological needs, autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which are the
basis for intrinsic motivation and behaviour and important for psychological health and well-
being. These psychological needs are not specific to youth but can be applied to the general
population.

Khanna and colleagues identified Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence as key factors that
capture the salient elements of the three models. The ARC model includes the following:

- **Autonomy:** Having input and voice in determining one's own behaviour

- **Relatedness:** Feeling a sense of belonging, and connecting with and caring for others

- **Competence:** Having the skills to confidently and effectively handle situations and
  experience mastery.

The competencies and assets that are important for healthy development support these broad
factors. For example, competencies related to Confidence and Character (Five Cs) support
Autonomy, while assets such as Support and Boundaries and Expectations (Developmental
Assets) support Relatedness. Broadly, these three factors appear to capture what is common
across most developmental approaches.

Meanwhile, the constellation of social and emotional skills and core capabilities provide the
foundation for youth to develop these competencies and assets and to achieve Autonomy,
Relatedness, and Competence. For example, specific skills like empathy, cooperation,
perspective-taking, and communication support the development of social competencies and
caring and ultimately contribute to Competence and Relatedness in youth lives.

b) ARC as an organizing framework for resilience

Resilience is the ability to respond in a positive adaptive way to significant adversity (National
Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). Resilience is not simply in the individual, as

was once believed, but derives from strengths of the individual and strengths in the individual's context or environment (e.g., family, peers, community). Interventions can focus on decreasing *risk factors* in the individual (e.g., poor self-control) or in the environment (e.g., harsh parenting), which are often associated with negative outcomes. Interventions can also focus on fostering positive development by increasing promotive or protective factors. *Promotive factors* promote positive and healthy development and directly counteract or compensate for risk and negative experiences in an independent way (Zimmerman et al., 2013). For example, a youth who has friends involved in risky behaviours may be less likely to get into trouble because the youth has supportive attentive parents. *Protective factors* change how negative experiences have their effect. For example, a youth who experiences family conflict may be less likely to have emotional distress because of effective coping skills and emotional regulation.

Some of the key promotive and protective factors identified by theory and literature are (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015):

- Having at least one stable caring supportive relationship with an adult

- A sense of mastery and control over one's life

- Self-regulation skills

- Supportive context from one's faith or culture.

These align very well with the ARC model, highlighting the importance of experiencing autonomy or mastery over one's life, having supportive relationships and belongingness with one's culture and faith, and the skills and competence to face life's challenges. When programs focus on fostering Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence and foundational skills, it not only increases a youth's competences, assets, and skills, but equips youth to better adapt to, cope with, and overcome stresses and adversities in life.

c) Applying ARC to youth employment programs

With its broad and comprehensive scope, the ARC framework can be applied to a wide range of youth programs that use different developmental approaches (e.g., PYD, social and emotional learning). Even for organizations or programs that do not explicitly articulate a developmental approach, the ARC lens can be used to examine how well program activities support ARC developmental outcomes. An advantage of the ARC model is that it can be applied broadly to both younger youth (e.g., adolescents) and older youth (e.g., emerging adults). Youth employment services and programs can sometimes serve a wide age range of youth. The ARC framework borrows these three critical factors from SDT. SDT was developed as a general theory for human motivation that has been applied in multiple domains including work and school. It

can be relevant for youth of different ages at different stages of life. However, the specific goals may differ for younger versus older youth.

Furthermore, the strengthening of social and emotional skills can be important at any age. Interventions have focused on childhood and adolescence because they are periods of significant growth and brain plasticity, during which interventions may have the strongest long-term impacts. However, social and emotional skills can still be strengthened and improved during young and even later adulthood. Social and emotional skills also underlie adaptive and positive functioning throughout the lifespan from infancy to old age.

Examples of developmental best practices

Below we highlight several examples of best practices and activities that are developmentally focused and foster youth autonomy, relatedness, and competence (for detailed examples, see Appendix B). This is not an exhaustive list but is meant to illustrate what developmental practices can look like. Many of these practices and activities were developed within specific developmental approaches (e.g., youth engagement, social and emotional learning) but most can be adapted to an employment training context (see section on *Putting it all together* below). Many of these practices demonstrate *how* to relate to youth, to interact with youth, and to approach, design, and implement activities for youth. As noted above, positive youth development is more determined by the goals of a program and the spirit and atmosphere in which it is implemented, more so than its specific activities (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In this way, developmental practices are easily adaptable for a wide range of youth programming, including employment-focused programming.

a) Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework

The Search Institute developed a framework to describe how relationships support positive development (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017). As part of the framework, the Search Institute provides concrete actions that adults can take to support young people within the context of a positive meaningful relationship. These concrete actions help express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities. Through challenging growth and sharing power, we can foster autonomy and competence. Through expressing care and providing support, we can foster relatedness. Through expanding possibilities, we can support continued development in all three dimensions of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (see Appendix B for more details on the framework).

b) Walking the talk: A toolkit for engaging youth in mental health

The Knowledge Institute of Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions developed a toolkit to help organizations implement youth engagement (2023; see previous section on *Youth engagement*). Although it was developed within the context of youth mental health, it can be applied to any type of youth programming, particularly those involving populations of vulnerable youth. The toolkit provides concrete steps to building youth engagement within a program or organization. It includes three major phases: co-activation, co-creation, and co-evaluation (see Appendix B for more details). Youth are empowered to take on leadership roles and make decisions about important issues that concern them. These opportunities not only develop autonomy, but help youth develop their skills and competencies (e.g., how to work with others, public-speaking, planning and organizing events, peer support skills). Youth engagement also has a strong focus on developing positive intergenerational relationships and peer relationships.

c) Social and emotional learning (SEL)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) developed one of the prominent frameworks for SEL (see previous section on *Social and Emotional Learning*). Effective SEL approaches have the following **S.A.F.E.** elements (CASEL, 2019):

- **Sequenced:** Connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development

- **Active:** Active forms of learning to help students master new skills and attitudes

- **Focused:** A component that emphasizes developing personal and social skills

- **Explicit:** Targeting specific social and emotional skills.

One way to deliver SEL is through free-standing lessons explicitly designed to focus on SEL. A second way to deliver SEL is to incorporate activities that foster SEL into classroom-based curriculums, such as cooperative learning and project-based learning. Depending on the needs of the youth, instructors may use either one or both approaches. CASEL developed a resource of sample activities to support teachers (2017). These include both explicit lessons and integrated activities for each competency area of skills (see Appendix B for more details). Activities that build self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making promote autonomy. Activities that build social awareness and relationship skills provide youth the foundational skills to build and maintain meaningful and positive relationships. Through these various activities, youth gain specific skills that give them the competence and confidence to self-regulate, self-manage, and navigate social interactions.

d) Building core skills and reducing stress

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University developed a practical guide for practitioners to help youth build their core skills and to deliver services in ways that reduce stress (2018; see previous section on *Core capabilities*). Some concrete strategies that can be used when working with youth include practicing with real-life situations, spotting and planning for triggers, taking another's view of stressors, focusing on personally motivating goals, and building on positive memories and small successes (see Appendix B for more details). Through the core skills of planning, focus, self-control, awareness, and flexibility, youth can build greater autonomy (e.g., understanding the self), relatedness (e.g., better emotional regulation in social situations, considering the perspective of others), and competence (e.g., coping skills).

The guide also includes five ways to deliver services that reduce stress (p. 4, see below). Reducing stress in the environment avoids overloading the regulatory system and gives youth more resources and mental space to devote to learning and working towards their goals.

- **Create a safe environment:** Provide physically and emotionally safe environments. Get youth input. This helps youth avoid triggering stress or fear.

- **Leverage social relationships:** Adolescent brains are especially attuned to social acceptance and rejection. Foster opportunities for peer relationships and help them navigate social relationships. Adult relationships are important too.

- **Support and listen:** Youth are particularly sensitive to anything that makes them feel diminished. Be respectful, check assumptions, and listen to them without giving them advice. Support their autonomy and build confidence and trust.

- **Use accessible, familiar tools:** Ask youth what helps them the most for keeping organized (e.g., checklists, apps, text message alerts). Encourages youth to problem-solve themselves with tools they know.

- **Streamline and simplify:** Make it easy for youth to enroll in and attend programming. This avoids additional stress for youth and increases their participation and retention.

## PRELIMINARY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To inform our engagement with service providers, we developed an integrated conceptual framework of the broad service or learning pathway that youth travel through to sustained employment. This framework integrates findings from our review of approaches, interventions, and practices used in youth employment programs and youth development programs. It presents the broad stages within the employment pathway (i.e., intake, pre-employment training,

employment training, work experience, sustained employment), and a range of services youth might engage with in each stage. Importantly, the framework incorporates a developmental lens, highlighting how developmental goals of autonomy, relatedness, and competence can be fostered at each stage of the pathway within a training or employment context. We also introduce a milestone-based approach that can be used to design programming and measure youth progress through training and sustained employment (see below for more details). This framework is presented in Figure 1, followed by an explanation of each component of the framework.

