

Partnering to Improve Employment Opportunities for Young Adults

Key Findings and Recommendations

October 2023

Double M Training & Consulting, a firm based in Calgary, Alberta, completed a short study to explore how employers and community agencies can effectively work together to improve employment outcomes for marginalized young adults. The study team interviewed 18 individuals representing employers and community agencies to surface the positive experiences and hurdles that are encountered when working together, and the resources and processes that can create stronger and more effective collaborations. The study concluded in a final report entitled [Enhancing Collaboration Between Partner Community Agencies & Employers of Marginalized Youth and Young Adults](#).

This brief is a summary of some key observations and recommendations for community agencies seeking to improve employment outcomes for marginalized youth and young adults, and for employers seeking to meet their workforce needs.

Definitions:

- ⇒ **Employer:** A business, government, or non-profit organization that hires a significant number of entry-level positions.
- ⇒ **Community Agency:** An organization, often nonprofit, that provides pre-employment training and support to young adults who face barriers.
- ⇒ **Marginalized Youth and Young Adults:** Individuals ages 16-29 who face barriers in society due to their past life experiences and/or their identity.

Observations:

1. Employers and community agencies see the value of hiring this population. From the employers' perspective, these employees tend to be loyal and supporting this demographic holds the potential to enhance an organization's employment brand and reputation. From the community agency perspective, employment greatly enhances the lives of marginalized young adults and the people around them.
2. Strong partnerships between community agencies and employers can be effective in meeting an employer's workforce needs while improving employment outcomes for marginalized young adults. Key factors that make these partnerships effective include:
 - ⇒ The partnership must be grounded in a strong relationship, including ongoing communication to build trust and rapport.
 - ⇒ Both parties are committed to understanding the context, needs, opportunities, and limitations of each other.
 - ⇒ Once the relationship is well established, there should also be the ability to act expediently when an employer has an immediate hiring need.
 - ⇒ Co-creation of pre-employment training, recruitment and selection processes, and onboarding.
3. Employers are often not aware of the resources and services available from community agencies that could help them meet their workforce needs. These services include sourcing and screening, providing employment readiness programming, delivering general or targeted training, supporting recruitment and interview processes, and providing ongoing support and mentorship to employees once they are hired. In some cases, community agencies can help employers access funding to subsidize salaries of new hires.
4. Community agencies are often not aware of the business needs, values, hiring objectives, opportunities, and limitations of specific employers. Building this knowledge requires ongoing work with dedicated staff time.
5. For some marginalized young adults, the standardized approach to hiring and onboarding can further exclude them. A customized approach could result in more successful placements and higher retention. This requires employers to have a better understanding of the realities of marginalized young adults and the barriers they face, and to develop policies and processes that provide support.
6. While employers have strong commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B), many do not recognize that hiring marginalized young adults might fall within the parameters of these commitments.

What can Community Agencies do?

- ◆ Seek employers that are well positioned to offer employment opportunities for marginalized young adults. Invest in long-term relationship building with employers; learn about each employer's business needs, values, hiring objectives, opportunities, and limitations.
- ◆ Promote their employment-related services to employers and be clear about the services they can offer in the recruitment, training, hiring, onboarding, and retention of new hires.
- ◆ Promote the value of hiring marginalized young adults through case studies, videos, and testimonials.
- ◆ Highlight how hiring marginalized young adults can contribute to an employer's diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging commitments.
- ◆ Seek employer input into the design and delivery of employment readiness and training programs; co-design and co-deliver where possible.
- ◆ Promote and recognize employers that hire marginalized young adults and that reflect the importance of doing so through their recruitment, hiring and onboarding practices and policies. This can be done publicly, where appropriate, or directly to the employer.
- ◆ Build in sufficient time and resources into programs to enable long-term relationship development and adequate supports for program participants, pre- and post-employment.

What can Employers do?

- ◇ Partner with community agencies that are value-aligned and deliver employment supports to marginalized young adults. Invest in long-term relationships with these partners to learn about their services, resources, values, and limitations.
- ◇ Learn about the experiences of marginalized young adults, and how these impact how they show up in the workplace. Learn about the barriers they may face, such as housing insecurity, lack of uniforms, lack of cell phones and laptops, and access to transportation.
- ◇ Where appropriate, provide customized and supportive policies and procedures regarding hiring, onboarding, and retention for new employees from this population. These policies can be developed in partnership with community agencies that have knowledge and experience about the kinds of supports that would be most effective.
 - ◇ Examples: targeted job descriptions, hiring fairs, group interviews, relaxation of experience requirements, pre-provided interview questions, post-hire mentoring, connection to and provision of resources, flexible bereavement leave policies, etc.
- ◇ Explore the connection between hiring marginalized young adults and the employer's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Consider incentives or targets for Human Resources departments accordingly.
- ◇ Explore the connection between a diverse workforce that includes marginalized young adults and the employer's brand.
- ◇ Provide input to community agency partners regarding the design and delivery of employment readiness and training programs; co-design and co-deliver where possible and appropriate.

In Conclusion:

Strong partnerships between community agencies and employers can improve employment outcomes for marginalized young adults while also positively contributing to the workforce and other needs of employers. While creating these collaborative relationships takes time and commitment, the potential benefits can be significant. There are also best practices and success stories to draw upon for those entering this space for the first time or looking to enhance current partnerships. As with most partnerships, creating relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and willingness to learn will be key.

Access the [full research report here](#).

Additional Resources from the Calgary Youth Employment Initiative

[Untapped Talent – Exploring the Benefits of Opportunity Youth for Employers](#): This guide explores a few of the employer benefits associated with tapping into the under-utilized population of Opportunity Youth (also known as marginalized young adults). These benefits include addressing talent shortages, increasing workforce diversity, accessing free recruitment support, increasing retention, and making a difference in a young person’s life. It includes steps for employers who are interested in engaging this population.

[Bridging the Gap](#): This publication explores ways that community agencies can support employer partners to create positive working experiences for Opportunity Youth. Drawing upon research as well as insights from Calgary-based youth employment professionals, it outlines promising practices for Identifying potential employer partners, engaging employers, preparing employers, and providing ongoing support.

[Customized Hiring Events: A Guide to Engaging Opportunity Youth](#): This guide offers one approach to tapping into the Opportunity Youth demographic: customized hiring events. Based on Starbucks’ success using this approach, it provides advice for structuring and adapting hiring processes in ways the meet the needs of both employers and Opportunity Youth.

[Supporting Youth in Their Employment Journey](#): This practitioner’s guide is designed to help build the capacity of youth serving professionals interested in supporting youth employment to engage with these young people and support them on their employment journey. The goal is to enable Opportunity Youth to find and maintain meaningful and sustainable work.

[Soft Skills Development for Opportunity Youth: A Proposed Service Delivery Model](#): This report provides an evidence-based practice guide to working with youth to develop soft skills through employment support and training. The term “soft skills” describes a range of skills related to emotional intelligence, inter- and intra-personal abilities, and personal traits or attributes favourably associated with career development.