



Employer Toolkit

Employers

Our employees are saying that...they want to see action in the communities where we live and work.... So being able to help in organizations that they've heard of or they drive by every day...or that they could recommend to someone they know... that's where we're really trying to get the impact...

HEATHER MACMILLAN, MANAGER, OFFICE SERVICES, INTACT INSURANCE

Give youth a chance. They're good for business and vital to our future.

Why should you consider previously homeless or at-risk youth for entry-level employment opportunities or apprenticeships? Because it's a wise investment in the workforce, your business and the health of your local community.

Across Canada, local community agency hiring programs can help you find motivated, qualified youth AND save you time and money in the recruitment process.

We hope the information, examples and insights in this section will encourage you to give unemployed youth a chance.

Who Are 'At Risk' Youth?

The Canadian Homelessness Research Network* has identified several factors that make an individual at risk of homelessness. They include: precarious employment, sudden unemployment, pending eviction, breakdown in family relations, abuse or fear of violence/abuse in a household, severe mental health issues, substance abuse, or behavioural concerns. These latter concerns can make youth at risk of homelessness even if they are not experienced in person, but are manifested in the youth's parents/guardians.

Other factors that can place youth at risk of homelessness include low educational attainment, involvement in the criminal justice or child welfare systems, and discrimination based on sexuality or race (particularly for Aboriginal Persons or new Canadians of colour). In general, the more risk factors present the more at risk of homelessness an individual will be.

*The Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) *Canadian definition of homelessness*



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Risks and Benefits

There are pros and cons to hiring **any** employee – not just youth who are disadvantaged. But it's a good idea to be aware of and prepared for both.

- **The risk...**

Youth homelessness -- and homelessness in general -- is bad for the economy. Aside from the cost of emergency, social, health and criminal justice services, lost productivity and potential is priceless.

The benefit...

When you support local youth employment you help build healthy communities that will buy and use your products and services. You also support young people to contribute to the country's tax base and prosperity.

- **The risk...**

It may take more time to screen, interview and orientate an at-risk youth and they may sometimes need more supervision and support than other employees.

The benefit...

*Community agency youth employment programs offer valuable pre-screening, job preparation, skills training and support services. They will help you find the right youth for your needs and will work with you to help the youth settle into the job. **These services and supports are available at no cost to you!***

- **The risk...**

Some at-risk youth leave school before they have mastered basic skills such as reading and writing – skills that may be important in your workplace.

The benefit...

Many of the youth are anxious to continue their education and develop their skills. If the youth is motivated to work and willing to learn, you have a potentially valuable, loyal employee. With a little support from you and the agency, the youth can continue his or her education while working for you.

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- **The risk...**

Some youth (not just those who are 'at-risk') have not learned how to conduct themselves at work (e.g., clothing, language, customer interaction)

The benefit...

It's true that good work habits can take time to develop – especially for youth who are new to full-time work. That's why most agencies provide pre-employment preparation that addresses – among other things – punctuality and attendance, communications and problem-solving skills and appropriate work-wear.

- **The risk...**

Although wage subsidies help, it takes a lot of effort to provide orientation and training for new employees. What if it they don't work out?

The benefit ...

It's in everyone's best interests that your agency partner finds someone who is a good 'fit' for your workplace. Many agencies offer pre-employment training and certifications such as WHMIS, fall protection, customer service excellence, and first aid. Wage subsidies may be available for some employment positions (the agency will know what's available).

- **The risk...**

Some of the youth have had a lot of trauma in their past. If they suffer from depression or anxiety at work, their colleagues and employer may not know how to respond.

The benefit...

Most agencies provide support and coaching to the youth to deal with any personal health issues so that they can function appropriately at work. Agency staff can also give employers tips on how to handle particular situations. However, a supportive work environment and a little extra understanding are generally all that is needed.

- **The risk**

Some placements likely won't work out.

The benefit... The chance to give a 'hand up' to someone who hasn't had many opportunities in the past. And the knowledge that you are helping a youth build his or her future.



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What to expect from your community agency partner

We're not just some employment agency throwing someone their way and hoping it will stick. We're selecting someone whose personality, whose skills, whose interests seem to be a really good fit for your organization...there's some serious thought put into the decision-making process.