**Figure 1** **Youth service pathway to employment**
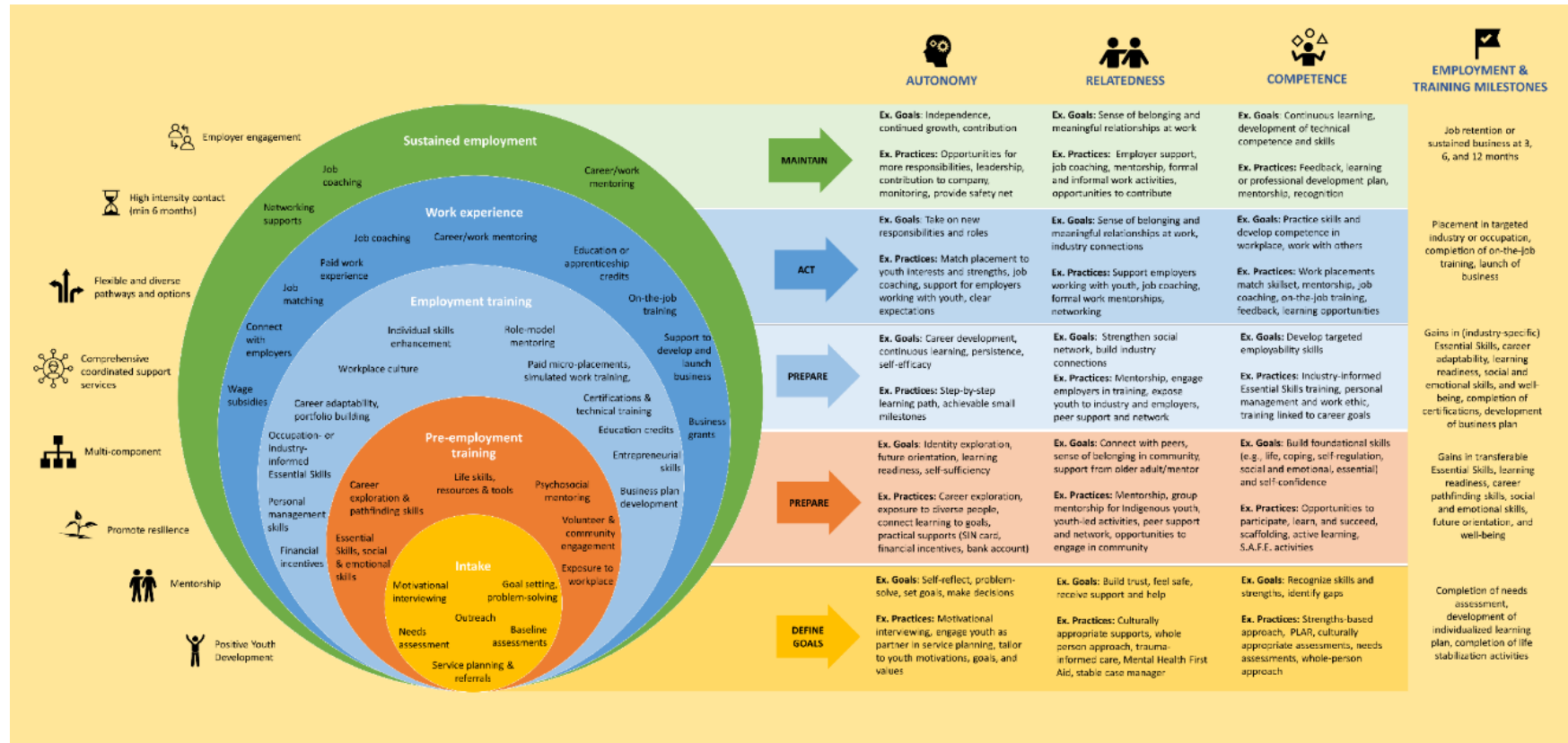
Employment pathway
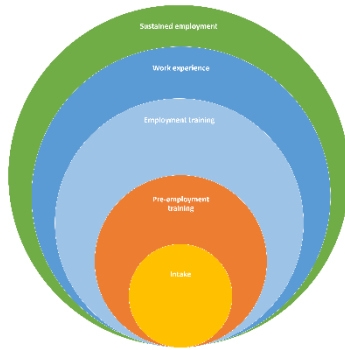
Employment pathway: The employment pathway is illustrated as nested expanding circles to show the general progression from intake, pre-employment training, employment training, work experience, to sustained employment. How youth travel within the pathway and how long they engage in services will depend on their employment-readiness and distance from the labour market. Services should be individualized and flexible to meet youth where they are at — pathways will not always be linear. Some youth may progress directly to employment training after intake, while others may engage first in pre-employment training. Youth can also move in any direction through the pathway (e.g., if work experience is not successful, a youth can move back into employment training). As emphasized in the Stages of Change model, it is normal to cycle backward and forward when we are trying to make significant changes in our lives. Within each stage of the pathway, we provide examples of common and effective intervention components typical of that stage. A youth may engage in one or more components at each stage, depending on his or her needs and the services available.
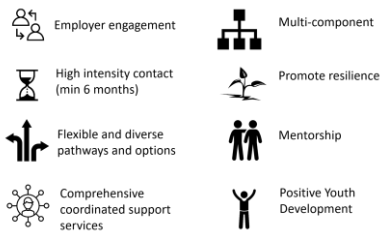
Effective characteristics and components: We illustrate some of the important characteristics and components of effective and successful youth employment programs. These are elements that can be incorporated into intervention program components (e.g., mentorship, flexibility) or to overall program structures (e.g., multi-component, comprehensive support services).

Stages of Change: The broad stages of change are mapped onto the employment pathway. During intake, youth begin to think about change and start defining goals for themselves. During pre-employment and employment training stages, youth prepare themselves for employment by building their knowledge, skills, and social connections. During work experiences, youth engage in actual work in the workplace. Finally in the sustained employment stage, youth work to maintain their employment and continue developing their confidence, skills, and knowledge.

Youth development pathway

AUTONOMY   RELATEDNESS   COMPETENCE

ARC framework: Our conceptual framework illustrates how the ARC framework can be applied to a training and employment context. At each stage in the employment pathway, we provide examples of goals and supporting activities to foster autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Many of these incorporate common employment intervention components and developmental practices discussed in our review. Different types of ARC goals will be more salient at different stages. For example, earlier in the pathway, autonomy goals are likely to focus on motivation to change, and making decisions about one's life (e.g., supports needed, training options). Later in the pathway, autonomy goals may focus more on taking on new roles and responsibilities at work. The ARC framework underscores the need to address not only cognitive and employment-specific skills, which overlaps with competency, but also autonomy and relatedness needs and goals.

Milestone-based approach

**EMPLOYMENT &
TRAINING MILESTONES**

Previous work has shown that using a milestone-based approach can be an effective way to design, develop, and evaluate a training program (SRDC, 2017, 2018b).[8] Milestones are interconnected indicators of success along a training pathway. They could include the completion of specific intervention components (e.g., completing a needs assessment, creating a learning plan) or demonstrated skill gains (e.g., gains in Essential Skills). Earlier milestones act as transition or tipping points for later milestones. Completing or reaching earlier milestones should create conditions that increase the chances of completing subsequent milestones. In an analysis of several training demonstration projects, including Pay for Success and Foundations, evidence showed that early milestones predicted later employment outcomes (SRDC, 2019a). For example, in Pay for Success, participants who showed earlier skill gains from training were more likely to do well in technical work training, and those participants were more likely to get hired (SRDC, 2017).

These milestones can be used to design and structure programming and guide training and evaluation activities. For example, service providers may find it helpful to have a series of milestones to work towards with their clients, rather than focusing on a sole distant target goal (i.e., employment). Articulating key milestones along the employment or training pathway can also improve motivation. It can help youth track their progress and celebrate wins along the

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[8]   For information about using a milestone-based approach, see the set of four reports by SRDC, *A comprehensive review and development of measurement options for essential skills initiatives* (2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b).

way. It also recognizes the important effort and work that both youth and service providers engage in during the preparation stage of change.

The framework provides some example milestones, including those that have been used successfully in previous projects. Further milestones can also be articulated with regards to developmental goals, including gains in social and emotional skills, gains in competency areas, and relationship quality.

The preliminary framework was used to structure our engagement and consultations with service providers. The goal of these initial discussions was to assess how well our conceptual framework captures the program models and intervention components used, the populations served, how the program is delivered, and the factors that support or hinder the success of interventions. This allowed us to identify gaps in our conceptual framework and identify additional areas of innovation and best practices that enhance positive outcomes for youth.

SKILLS LINK DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION TO SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

To further understand differences in outcomes by the characteristics of the Skills Link funded programs and providers, we engaged in secondary data analysis of ESDC's 2015-2016 fiscal year Common System for Grants and Contributions data — the same data used in the 2015 evaluation of YES programs (ESDC, 2015).

The original goal of our secondary analysis was to explore how program characteristics might explain differential outcomes for youth and identify key service elements that are effective for youth employment interventions. However, due to the lack of information available on organizations, programs, and youth characteristics, our analyses could only compare outcomes across intervention types and consider associations with the subgroups of youth participants they serve.

Our approach culminated in two stages of secondary data analysis answering two research questions. Stage one of our analysis answered: 1) *Is there a difference in likelihood of youth being employed or in education between the various Skills Link intervention types?* Stage two then answered: 2) *What is the distribution of organization-level outcomes, and how do organizational outcomes vary in relation to the demographic characteristics of the youth they serve?*

Data and variables

To complete the analysis, ESDC securely shared Common System for Grants and Contributions data with SRDC. The dataset shared excluded any organization with less than 10 participants, which resulted in our analysis being based on 5,231 of 5,760 participant records and 166 of 268 organizations.

