

Where Are They Now?

An Overview of NPower Canada Alumni Supports

INTRODUCTION

NPower Canada aims to reduce poverty by addressing youth unemployment, launching opportunity youth into meaningful and sustainable digital careers. Since its founding in 2014, NPower Canada has gained acclaim as an evidence-based, best-in-class youth employment solution. The organization has grown significantly over the last five years, from serving 87 youth in 2015 to 590 youth in 2019.

NPower Canada's comprehensive curriculum ensures participants are equipped with the in-demand technical and professional skills most sought after by industry. The organization partners with employers to provide a pipeline of eager, diverse and job-ready young talent who are primed to succeed in the workplace.

However, graduation from the NPower Canada program and job placement is just the beginning of our relationship with the youth we serve. The organization's mission is to move young people out of poverty, which means taking a long-term approach to equipping young adults with the personal and professional skills that lead to their career progression and success over time.

To that end, NPower Canada graduates receive five years of ongoing support and coaching to navigate the workplace, ladder up in their careers and ensure continued job growth and success. It is this long-term, supportive approach that helps move individuals, and in some cases entire families, out of poverty.

Building Organizational Success from Individual Success

NPower Canada supports its program participants for 5 years post-training. Alumni are provided with a wealth of support in order to not only succeed in their first junior level IT role but to grow and thrive in their careers.

Alumni are supported through NPower Canada's Employer Engagement team, whose focus is Employment and Alumni, with the goal of building community and supporting graduates' career laddering. The Employer Engagement team provide ongoing and regular touchpoints with alumni throughout their 5 years post-program, in addition to data gathering to track progress and identify roadblocks.

NPower Canada maintains a high job placement success rate with at least 80% of alumni securing employment within 6 months of graduation. Moreover, more than 80% of these alumni have remained employed at 12, 24 and 36 months post-training. Each individual alumni success adds to the growing network of IT professionals who make up the NPower Canada alumni network.

As alumni of the program, youth continue the ongoing development of the **3 core competencies and key traits of being coachable, having a growth mindset, and remaining a lifelong learner. It is upon this foundation that alumni build their success.**

ALUMNI SUPPORT SERVICES

NPower Canada Alumni Support Services continue to support the core features of the NPower Canada model first introduced during the training phase of the program, including technical, professional and personal development, all with the aim to continue strengthening graduates' employability, potential for advancement and lifelong learning.

Post training workshops

NPower Canada Alumni Support Services vary in method, delivery and focus, with the intention of supporting youth in ways that they report finding most beneficial. Immediately post-training, NPower Canada provides in-person workshops to recent graduates beginning their job search. The workshops simulate the same structured environment as the classroom, providing familiarity and community. In-person workshops focus predominantly on professional development, honing the skills learned throughout the program, particularly interview practice, personal branding and leveraging social media for professional networking. These workshops help prepare alumni for job interviews that NPower Canada has arranged with its employer partners. Job-seeking alumni are also invited to return to the classroom space to disrupt the isolating process of unemployment and re-join their peers in a safe space.

On-line support

NPower Canada also provides digital methods of connecting including online workshops, facilitated over Google Hangouts and other digital platforms which allow for screen-sharing and multiple attendees. These types of virtual meetings facilitate greater accessibility and flexibility for alumni.

Access to hiring events and conferences

NPower Canada offers its alumni access to a multitude of networking and hiring events with core partners and new employer connections, with the aim of securing job placements, building professional networks and gaining more insight into the ever-changing needs of employers.

In association with NPower Canada's core partners, and with the support of our leading employers, we are able to offer alumni free entry to technology conferences and workshops, giving alumni the opportunity to continue developing their skills and understanding of the technology sector to support career advancement.

Alumni also have access to an online resource portal that includes real-time job leads with hiring partners, study guides for industry-recognized certifications and life management resources on topics like coping with stress and financial literacy.

Career Laddering

NPower Canada graduates begin their careers in a junior-level IT role with the goal of developing both their hard and soft skills in the fast-paced, agile technology sector. The first role obtained after completing the program can often be a junior-level IT role where youth are given

exposure to multiple facets of the company's technological needs. These roles can be launchpads with huge potential for learning and growth.

NPower Canada alumni success is closely rooted in the program's **Key Employability Skills**. The alumni who continue to see the most growth personally and professionally, are those who continue to build their learning agility, remain cognizant of their personal brand, and prioritize their personal and character development. We support continued growth and development in these areas through personalized individual alumni coaching, organizing networking events, connecting graduates with industry mentors and helping alumni to plan and access continued education. In 2019, for example, NPower Canada organized 141 professional development, hiring and networking events for alumni. Events included guest speakers and employer mentors who provided alumni with group and individual mentorship on the key employability skills such as personal branding and learning agility that NPower Canada has identified as success factors for our graduates.

ONGOING TOUCHPOINTS

NPower Canada connects with its graduates through frequent in-person, e-mail, phone and text-based touch points to share job leads, provide resources, facilitate connections with mentors, provide ongoing career development coaching and track long-term employment and social impact outcomes.