ADRIEN, RESOURCE ASSISTANCE FOR YOUTH

A successful partnership

- The agency takes the time to get to know you, your business and your needs
- You and the agency are both clear about your expectations of one another during each stage of recruitment – from pre-screening, to helping the youth get settled in the job to helping address any issues that come up in the first few months on the job
- Open honest communication – e.g. you are clear about the job expectations, work environment and support and the agency is truthful about the background, skill levels and individual barriers of the youth being put forward for interview
- The entire employment process is as simple as possible and the agency is respectful of your time

What you can do

- Alert the agency right away if a problem arises. They can often help address the matter/provide extra support to you and the youth before it is too late
- Stay in touch with the agency on a regular basis to ensure that the partnership is progressing smoothly



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Potential Roles for Youth

At-risk youth may not have a lot of past work experience so they will likely be best suited to entry-level positions. Some examples:

- Hospitality/restaurant sector: short-order cooks, bakers and service staff
- Retail: sales staff, stock room assistants
- Office work: reception/clerical, mail room (sorting/delivery)
- Tourism & Recreation: ski resort service staff
- Auto service: oil changes, tire installation
- Construction trades: installing framing, insulation and drywall
- Building/garden maintenance



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Pre-Screening — How it Works

The basics

Most community agency employment programs prepare the youth with basics such as:

- Developing a resume, writing a cover letter and preparing for job interviews
- Developing good attendance and punctuality habits
- Life skills such as budgeting, grocery shopping and doing laundry
- Some agencies also offer the youth training in health and safety and in customer service

Other programs, particularly those that work closely with the trades, provide youth with 'hard skills' such as basic carpentry and construction training which they can use to begin an apprenticeship. Some of these programs even provide the youth with work gear such as hard hats, boots and tool belts.

Transition programs

Youth who have been dealing with serious issues in their lives may not be able to move directly from crisis mode to full-time employment. They may need a transitional step known as 'pre-employment' training, to help them stabilize their lives. Pre-employment programs help youth address their barriers to employment and learn valuable life and workplace skills in a supportive environment. Be sure to ask program staff about the training and supports they provide to prepare youth for employment.

You support young people around the stuff that's going on in their lives that they need support on, they're much more likely to show up to work the next day. And if they show up to work the next day, they'll show up the next day, and the next day, and then the next day. And then they start believing in themselves, and that's as simple as it is.

SHELDON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT CHOICES FOR YOUTH



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Next Steps in Hiring Process

Getting started

Use the same process you would when hiring any employee. Perhaps the only difference is that you should have realistic expectations about the employment history of at-risk youth. Keep in mind that skills can be learned. Instead, look at the youth's attitude and willingness to learn.

If you are not comfortable hiring a specific youth, there is no pressure to do so. For his/her sake and yours, the candidate has to be a good fit for the position.

Recruitment/Selection

1. Step One

Contact local community agencies that have youth employment programs. This National interactive locator map, created by First Work with development support from Raising the Roof, is a great place to find a program near you.

2. Step 2:

Provide a job description or apprenticeship opportunity outline with the following information:

- Wages
- Work location
- Hours of work
- Required skills (e.g. reading, writing, computer proficiency, proficiency with construction tools)
- Certifications/licenses (e.g. safety training/G2 driver's license)
- Soft skills/personality 'fit'
- Timeline for hiring

Handy resource : Human Resources and Skills Development Canada – 250 Essential Skills profiles for specific occupations.

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3. Step 3

Determine what you have to offer the new employee (beyond wages), for example:

- Training/further education opportunities
- Flex time
- Health benefits
- Gym access, wellness programs

What are youth looking for in a job? Most youth...

- like to blend work and life, challenging traditional work hours in favour of more flexible options
- enjoy a workplace that welcomes innovation and challenges old ways of thinking
- want equitable treatment as well as input into creating the rules
- are tech-savvy but need training on specific software programs
- want frequent feedback that is constructive and offered with sensitivity
- value low levels of bureaucracy, including speedy decisions

Source: City of Toronto, Youth Hiring Made Easy Toolkit <http://www.toronto.ca/yep/index.htm>

Interview tips

Although the interview process for an at-risk youth should be similar to that for any potential employee, keep in mind the youth may not have much employment experience to draw upon. Remember that skills can be learned. Focus instead on the youth's motivation and interests.