While the dataset included outcomes (e.g., employed, in-school) for each individual youth, there was no demographic data at the individual level. For example, we were unable to determine whether a specific youth was male or female. Instead, the dataset included only organizational-level demographic data, indicating the proportion of females and males served at each organization. Table 1 illustrates the nature of the dataset, where demographic data refers to the organization and not to individual youth.

Table 1   Illustration of sample data

Client ID	Organization	Outcome	Proportion female	Proportion male
ID1	Organization A	Employed	0.37	0.63
ID2	Organization A	Unemployed	0.37	0.63
ID3	Organization B	In-school	0.51	0.49
ID4	Organization B	Unemployed	0.51	0.49
ID5	Organization B	Employed	0.51	0.49
ID6	Organization C	In-school	0.56	0.44

The organizational-level demographic information included:

- proportion **male, female, or not declared**;

- proportion at various **education levels**;[9]

- proportion of **Canadian citizens, permanent residents or refugees** (or not declared);

- proportion of **visible minority** youth;

- proportion of **Indigenous** youth;

- proportion of youth with a **disability**;

- proportion at various **age** groups; and

- proportion receiving **EI status**.

The dataset also included information about the type of training intervention. Of the nine interventions included in the original dataset, a few had strikingly similar names. The number of participants in some of these interventions were also small and risked producing unreliable results if analyzed independently. To address this, we combined interventions that shared a similar name based on the assumption that the program characteristics were

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[9]   In our analysis, we excluded education level as it was missing from more than half of all organizations.

approximately the same.[10] In most cases, combined programs likely differed in terms of the name inputted into the data rather than variation in more substantive elements of the program.

Table 2 provides a general description of the five types of Skill Link interventions and the comparison group included in our analyses. These groups align with ESDC's 2020 evaluation report of the Skills Link stream (ESDC, 2020). Many organizations offered more than one type of intervention so the numbers of organizations for each intervention group do not sum to 100. When interpreting results, it is important to note that the number of organizations who delivered each type of intervention varied considerably. When the number of organizations within an intervention group is small, the results can be more easily influenced by differences between organizations. Note that the comparison group included in the table is quite small.

Table 2   Intervention types

Name	Description	Maximum duration	Maximum cost per participant	# of org. in data
Skills Link funding streams				
Group-Based Employment Skills (GBES)	Short-term workshops that enhance skills transferable to the workplace	24 weeks	$12,000	93
Employability Skills through Work Experience (ESWE)	Employability skills workshops blended with periods where participants work directly with employers	52 weeks	$25,000	111
Work Experience (WE)	Opportunities to work with employers and may include support through coaching or on-the-job training	52 weeks	$25,000	108
Individual Skills Enhancement (ISE)	Participation in short-term courses that meet specific education and skill development needs	12 weeks	$10,000	5
Employability Skills through Entrepreneurship (ESE)	Entrepreneurial skill building opportunities where individuals establish a new enterprise with support	52 weeks	$25,000	5
Comparison intervention				
Employment Services (ES)	A subset of individuals aged 15 to 30 who have the same characteristics as Skills Links participants but received only a limited level of treatment through minor Employment Assistance Services interventions as part of the Labour Market Development Agreements			4

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[10]   Employability Skills through Entrepreneurship was combined with Employability Skills – Entrepreneurship (ESE); Employability Skills through Work Experience was combined with Employability Skills – Work Experience (ESWE); and Individual Skills Enhancement was combined with Skills Link – Individual Skills Enhancement – CC (ISE).

RESULTS

Youth-level outcomes

Descriptive results

Youth-level outcomes showed that after completion of the intervention, more than 8 in 10 participants (84 per cent) reported being employed or pursuing further education.[11] The average rate of employment across all interventions was 77 per cent, ranging from 63 per cent (GBES) to 94 per cent (ESE). Reports of being unemployed (not employed or in school) was highest for ISE (15 per cent). The average rate of pursuing further education was eight per cent, ranging from three per cent (ESE, ISE) to 13 per cent (ESWE, GBES). These results are presented in Figure 2.

Interventions of greater duration (e.g., ESE, ESWE, WE) with a combination of skill building and experiential work components had better overall results than shorter skill enhancement and group-based interventions. Interventions of greater duration had an 86 per cent success rate when combining *employed* and *returned to school* outcomes — 10 percentage points higher than shorter skill-based interventions (76 per cent).[12] These results underscore the potential added value of including work-integrated components in training programs and longer interventions.

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[11] This calculation does not include participant outcome (12 per cent) that were unknown for various reasons (e.g., could not be reached, abandoned the program, did not declare their status).

[12] ES was not included in the average calculation of for non-work-oriented interventions as this was not a Skills Link intervention.

Figure 2   Youth outcomes by intervention type
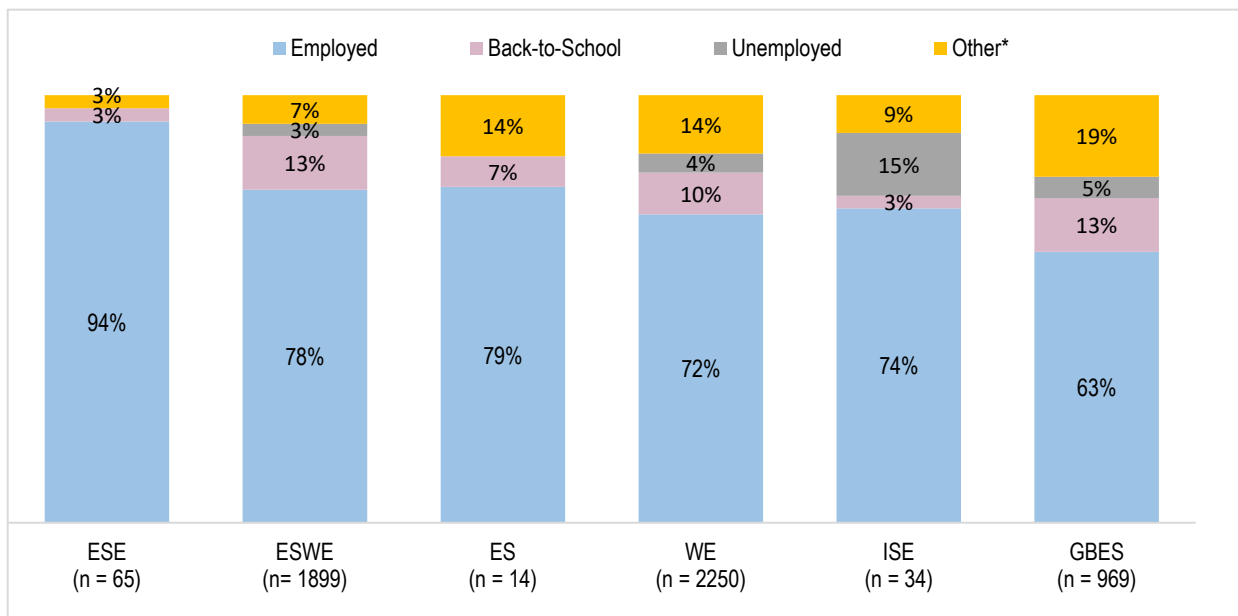
Note: *Other refers to participants in the following outcome categories: other, abandoned, can not be reached, or not declared.

Regression results

This section describes the analytical approach and results addressing the first research question: *Is there a difference in likelihood of youth being employed or in education between the various Skills Link intervention types?* Note that when we refer to outcomes below, we are referring specifically to outcomes as defined by regression estimates.

Our analysis specified a series of base regression models each predicting achievement of a positive outcome (employment or return to school) as a function of Skills Link intervention type. The unit of analysis was each individual youth. Work Experience (WE) was used as the reference category as it contained the largest number of people. The results indicated that the likelihood of a positive outcome (employed or in school) was significantly higher for youth in ESE and ESWE programs (see Figure 3). Compared to WE, outcomes for the ESE and ESWE groups were 8.4 and 3.6 percentage points higher, respectively – perhaps indicating the benefits of adding a preparatory skills development component to complement a planned work experience.

In contrast, the likelihood of a positive outcome was significantly lower for youth in GBSE and ISE. Specifically, the likelihood of a positive outcome was 4.1 percentage points lower for GBSE and 11.2 percentage points lower for ISE compared to WE, indicating that short-duration skills training alone (without a work experience component) may not fully meet the needs of some learners.

In addition, though 100% of the small number (n=14) of youth receiving employment services (ES) achieved positive outcomes, this was not significantly different from the reference category (WE), as the low sample size for the ES group reduced the predictive power of this estimate.