Concentrated and comprehensive support is provided to alumni throughout the first 3 months of their first job placement. Throughout the standard 12-week probationary employment period, NPower Canada conducts bi-weekly touchpoints with youth over the phone, by email, video conference and in person, as requested by the youth. Challenges and concerns are addressed on these touchpoints, as well as highlights of the week and learning opportunities.

After the probation period is complete, staff and alumni continue to connect on a quarterly basis, or more often as needed, to facilitate longer-term career planning and address any concerns. Common concerns include upcoming performance reviews, discussion of an internal application with their current organization, and challenges with work-life balance. NPower Canada staff also encourage alumni to provide mentorship and give back to the next generation of NPower Canada program participants. In addition to these conversations, NPower Canada staff also collect data points on the alumni's current status, including where they are now working or studying, and what their aspirations are for the next 6 to 12 months.

Building Community

NPower Canada has a strong network of 1,200+ alumni who support one another and maintain a symbiotic relationship, benefiting from each other's successes. Connections first established during training are often nurtured and strengthened as alumni transition into the workforce.

NPower Canada offers opportunities for alumni from all program streams and regions to connect and socialize in a pressure-free environment, allowing the forum to build personal and professional networks. NPower Canada connects its youth via social media, including LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram, offering a space to re-connect, share memories and photos. Alumni often connect with each other via social media and mobile applications, such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp, using these platforms to celebrate their wins and support each other through losses, as well as learning from each other's experiences and sharing advice and encouragement.

The NPower Canada Youth Advisory Council (NYAC) is comprised of a dozen NPower Canada alumni. Its role is to provide insider input on NPower Canada's program design, development and evaluation. The council also organizes social events for alumni, with the aim of creating an even stronger sense of community. The NYAC Chair is also a full voting member of the NPower Canada Board of Directors, embedding a strong youth leadership voice within the organization's governance structure.

Giving Back and Coming Full Circle

NPower Canada alumni are ambassadors of the program. They are the program's most valuable resource, acting as referral sources for potential participants, and representing the NPower Canada brand in the community and the workplace. NPower Canada's success is aligned directly with its youth's success. Therefore, its Alumni Support Services are an integral part of the NPower Canada model and framework.

NPower Canada participants come to the program in search of meaningful work in junior and digital roles. The Alumni Support Services helps continue to build community and confidence after the NPower Canada program has finished.

Some program participants report facing challenges with mental health prior to joining the NPower Canada program and mental health issues can be a barrier to completing formal post-secondary education. To address this, NPower Canada provides wraparound supports including mental health support and warm referrals to community services while participants are in the program and after graduation.

As nearly half of NPower Canada's alumni are newcomers to Canada, Alumni Support Services are also key in providing them with a safe space to develop new connections and ask for trusted advice. The community and friendships that youth build while in the program continues after graduation and alumni are each other's best cheerleaders, confidants and advocates. This support from the NPower Canada team and from their peers, is instrumental in helping youth navigate Canadian workplace culture and norms, and is key to their long term career success.

Some of the challenges NPower Canada faced when providing Alumni Support Services include:

- **Supporting alumni across a large geography** - as NPower Canada has grown and scaled we have also invested in the Alumni Services team and used technologies to further support alumni engagement. For example, in lieu of asking youth to travel across the city to meet with staff in person, attend workshops, or conduct mock interviews, Google Hangouts or Skype are utilized.
- **Engaging employers and supporting them with hiring** - over the last five year the team has worked to develop robust partnerships with employers and to ensure a ready pipeline of jobs and opportunities for youth. As we have scaled, we have worked hard to bring value to employer HR processes improving our pre-screening and onboarding supports. We have also engaged employers to help us network with other businesses needing junior IT talent. This has helped us grow from 40 employer partners in 2015, to over 200 employer partners currently
- **Matching alumni to the job opportunities** - ensuring the right fit with the role and the organization based on the youth's strengths, skill set and new-found experience while also remaining attuned to the organizational culture to ensure fit has been key to our success with youth employment.
- **Providing long-term support** - NPower Canada provides 5-years of post-graduation support to youth. This has grown from initial employment and internships to now include supports for career laddering and educational opportunities to help youth grow and thrive in their career.
- NPower Canada has also established a **Youth Advisory Council** to bring youth voice to organizational planning and support alumni and participant engagement. This group has organized events and participated in classroom activities to share insight and knowledge with their peers.

Reflection Questions

1. How does your organization currently support the long-term achievements and well-being of opportunity youth upon program completion? Are there new opportunities for post-program support that youth and/or staff have recently proposed that may be possible to implement within the next 6-12 months? What might these look like?
2. What are the common concerns and barriers faced by opportunity youth upon entering the workforce? How might these concerns be addressed through alumni support?
3. How does your organization embed input and feedback from youth into program evaluation and continuous improvement? How do these help you to develop better alumni supports?