Respecting the youth's right to privacy, here are a few questions or discussion points you may want to raise:

1. What do you like to do in your free time? Any hobbies or volunteer work?
2. Tell me about something you have worked at or would really like to work at – something that made you happy or you think would make you happy.



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3. Have you ever lost a job? How did you feel? Tell me about a time when your job didn't work out. How did you handle that?
4. Tell me why you are interested in this job (or placement opportunity)
5. How comfortable are you with working with customers, e.g. telephone conversations? How about face-to-face contact, e.g. in reception or in a customer service role?
6. How do you feel about being closely supervised, at least for the first while you are in the job?
7. Why do you want to work for this company?
8. Is there anything else you think I should know about you?
9. What are you curious about – what would you like to ask me?

Successful integration

Just like any new employee, at-risk youth need to be introduced to your workplace and made to feel welcome. Take time to tell them about things such as:

- The company's dress code
- Policies about rest breaks and lunch hours – it may help to review key policies with them to be sure they understand and have a chance to ask questions
- Socialization and personal use of technology (e.g. cell phones and iPods)

Some of the things you can do to help the youth settle in:

- A thorough orientation as soon as they arrive
- Assign them an experienced mentor – someone you can trust to show them around and tell them how things work
- Social or team-building activities that help connect the younger employee with older staff

While a previously homeless or at-risk youth may need a little extra understanding and support to settle in to their new job, employers must find a balance between being prepared to offer support and not treating the youth very differently from other staff, which could lead to resentment. The youth also likely does not want to feel that he or she stands out and is not part of the team.



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Retention

It costs a lot of money and time to hire, orientate and train new staff. So the longer you keep them, the greater the return on your investment! Things your young employee will stick around for:

- An employer who shows them that their work and input is value and respected
- Options for flex-time
- Access to training that accommodates different learning styles
- Coaching and job shadowing opportunities that help them develop their skills
- Frequent feedback
- Recognition – formal and informal
- Lifestyle and wellness benefits such as access to a gym, paid training and education upgrading opportunities

Evaluation and feedback

Before you can evaluate your young employee's performance and give helpful feedback, make sure:

- you have been clear about your expectations and have agreed on realistic goals
- you understand the youth's capabilities and learning needs

Regular feedback is best as it helps the employee to make adjustments, build their skills and gain confidence early on.

- Ask if they are having any trouble with their tasks
- Offer training and coaching where needed
- Encourage them to ask questions
- While you are clear about expectations and goals, be patient
- Reward good performance, just as you would with any of your employees

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Myths and Realities

There are many myths and realities about youth in the workplace. Here are some positive strategies to help you understand and successfully address them:

- 1. Disrespectful and vocal if dissatisfied**

Today's youth were raised in a less authoritarian manner than previous generation. They have always been encouraged to express their feelings and opinions and they will question everything.

Strategy: engage the youth – explain how and why things are done. Provide them with opportunities to voice their opinions/share ideas and concerns. Their respect will be earned by engaging and listening to them.
- 2. Lacks a strong work ethic**

Some youth may have a more casual approach to their work than their older colleagues. This may affect their productivity and the quality of their work, and may cause tension in the workplace.

Strategy: Find out how they define work ethics and share your expectation. Determine what motivates them and challenge them.
- 3. Not loyal**

Many of this generation saw their parents and grandparents downsized after years of loyal service. They are prepared to change jobs as new opportunities arise.

Strategy: engage them in meaningful work that makes a difference and meets their personal goals.
- 4. Technologically dependent**

Raised in the computer age, most youth rely heavily on technology to access, collect and share information.

Strategy: use technology in new, innovative ways to provide stimulation and keep them engaged.
- 5. Sense of entitlement**

Generation Y is aware of what jobs should pay and are likely to question the effort-reward equation.

Strategy: be prepared to discuss salary, provide development/training opportunities and support work-life balance.
- 6. Lacks experience**

They are young and just starting out.

Strategy: take the time to explain things, then step back and let them tackle the task. Return to assess the outcome, give encouragement and offer any lessons for next time.