Figure 3   Likelihood of being employed or in school by intervention type
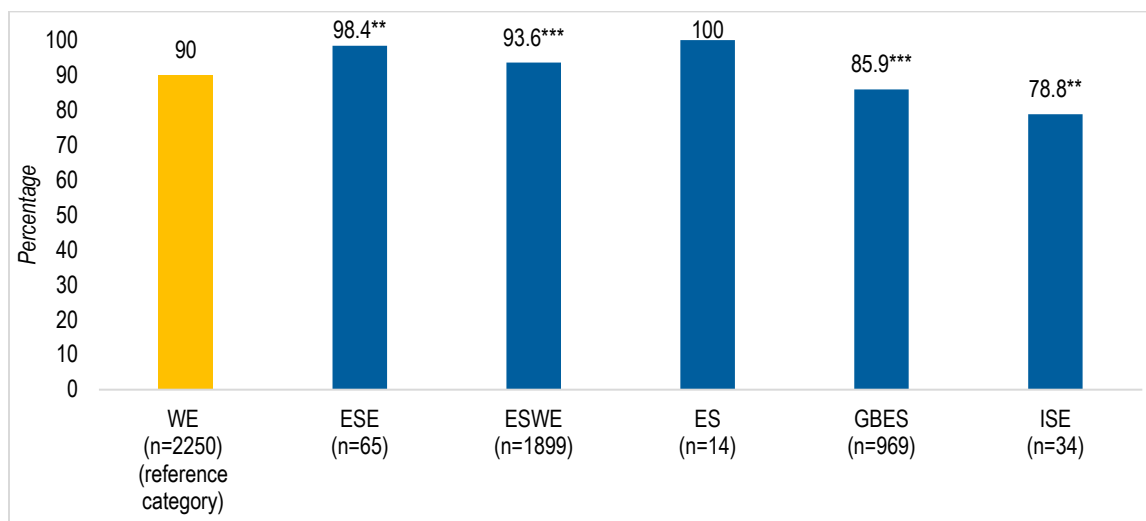
Note: Statistically significant differences between the reference category (yellow bar) and other categories (blue bars) are indicated with one or more asterisks: * denotes that the comparison is statistically significant at the 10% level, ** at 5%, and *** at 1%.

Organizational-level outcomes

The following section describes the analytical approach and results addressing the second research question: *What is the distribution of organization-level outcomes, and how do organizational outcomes vary in relation to the demographic characteristics of the youth they serve?*

As mentioned earlier, although the initial intention was to assess youth outcomes by provider characteristics, few details were available in the provided dataset and there was a lack of publicly available information online. As a result, we focused on the relationship between organizational outcomes and the proportion of youth served who belong to certain demographic groups (i.e., Indigenous, visible minority, etc.). The unit of analysis was the organization. We conducted base regression models predicting positive outcomes (return to school or employment), essentially running a base model for each organization (i.e., by creating a dummy for organization A, so that the coefficient was compared against the mean of all other organizations, for each of the models, then repeating for organization B, C, etc.). We then ran seven different models, each of which controlled for a different demographic variable (e.g., all indicators listed above, other than education level).

After running these models, all 166 organizations were categorized into seven groups by their outcomes achieved:

1. Those that often had **significantly worse** outcomes than average, regardless of which demographic characteristic was controlled.

2. Those that had **mostly worse** outcomes than average, regardless of which demographic characteristic was controlled.

3. Those that were usually not significantly different from the **average**.

4. Those that had **mostly better** outcomes than average, regardless of which demographic characteristic was controlled.

5. Those that often had **significantly better** outcomes than average, regardless of which demographic characteristic was controlled.

The analysis refers to these outcomes as: 1) *significantly worse*, 2) *mostly worse*, 3) *about average*, 4) *mostly better*, and 5) *significantly better*. Group membership was based on aggregate findings across the seven regression models, each of which controlled for a different demographic indicator representing the proportion of youth served at each organization with that characteristic.

Classification coding guidelines

The following guidelines were used to assign one of the five possible outcomes to each organization:

Significantly worse/better: Organizations were coded as *significantly better* than average when most of the estimates (i.e., at least four out of the seven) across the regression models were significantly positive. When the opposite was true (majority of estimates significantly negative), organizations were coded as *significantly worse* than average.

Mostly better/worse: Organizations were coded as *mostly better* than average when four or more of the estimates were 0.05 (positive direction) or higher (up to but not including four significantly positive estimates). When the reverse was true (estimates in negative direction), organizations were coded as *mostly worse* than average.

Average: All remaining organizations were coded as *about average.*

In terms of overall results, Figure 4 shows the breakdown of organizations across the five outcome categories. *About average* was the most common predicted organizational outcome, followed by *mostly better* and *significantly worse*. The *mostly worse* and *significantly better* outcome categories had substantially fewer organizations, both below 10 per cent of the total sample of organizations. The distribution of outcomes somewhat approached a normal distribution, with the highest aggregate of organizations falling in the *about average* outcome category and fewer organizations in the tails.

Figure 4   Distribution of organizations' outcomes, by outcome category
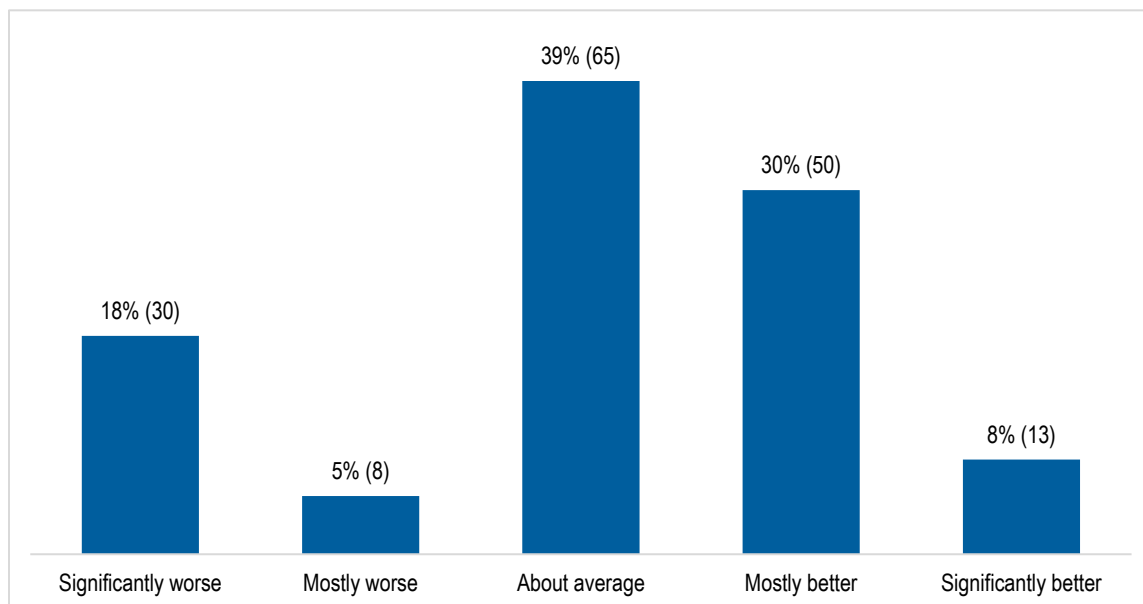

The results for each of the seven demographic characteristics are shown in Figure 5. Each graph illustrates the results for one of the demographic characteristics. It shows the distribution of organizations with respect to the proportion of individuals served (with that characteristic) across the five outcome categories (from *significantly worse* to *significantly better*). For example, for females, the distributions of organizations are similar across the five outcomes categories. In each category we see organizations with both low and high proportions of females. However, we can observe that in the second graph, the *about average, mostly better,* and *significantly better* categories have more organizations who serve high populations of permanent residents and refugees, as illustrated by the data points in the upper right quadrant. A fitted trend line is also included for each graph and the mean proportion of individuals served (with each characteristic) for each outcome category is displayed. For example, we can see that mean proportion of Indigenous youth served was 31 per cent for the *significantly worse* group and 17 per cent for the *significantly better group*.

Overall, the graphs show some patterns and associations. Organizations with better outcomes (e.g., in *mostly better* or *significantly better* categories) are more likely to serve higher proportions of females, permanent residents and refugees, visible minorities, and older youth. The associations appear stronger for females and older youth. In contrast, organizations with worse outcomes (e.g., in *mostly worse* or *significantly worse* categories) are more likely to serve higher proportions of Indigenous youth, youth with disability, and youth receiving EI. The associations appear stronger for Indigenous youth.

Figure 5   **Organizational outcomes by demographic characteristics of learners served**
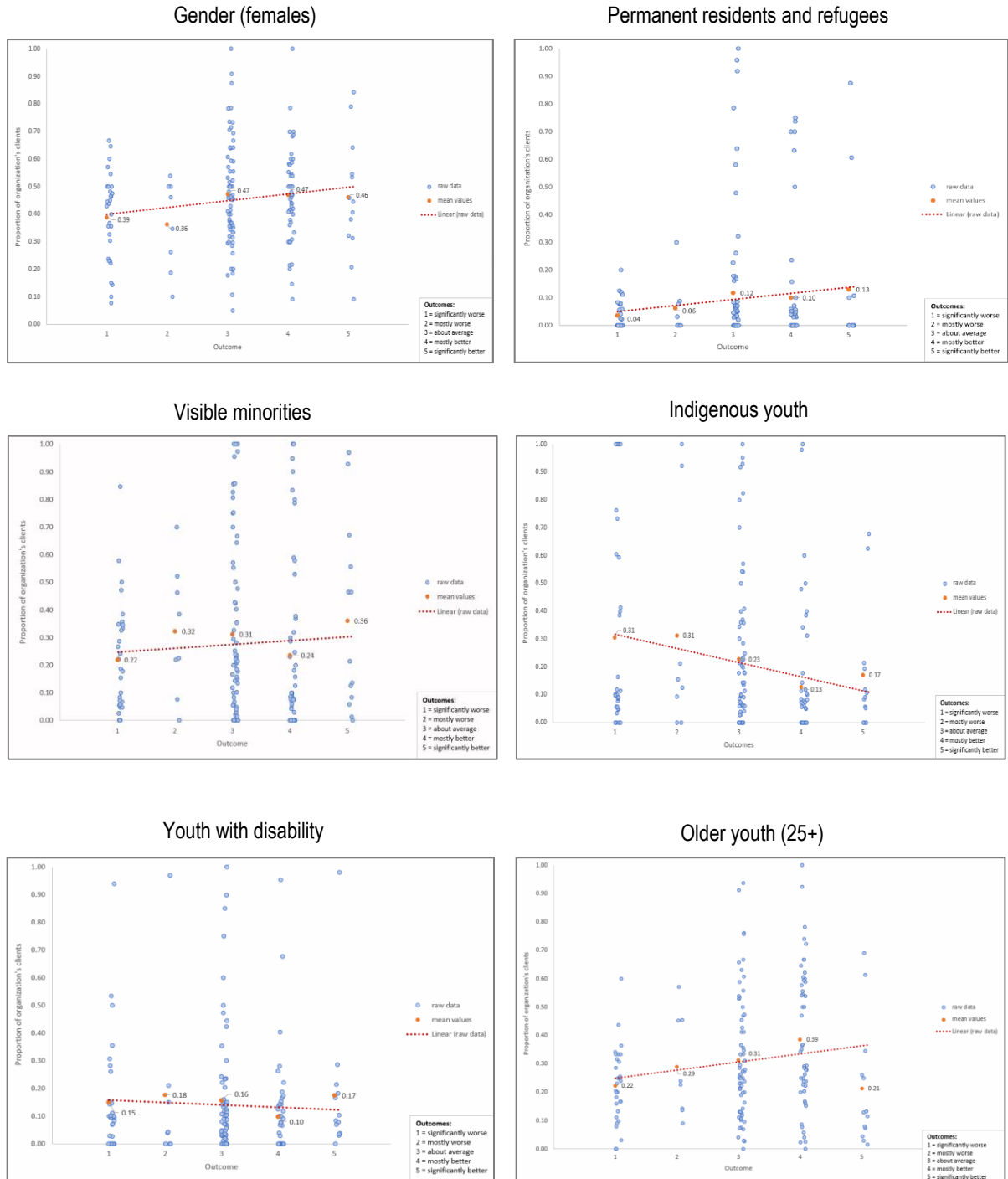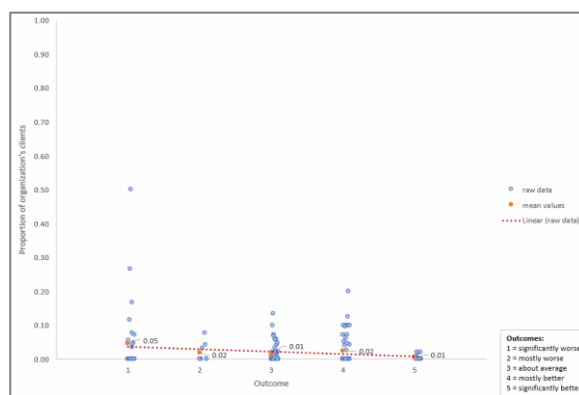
DISCUSSION OF SECONDARY ANALYSIS

The results from the first stage of analysis underscore the value of work experience as a contributor to improved employability. The three interventions that were longer in duration with experiential components (ESE, ESWE, WE) had better outcomes than those without (GBES, ISE). These interventions were 52 weeks in duration compared to GBES's 24 weeks and ISE's 12 weeks. The findings align with past evaluations of Skills Link and existing research literature that highlights the value of work experience placements (Rodier et al., 2020) and work-integrated learning such as co-ops (Wyonch, 2020) in improving employment outcomes. The length of intervention may have also contributed to better outcomes not only because of increased intervention dosage but also increased time to observe positive changes.

In addition, the value of a skill building component to prepare learners for a planned work experience is shown by the higher proportion of successful outcomes among interventions with both skills enhancement and work experience components (ESE and ESWE), compared to those with work experience alone (WE). This finding also aligns with previous literature documenting the benefits of work-contextualized skills training and subsequent employment, job performance and retention (e.g., Gyarmati et al., 2014; SRDC, 2017).

The results from the second stage of analysis revealed some instances where the outcomes of organizations were associated with the demographic composition of their learners (e.g., a high proportion of female youth). These associations may be related to how different identities and characteristics impact youth experience and engagement with training. For example, on average, females have higher levels of education, which improves their labour market success and likelihood of pursuing further education. Older youth are more likely to have pre-existing work experience and more years of education, which will strengthen their employability. On the other hand, Indigenous youth and youth with disabilities may often face additional barriers with the

result that less fully resourced programs may not fully meet their needs. As a result, organizations serving youth who tend to be closer to the labour market and experience fewer barriers may be more likely to have better outcomes. Those serving more vulnerable youth further from the labour market may face greater challenges in terms of offering a range of supports to allow youth to fully engage in and benefit from training.

Unfortunately, with the data available, we were unable to confirm the nature of these associations or underlying factors. For example, we do not have any data on barriers to indicate whether different demographic characteristics are in fact associated with the experience of greater barriers or greater distance from the labour market. While organizations serving more females may have better outcomes because females have higher levels of education, it could also be because females benefit more from these types of interventions. Having more older youth in a program might improve outcomes for all if older youth act as mentors to younger youth. These differences in outcomes and demographics served might also point to inequities in access. For example, organizations that serve non-Indigenous youth may be more likely to have better outcomes because Indigenous youth have trouble accessing fully resourced programs. All of these examples illustrate how we need more comprehensive data collection and better data quality to generate useful results that can be interpreted in meaningful ways. Currently we need further research to understand the associations in this data and what they actually reflect.

It is also important to acknowledge that the current data only allows analysis based on very specific success indicators, namely education and employment. A lack of education or employment outcomes does not necessarily mean that other kinds of success were not achieved, or that service quality is lacking. In some cases, youth may not have immediate employment or return to education objectives – for example, Indigenous youth may seek to enhance their employability without leaving or disconnecting from community. There are a range of meaningful outcomes not captured in the current data that are likely to contribute to education and employment down the road. As described in our conceptual framework from the previous section, education and employment outcomes are milestones that are near the end of the pathway. They build on earlier milestones such as gains in foundational skills, connections to others, and sense of identity and career goals. Especially for organizations serving more vulnerable youth, there may be significant gains in these earlier milestones that do not result in immediate employment or enrolment in post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SECONDARY ANALYSIS

Based on our analyses and results, we offer recommendations for future data collection for youth employment and training programs. The goal is to improve ESDC's ability to conduct analyses to identify program characteristics associated with positive outcomes, document a range of youth outcomes that support increased employment and educational attainment, explore how

demographic characteristics might be associated with youth outcomes, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of how programs support youth.

Recommendation 1: Collect and analyze data on program and organization characteristics.

The current analysis showed that intervention types that were longer with both skills development and experiential components were associated with better education and employment outcomes. However, we could not disentangle the effects of duration on the one hand, and specific combinations of skills training and work experience on the other. Rather than analyzing at the level of broad intervention type, a better approach may be to analyze at the level of specific program characteristics, such as dosage (e.g., hours), components included (e.g., social and emotional skills, occupation-specific training, work experience, job development and coaching, etc.), and supports provided (e.g., transportation, childcare, mental health supports, trauma-informed practice, etc.). Organizational characteristics could also be helpful such as location (e.g., rural or urban) or capacity (e.g., size). This would provide more detailed and useful information about how program characteristics relate to youth outcomes and how we can better support diverse organizations.

Recommendation 2: Improve the quality of youth demographic data.

In our dataset, there was a lot of missing data for certain demographic characteristics, including residency status (27 per cent), visible minority status (68 per cent), EI status (28 per cent), and highest level of education (67 per cent). This missing data could be due to various factors, such as: organizations not collecting it because it was not a priority and not required for reporting; it was seen as irrelevant for programming; or deemed too sensitive to ask youth. It could also be related to youth choosing not to disclose these aspects of their identity even when they are asked. Such high levels of missing data can significantly limit the kinds of data analysis that can be conducted, as well as the interpretations that can be made from results.

Furthermore, some of the demographic characteristics in the dataset were not captured in a precise way. For example, in the data we received, there was no differentiation between types of disability, no gender categories beyond a male-female binary, and no distinction between permanent residents and refugees, as well as recent versus established immigrants. Having detailed demographic characteristics would provide more nuanced insight into the unique experiences of different groups of youth and how they benefit from employment and training programs. We recommend that organizations be encouraged and provided necessary support and tools to collect demographic information about their youth (e.g., sample intake forms or surveys, online data collection tools). To encourage youth to feel more comfortable to disclose demographic information, researching and sharing best practices with organizations can also be helpful (e.g., using inclusive language and categories on surveys, ensuring data confidentiality and security, increasing anonymity).

Recommendation 3: Collect more comprehensive data on youth outcomes that reflects the full pathway to education or employment.

As discussed above, the current dataset focused solely on outcomes late in the employment pathway (i.e., employment and return to school). While these outcomes are important, including data on intermediate outcomes such as skill gains, strengthened relationships and connections, and well-being will more accurately reflect the full range of benefits programs have on youth. It is not uncommon that organizations working with youth distant from the labour market have their greatest impact on these earlier milestones. These are important outcomes because they support youth employability and so help to ultimately build a pathway to employment and further education, although we may not be able to observe these "endpoint" outcomes unless long-term follow-up is conducted. Part of gathering more comprehensive information on youth outcomes includes integrating qualitative data in reporting. Qualitative data in the form of challenges, success stories, or narratives of youth experience can help not only contextualize and explain quantitative results but also come to a fuller understanding of how youth themselves define success. Having a richer and fuller dataset of youth outcomes will improve our understanding of how programs are helping youth enter the labour market and provide a more accurate and fuller assessment of program effectiveness.

VALIDATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY ORGANIZATIONS

Below we describe how we initially engaged with service providers, first to inform and validate our preliminary conceptual framework of program components and best practices to support youth pathways to sustained employment and second, to identify potential partners and enhanced program models that can be piloted in the implementation phase of the project.

OUTREACH

To guide our initial outreach process, we completed an online environmental scan to generate a short-list of organizations that represents a range of program models, populations served, and regions across Canada. This also included organizations within SRDC's network, as well as suggestions from ESDC. In January 2020, SRDC attended Cannexus, a national career development conference that brings together diverse service providers who deliver employment and career programming across Canada. We leveraged this timely opportunity to connect with additional organizations that were delivering innovative and effective youth programming to broaden the scope of our engagement. We conducted introductory meetings to learn more about the organizations and programs they deliver and introduced our project to providers. These initial meetings set the stage for us to invite service providers to participate in key informant interviews.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the key informant interviews was to learn more about each provider's program model, delivery, and populations served in light of two goals. The first goal was to use this information to validate and refine our preliminary conceptual framework, ensuring that the framework is relevant to a range of program models serving different populations of youth. The second goal was to use this information to begin identifying gaps and opportunities where providers may be interested in testing an enhancement to programming or measurement.

We interviewed six youth-serving organizations, conducting interviews in two sessions over the phone with staff in leadership positions (i.e., directors, CEOs) and staff who manage programs (i.e., program managers). Some organizations work across Canada while others are based in BC or MB. They serve a wide range of youth participants, including NEET youth, newcomers, Indigenous youth both rural and urban, and youth in elementary or secondary school. Many of

these youth face multiple barriers in their pathway toward education and employment. These organizations represent a range of program models. For example, two have a strong employer-led focus, one bringing together a coalition of employers from multiple sectors, and another targeting employers in the information and communication technology sector. Others also have an industry-focus, connecting youth to opportunities in the construction and trades industry. Those who work with younger youth still in school focused on career exploration and development as well as early work experiences.

KEY THEMES

We qualitatively analyzed the results of our interviews, looking for common themes related to effective practices and approaches, challenges, and areas for enhancement. These themes are summarized below, organized by program model, measurement, client population, and conceptual framework.

Program model – Challenges and effective practices

Recruitment and intake: When organizations work closely with schools or Indigenous communities, the schools, families, and communities facilitate the recruitment of youth. For programs that serve youth who are more distant from the labour market or not in school, recruitment can be a challenge. Grass-roots strategies that involve direct recruitment in youth spaces can be effective. Sometimes recruitment challenges can contribute to a mismatch of supply and demand, where employers have more job openings than can be filled by providers.

Most organizations assess skills at intake, but use a range of methods, including developing or adopting assessments tailored to a community, using self-report participant surveys, asking youth to complete small tasks (e.g., writing paragraph, making a phone call), or observing youth behaviours during interview activities. Few organizations reported currently using formal objective Essential Skills assessments, although some have tried in the past.

Skills training: While organizations acknowledged the importance of literacy skills, most emphasized the importance of soft skills or social and emotional skills, which are also reflected in the feedback they hear from employers. Soft skills are seen as critical for entry-level jobs. Skills training is usually integrated into workshops and program activities and fostered through "simulated workplace" conditions and expectations for youth (e.g., punctuality, communications). Most organizations also highlighted financial literacy as an important skill.

Organizations underscored the importance of "experiential learning" or "learning through doing." With younger youth in school, the focus is on hands-on activities, whether to explore careers, learn Indigenous art skills, or lead community projects. For youth transitioning to the

workforce, organizations prioritize learning through entry-level jobs. Youth are provided short-term training in soft skills or basic certifications, and then supported to develop skills as they navigate work and life responsibilities. This highlights the value of alternatives to classroom learning and the importance of follow-up supports.

Work experience: Work experience as time-limited placements was only used by one organization, but this may be more common when serving younger youth looking for first job learning experiences. Organizations working with NEET youth typically place youth directly into full-time jobs. Several organizations reported that formal work experiences and wage subsidy programs can sometimes pose a barrier for service providers and employers. Service providers need to meet certain requirements (e.g., hours worked) to get funding, and employers need to complete forms or other reports. In some cases, employers are limited to direct hiring by their corporate policies.

None of the organizations reported being involved with social enterprises, although some have expressed interest. However, organizations need to weigh the pros and cons of creating a formal business, especially against other interventions that could provide similar benefits.

Employer engagement: All organizations that offer work experiences or full-time job placements directly engage employers. It is important to approach employers as clients and understand programming as offering a service and providing talent to employers. In some cases, this can also mean putting minimal demands on employers by taking on the responsibilities of supporting youth through job coaches. Organizations with employer-led models expressed a need to demonstrate the return on investment for their employers, both short- and long-term.

A smaller number of organizations reported engaging employers in the design of curriculum and training. However, it is an area that organizations are actively working to develop. For example, they are developing tools to articulate skills needs and engaging with rural and remote Indigenous communities to identify employment and career opportunities and pathways. Especially for organizations working with younger youth, understanding the "future of work" is important since youth will not enter the workforce for several years. Some organizations involve employers in the delivery of programming through Q&A sessions, mentorship, and site visits.

While demand-sides strategies often focus on alignment of training needs, it can also include enhancing work policies, practices, and cultures for diverse and vulnerable youth. Employer-led models offer such resources and supports for their employers. For those working with culturally diverse newcomer youth, it is seen as a priority area to enhance moving forward.

Education and alternative pathways: High school graduation is an important outcome for organizations that serve younger youth in school, and programs facilitate the transition to post-secondary education. However, access to post-secondary education, apprenticeship, or other technical training can be part of longer-term post-hire follow-up supports for NEET youth.

A post-secondary education pathway is not a good fit for all youth and there is increasing focus on alternative pathways from high school directly to employment, unionized training, or entrepreneurship. For example, two organizations are exploring employment and career opportunities within rural and remote Indigenous communities, especially apprenticeship or entrepreneurial opportunities tied to traditional arts and activities.

In the BC construction sector, there is a policy shift way from "training first and job after." For example, sometimes it is more effective to prioritize short-term training and place clients directly into entry-level trade opportunities rather than longer-term foundations training. Another strategy is to place youth directly into construction jobs and then work with youth in the longer-term to access apprenticeship training if a youth is interested.

Follow-up supports: Organizations that offer work experiences or job placements typically have some supports for youth post-hire. However, with NEET youth it can sometimes be challenging when youth may not want to engage, feeling that they no longer need support once employed, or when youth move away or change their phone number. One organization advocated for comprehensive supports that can motivate youth to continue engaging, particularly wraparound and career laddering supports. Leveraging technologies that youth are familiar with can also be helpful. Organizations are generally keen to further enhance follow-up supports and tracking, which not only benefits youth but helps demonstrate longer-term impacts.

Measuring success

Over half of the programs have participated in or are in the process of conducting evaluation activities (e.g., developmental evaluation, on-going collaboration with academic researchers, funder-led evaluations, contracted external evaluators). All organizations expressed interest in enhancing their data collection and measurement capacity.

Organizations recognize that success is more than getting and retaining a job and are interested in developing their capacity to measure in-program gains such as social and emotional skills. Organizations also reported interest in better tracking and measuring long-term outcomes to document youth and employer experiences on-the-job, and to show long-term social impact on youth lives, economic impact on businesses, and community-level outcomes.

Organizations emphasized adopting a youth perspective when it comes to success, rather than focusing on job retention. Indeed, jobs are often not permanent, or youth have personal circumstances that do not allow a year-round job. Youth might leave a job because they discover it does not match their interest, to move on to a better job, or to return to training or school. All of these cases can be considered successes. Youth may define success through reaching their own personal goals, which can sometimes be as simple as being allowed to enrol in training, gaining self-confidence, learning what they do not like, or finishing training without working.

Client populations

Younger youth: For younger youth still in school, organizations need to work closely with families, schools, and communities. Because youth are often not immediately transitioning to full-time work, programming tends to focus on career exploration and developing a career mindset, developing social and emotional skills, and fostering work readiness and providing opportunities to gain their first work experience. There is a strong focus on education and post-secondary pathways although organizations also include alternate pathways to employment.

NEET youth: Organizations working with NEET youth provide targeted short-term training and place youth into full-time jobs, typically entry-level work. If program resources allow, providers continue to work with youth to support job retention and facilitate access to additional training or post-secondary education. The emphasis is placed on learning in the real world as youth work and juggle life responsibilities. Organizations are interested in building pathways to support youth to progress in their careers through work or training.

Newcomer youth: Families have a significant impact on youth through family attitudes and expectations about school and work, and through responsibilities placed on youth, such as child-minding, transportation, and translation. Even post-hire, newcomer youth are more likely to experience work and life disruptions because of family challenges. Because a significant number of newcomer youth have been refugees in recent years, it is important to adopt a trauma-informed approach and provide additional psychosocial supports.

Indigenous youth: The most effective approach to working with rural and remote Indigenous youth has been to adopt a community approach, where the community is engaged meaningfully in both the design and delivery process. It is a gradual learning process that organizations have undertaken to extend their reach to these communities and develop tailored programming. It is important to identify local education, employment, and career pathways that work for youth who want to stay in the community. Urban NEET Indigenous youth might also experience challenges of being away from families and their communities, so providing opportunities to connect might be especially important. Inter-generational poverty and trauma are also important considerations in programming and inform the supports needed by youth.

Conceptual framework

Overall, organizations responded well to the conceptual framework and appreciate its comprehensiveness in capturing best practices and effective program components in youth employment programming. The main caveat expressed by most organizations was that real world implementation can sometimes look different. Most of the recommendations were

suggestions of components or characteristics to add, and increased clarity regarding some of the terminology and concepts used.

Overall: The framework is comprehensive, detailed, and reflects the pillars of best practices. Providers see the framework as outlining the broad pathway to employment and recognize where along the pathway they play a key role. However, it is an idealized pathway that is much messier when implemented in real world conditions.

Employment pathway: Organizations emphasized that the pathway is often not linear and there is need for flexibility in programming. Ideally funding would allow for this flexibility. Youth sometimes go backwards, or skip a stage, or may only need boots or equipment to begin working. Forcing youth through mandatory components can risk "losing" youth who may disengage. Also, the term "sustained employment" does not reflect a true end-goal, when youth typically will change jobs and can do so in ways that are adaptive.

Pre-employment versus employment: The distinction can be unclear, especially when Essential Skills can be integrated in both types of training. For entry-level jobs, typically youth can go directly into work after pre-employment training that focuses on soft skills. A multi-step pathway may suit other career pathways, however, such as certain skilled trades.

Work experience: The term "work experience" seems to imply time-limited formal placements, but it is not always appropriate as oftentimes, youth are directly hired into full-time jobs.

Retention supports: The period for support should be extended beyond 12-months post-hire, and also include a focus on upskilling, reskilling, career laddering, and wraparound supports.

Effective characteristics: Most agreed the characteristics are important for effective programing. One suggestion was to add community involvement, which is very important to programming with Indigenous communities. Organizations also emphasized that employer engagement is important for all steps of the pathway, not just for hiring and retention.

Stages of change: Given flexible and non-linear pathways, stages of change might be less useful applied to the overarching pathway. Defining goals is sometimes the hardest step (not the first step) and there is a missing step related to "pre-contemplation" where youth do not yet realize they need to define goals or make change. Youth can also cycle through these stages at any point in the pathway, such as defining new goals while training or working. Furthermore, the stages are not always distinct, such as when youth "prepare" and "act" at the same time (i.e., learning through doing).

Youth pathway: The ARC (Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence) examples are seen as comprehensive and detailed, showing actions that all stakeholders (youth, providers, employers) can take at different stages of the employment pathway, but also allowing enough flexibility for

different interpretations. However, it was noted that positive youth development, while familiar to providers, is likely unfamiliar to employers.

Milestones: Organizations suggested the addition of longer-term milestones beyond 12-months post-hire and other benchmarks of success beyond single job retention. This could include broader employment/training outcomes (e.g., youth returning to training or changing jobs), youth personal goals (e.g., learning about interests), employer goals (e.g., company-specific retention goals), and personal development goals such as self-actualization.

Opportunities for enhancement

The six organizations provided a range of perspectives, reflecting experiences of those serving younger youth in school, NEET youth, Indigenous youth, and newcomer youth, and reflecting program models emphasizing different steps of the pathway (e.g., pre-employment career exploration, work and post-hire supports). The key themes point to several areas of opportunities that were explored further as we continued to engage providers in subsequent phases of the project:

Opportunities in measurement:

- Articulating a framework for measuring Essential Skills, soft skills, and social and emotional skills

- Measuring a wider range of culturally-relevant and personally-relevant outcomes for youth and communities

- Measuring post-hire outcomes and ROI for employers.

Opportunities in programming:

- Exploring alternative learning environments (e.g., community or cultural activities) that support experiential learning and foster social and emotional skills

- Exploring post-hire supports (from providers or employers) that enhance learning on the job and help youth progress in their career

- Exploring alternative employment and career pathways for youth who are not interested in post-secondary education and for Indigenous youth in rural and remote communities.

Opportunities in employer engagement:

- Enhancing employer engagement to better align skills training and programming with employer needs now and in the future

- Enhancing training and supports to employers to work with and support diverse youth.

CONCLUSION

Our literature review highlighted effective practices and characteristics for youth employment programming, integrating evidence and perspectives through the dual lenses of employment and youth development. These practices can be framed as part of a milestone-based pathway that helps youth progress from early life stabilization, self-exploration, and motivational activities to training, work experience, and retention in the workforce. These findings were validated and augmented by our engagement with service delivery organizations who provided in-the-field insights, innovations, and lessons learned. We also completed a secondary analysis of Skills Link evaluation data with key recommendations related to more comprehensive and higher quality data collection, especially around demographic characteristics, program characteristics, and youth outcomes.

The combined learnings from this Research Synthesis report serve two purposes. First it is intended as an information resource for ESDC, other funders, and service delivery organizations to better understand effective approaches in supporting vulnerable youth in employment and training. It also highlights gaps in data collection that limit the type of analyses that can be conducted and our ability to fully understand and evaluate programs. Second, it informed our next project objectives – i.e. to build a demonstration project with several partner organizations and test the use of pay-for-performance funding models in a youth training and employment context. Specifically, the conceptual framework and opportunities for enhancements from our engagement work helped to structure subsequent program design and implementation conversations with our partners, leading to the development of a broadly applicable milestone-based pathway model and ultimately the development of tailored pay-for-performance milestone outcomes for each partner organization. The recommendations for data collection also shaped the development of our evaluation frameworks and data collection tools.

The ability to integrate findings from the literature, previous evaluation results, and the latest insights and experience of service delivery providers ensured that the demonstration project described in the attached Implementation Report builds on the collective knowledge of the sector and maximizes the likelihood of successful outcomes.

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APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Table 3   **Innovative practices identified by the Expert Panel**

Barrier addressed	Description	Examples
Uninformed	▪ Support for young people who want to explore and discover the possibilities of entrepreneurship	▪ Fab Labs Nation, Montréal; TNBT, Vancouver; Simon Fraser University's paid entrepreneurship co-op, Burnaby; SHAD
	▪ Connecting entrepreneurs to early-stage companies	▪ Adopt Inc., Quebec; Concordia University's District 3 Innovation Center, Montréal
	▪ Facilitating matching between job seekers and employers via digital platforms and treating the employer "like a customer"	▪ Magnet, Toronto; Career Edge, Canada; Social Capital Partners, Toronto
	▪ Mobile meeting points for young job seekers and local businesses to connect	▪ Roulo-Boulo, Montréal
Underrated	▪ Recognizing companies that support young workers	▪ U.K.'s Youth Friendly Badge and the Youth Friendly Charter programs
	▪ Municipal initiatives that connect young people directly to business leaders for coaching and interviews	▪ City of Toronto's Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE)
	▪ Employer- and industry-led initiatives that target and train vulnerable youth	▪ NPower Canada, Toronto; 100,000 Opportunities Initiatives, U.S.
	▪ Local business clusters created by subsidiaries of international companies to support young people	▪ BleuBlancTech, Montréal

Barrier addressed	Description	Examples
Uncertain	▪ Educational programming or campaigns on worker rights, health and safety conducted by unions and non-profit organizations	▪ The Know Your Rights Workshop, Canada; Au bas de l'Échelle, Montréal
	▪ Experimenting with basic income pilots that could provide predictable income support while youth search for jobs or as young entrepreneurs invest in the risk of self-employment	▪ Ontario's basic income pilot; YCombinator, U.S.
	▪ Postsecondary-led transition support such as work-integrated learning, co-op, paid internships that ease the transition from school to work	▪ Ryerson ADaPT, Toronto
	▪ Targeted skills training for unemployed youth	▪ Generation Initiative, multiple countries; YearUp, U.S.; NextWork, Denmark
Underprepared	▪ Collaborative programming bringing applied entrepreneurial skills and mindset education into high schools	▪ YELL Canada
	▪ Career-oriented network-building and mentorship programs	▪ CivicAction Escalator, Toronto; Calgary Connector Program; GradusOne, Vancouver; Intégration Jeunesse du Québec, Montréal
	▪ Organizations bridging the gap for students to build their professional networks through experiential learning	▪ Riipen
	▪ Cohort and peer-based learning support that can amplify learning through shared networks and resources that are critical to finding a good job	▪ RADIUS Fellowship, Vancouver

Barrier addressed	Description	Examples
Unaccepted	▪ Reinforced personal guidance on professional and other life needs, with local and holistic implementation of employment projects	▪ Créneau Carrefours Jeunesse and Autism Without Limits, Quebec; Garanite Jeunesse, France
	▪ Digital interventions such as a secure cloud to help at-risk youth store their IDs	▪ Reconnect – le nuage solidaire, Quebec
	▪ Partnerships between social economy enterprises and service providers for vulnerable youth to receive training, guidance, and experience linked with local business needs	▪ Collectif des entreprises d'insertion du Québec
Under-resourced	▪ Providing cultural connections for Indigenous youth in the workplace and society to create inclusive spaces	▪ Nunavut Sivuniksavut, Canada; Redfox Healthy Living Society, Vancouver and Surrey; BladeRunners; The AborigiNal Computer Education through STO-Rytelling (ANCESOTR) program, B.C.
	▪ Creating networks of Indigenous job seekers and employers	▪ Working Warriors, Winnipeg
	▪ Supporting high school completion among Indigenous youth while creating closer links between training and employment through experiential learning in various fields	▪ Youth Fusion, Quebec

Source: Reproduced from Expert Panel (2017).

Table 4   Innovative practices from S4YE Impact Portfolio

Innovation	Examples
Screening youth for motivation, drive, and career interests	▪ Tools and approaches to select youth based on drive, will, and motivation (e.g., youth who have showed commitment and persistence)
	▪ Tools and approaches to help youth find good-fit careers (e.g., personal action plans, work-simulated training, job shadowing)
	▪ Tools for encouraging entrepreneurship (e.g., entrepreneurship attitude test)

Innovation	Examples
Incorporating occupations of the future in training offerings	▪ Preparing youth for jobs in technology, STEM, healthcare, energy/green sector, construction and logistics, hospitality and tourism, agri-business and modern agriculture
Innovating in delivery of skills training	▪ Delivering job-specific, simulated-workplace training (e.g., setting up a warehouse setting for factory jobs) ▪ Developing practical and soft skills through student-centred pedagogy ▪ Developing soft skills through volunteerism and youth-led community enterprises
Adopting technology for youth employment solutions	▪ Digital platform to delivery virtual skills training ▪ One-stop shop youth employment digital platform ▪ Tapping into social media to reach the digital generation
Applying behavioural insights to change perceptions and nudge behaviour change	▪ Shifting youth perceptions of careers with stigma ▪ Attracting young girls to non-traditional fields ▪ Addressing employer bias against disadvantaged youth ▪ Nudging teachers to adopt an innovative mindset to how they teach ▪ Getting the incentives right in organizational behaviour change
Devising new models in cost-sharing and sustainability	▪ Charging employers fee-for-service by demonstrating a return on investment (ROI) (e.g., to co-invest in training costs of youth employment programs) ▪ Securing cost-share through leveraging models ▪ Achieving sustainability through social enterprise models
Working with the private sector in new ways	▪ Conducting labour market diagnostics at the onset to identify target industries in the private sector ▪ Taking a customer relationship management approach to employer partnerships ▪ Working with industry associations and groups of employers to coordinate building a sector-wide talent pipeline ▪ Trying to "crack the nut" of working with small- and medium-sized (SME) employers

Innovation	Examples
New models of supporting young entrepreneurs	▪ Identifying "young job creators" through business plan competitions ▪ Supporting marginalized youth to become social innovators and social entrepreneurs ▪ Creating linkages between youth entrepreneurs and agriculture value chains ▪ Helping young people launch enterprises through youth group-based models ▪ Working on the demand-side by helping micro-retail and waste management micro-distribution enterprises grow
Helping most vulnerable youth succeed through mentoring and social support services	▪ Overcoming access barriers through social support services (e.g., transportation, stipends, childcare) ▪ Mentoring youth through peers, life mentors, and support groups

Source: Adapted and reproduced from S4YE (2017). See source for examples of programs that implemented these approaches.

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES IN DEVELOPMENT

Table 5   **Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework**

Elements	Actions	Definitions
Express care – "Show me that I matter to you"	▪ Be dependable ▪ Listen ▪ Believe in me ▪ Be warm ▪ Encourage	▪ Be someone I can trust ▪ Really pay attention when we are together ▪ Make me feel known and valued ▪ Show me you enjoy being with me ▪ Praise me for my efforts and achievements
Challenge growth – "Push me to keep getting better"	▪ Expect my best ▪ Stretch ▪ Hold me accountable ▪ Reflect on failures	▪ Expect me to live up to my potential ▪ Push me to go further ▪ Insist I take responsibility for my actions ▪ Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks
Provide support – "Help me complete tasks and achieve goals"	▪ Navigate ▪ Empower ▪ Advocate ▪ Set boundaries	▪ Guide me through hard situations and systems ▪ Build my confidence to take charge of my life ▪ Defend me when I need it ▪ Put in place limits to keep me on track
Share power – "Treat me with respect and give me a say"	▪ Respect me ▪ Include me ▪ Collaborate ▪ Let me lead	▪ Take me seriously and treat me fairly ▪ Involve me in decisions that affect me ▪ Work with me to solve problems and reach goals ▪ Create opportunities for me to take action and lead
Expand possibilities – "Connect me with people and places that broaden my horizon"	▪ Inspire ▪ Broaden horizons ▪ Connect	▪ Inspire me to see possibilities for my future ▪ Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places ▪ Introduce me to more people who can help me grow

Source: Roehlkepartain et al. (2017, p. 4).

Table 6   Youth engagement: How to take action

Phase	Example activities
Co-activation – Creating the conditions that will support successful youth engagement	▪ Get buy-in by sharing youths' stories and experiences ▪ Asses readiness of the organization, program, and staff ▪ Provide training for staff on how to be an adult ally ▪ Set realistic expectations, create an orientation manual ▪ Involve youth to recruit their peers
Co-creation – Put in motion youth engagement goals and plans	▪ Create safe, youth-friendly spaces ▪ Build a team with youth, service providers, and adult allies ▪ Co-create plans that include roles for youth to lead and design ▪ Develop a communications plan to share the importance of youth engagement ▪ Engage the broader community, including families, Elders, teachers, etc.
Co-evaluation – Monitor and evaluate youth engagement efforts	▪ Develop an evaluation framework, involving youth and other stakeholders

Source: Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions (2023).

Table 7   Sample teaching activities to support core competencies of SEL

Competencies	Example standalone activities	Example integrated activities
Self-awareness	▪ Lead class discussion about how emotions can improve by changing our behaviour ▪ Provide age-appropriate vocabulary words (e.g., angry/irate, rejected/disappointed)	▪ Listen deeply to what students say and reflect what you heard about their feelings, e.g., "It sounds like you're feeling very frustrated right now…" ▪ Routinely encourage students to reflect and analyze in journals or in pair-shares how their thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behaviour

Competencies	Example standalone activities	Example integrated activities
Self-management	▪ Teach the THINK process to help students recognize responsible social media use before posting an unkind or untrue remark about a person because you are upset. T – is it true, H – is it helpful, I – is it inspiring, N – is it necessary, K – is it kind ▪ Teach effective age-appropriate self-management techniques (e.g., yoga, relaxation exercise, mental rehearsal)	▪ Establish a separate space in the classroom for individual self-management (e.g., cozy corner) ▪ As a teacher, consistently model effective self-management
Social awareness	▪ Discuss the expectations and demands of different settings, e.g., how we dress and behave for school, places of worship, formal ceremonies, hanging out with friends ▪ Discuss more subtle cues in the environment, such as the presence of people of different ages, when people are quiet, etc., in determining what kinds of behaviours are appropriate	▪ Build on the diversity in the classroom by having students share their different cultural perspectives on situations ▪ Routinely talk about how others feel in different situations
Relationship skills	▪ Teach lessons on how to resolve conflicts peacefully ▪ Teach lessons on how to give and receive constructive feedback	▪ Use team-based, collaborative teaching practices such as cooperative learning and project-based learning to provide students opportunities to develop and practice communication and social and assertiveness skills ▪ Have students routinely evaluate how well they worked together in a group (e.g., listening, taking turns). This process holds the students accountable for improving their part in a group learning situation
Responsible decision-making	▪ Explicitly identify the steps for solving a problem. Walk through the steps of problem-solving in response to hypothetical situations ▪ Define responsibility and related terms (ethical, safe, values, honesty)	▪ Give students authentic feedback for making good decisions ▪ Develop and enforce class rules and shared norms, discussing them routinely

Source: CASEL (2017, p. 3–20).

Table 8   Five ways to help youth build their core life skills

Action	Description
Practice with real-life situations	▪ Encourage youth to problem-solve with real situations in their own lives (e.g., conflict with friend, trying to finish a school assignment) ▪ Youth learn best when experience is relevant to real world ▪ Develops focus and flexibility
Spot and plan for triggers	▪ Help youth recognize what their emotional triggers are (e.g., losing a game) and how to prevent intense reactions (e.g., taking deep breath) ▪ Helps youth become more aware and develop coping strategies ▪ Develops awareness and self-control
Take another's view of stressors	▪ Encourage youth to talk to others about how they cope with stress ▪ Encourage youth to take other people's perspective (e.g., if conflict with parent, help youth take the parent's perspective) ▪ Helps youth diffuse negative emotions and learn that there is more than one way to view problems and solutions ▪ Develops awareness, flexibility, and self-control
Focus on personally motivating goals	▪ Encourage youth to discover their passions and interests ▪ Help them set goals and map out how to reach their goals ▪ Strengthens self-identity, develops long-term thinking and goal-directed behaviour ▪ Develops planning and flexibility
Build on positive memories and small successes	▪ Recalling positive memories and successes can help counteract negative feelings and feelings of lack of control that arise from adversity ▪ Provides starting point for building sense of self, undoing negative internalizations, planning for future ▪ Develops focus and planning

Source: Center on the Developing Child (2018, p. 2).

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