

# **Youth Employment Recommendations**



# Child & Youth Network

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## About this Paper

Following the Youth Employment Trends paper, this paper is the second part of the Youth Employment series that makes specific recommendations about improving employment opportunities for young people in London. Youth employment is the fifth topic in a series aimed at identifying systemic problems contributing to the cycle of poverty experienced by Londoners, recommending specific changes to break this cycle. Having strong employment opportunities available for London's young people is beneficial for the whole London community. Informed by the Youth Employment Trends document, this paper is intended to make recommendations to the provincial and federal governments to improve employment outcomes for young people in London. Endorsed by the membership of the Child & Youth Network, these recommendations will form the organization's stance on youth employment related policy issues at the provincial and federal levels of government. These recommendations will be used to engage with other levels of government on issues related to youth employment in order to work towards improving employment outcomes for London's young people.

## Why it Matters

High youth unemployment is costly to our society. It is estimated that the provincial and federal government spent at least \$10.4 billion last year, directly focused on issues of poverty. This is a loss equal to 10.8-16.6% of the entire provincial budget (Ontario Association of Food Banks 2008). It is further estimated that poverty in Ontario costs every household between \$2299 and \$2895 each year (Ontario Association of Food Banks 2008). Youth unemployment sets the foundation to perpetuate future cycles of poverty, and as such, is critical to addressing poverty in our community.

Considering the significant impact poverty has on our society, it is imperative that young people are prepared for successful careers. For young people in Ontario, post-secondary education has been framed by society as the key to future employment success. Unfortunately, this is increasingly not the case for many of Ontario's young people. A post-secondary degree used to guarantee one's future career success, but this is no longer case. There will need to be new and creative ways to prepare young people for an ever diversifying labour market.

There is no doubt that London, along with the rest of Ontario, is experiencing a tough economic position. With a decrease in manufacturing jobs and a large student population, in addition to high youth unemployment rates, critical steps need to be taken in order to reduce the number of low-income young people to break the cycle of poverty in London. As of July 2016, for the third month in a row, London continued to rank among the top three cities with the highest youth unemployment. In May 2016, London's young people faced the second highest youth unemployment rate in the province and the third highest in Canada. Underemployed young people pay off debts at a slower rate, delay major financial purchases like homes and vehicles, and earn less over their lifetime (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 2015).

Canada's work force is becoming increasingly characterized by "precarity," a term developed that reflects employment relationships that do not have security or benefits found in more traditional employment relationships. Further, if precarious employment is becoming a normal characteristic of the Canadian economy, it is critical to implement better strategies to protect young workers and ensure they receive proper benefits and health and safety assurances. It is essential to move away from temporary, part-time, precarious employment situations and provide meaningful opportunities that provide income security and a greater quality of life.

Further, more information is required to understand London's unique position in the province's economic landscape. Young people in London need stable employment, secure income, and support to explore more innovative means of employment in the face of increasing precarious work. In order to succeed in these areas, it will be critical to understand what young people in London are currently experiencing, including: their experiences with education and employment, challenges in searching for meaningful and stable employment, as well as additional resources needed to succeed. With this knowledge, the CYN will be better situated to achieve the employment outcomes of the CYN Youth Framework, resulting in young people with stable entry to employment or business, having opportunities for meaningful employment, and building a successful career path related to their education and training (Child and Youth Network 2014).

The recommendations made in this paper will be presented according to the employment outcomes of the CYN Youth Framework<sup>1</sup> and will be connected to the success indicators identified in the framework. Further, the recommendations will be divided into recommendations for the provincial and federal government. For a summary of all recommendations, see Appendix A at the end of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cynyouthframework.com](http://www.cynyouthframework.com)

# Young People Have Relevant Experiences, Tools, and Resources

- Young people are engaged in meaningful opportunities to gain practical career and education skills
- Young people have employability skills
- Young people have resources and relationships to facilitate entry into employment or self-employment
- Young people have careers that fit with the needs of the market
- Young people have exposure to employment or self-employment opportunities

Following the outcomes of the CYN Youth Framework, to support youth employment, youth must have relevant experiences, tools, and resources in order to best transition into the labour market. There are a variety of ways this can be achieved in order to make sure London's youth have diverse experiences to increase their employability. This section will outline the need for increased accessibility of cooperative education, work integrated learning opportunities, and will examine the challenges associated with transportation in relation to young people having the necessary tools to participate in employment activities.

## Access and Affordability of Co-Op Programs

Throughout a young person's education are critically important experiences to career development. These types of opportunities can help young people to learn both hard and soft skills that can be transferred to future employment opportunities. Co-ops and work-integrated learning can also enable young people to sample different employment paths to better inform future career decisions. In London specifically, 49.6% of survey respondents had some experience with co-op work. Young people that responded to the survey had mixed experiences with co-op programs, but overall found work-integrated learning opportunities to be helpful in deciding future career paths. However, young people warned that co-op placements that do not engage young people in meaningful work may cause students to miss out on valuable opportunities to experience different workplaces and gain a better understanding of the most appropriate career choices for them. It may also limit the ability of young people to gain an understanding of appropriate workplace behaviours and acquire soft skills - a deficit noted by service providers who provide work placements for young people. Overall, these types of opportunities are a good way for young people to gain relevant experience to be successful when applying to future careers.

In order to make certain that these opportunities are accessible to all young people, this paper recommends several changes to the way co-op programs are administered in post-secondary education. For the most part, cooperative education programs are equally accessible to all high school students. Students enter into a co-op course and are asked to find their own co-op placements of their choosing. In order to help facilitate this process, teachers will assist students to make sure everyone finds a placement that is closest to their preference.

However, despite the benefits of work-integrated learning for future career development, it is in post-secondary education when such opportunities tend to become less accessible for students. It has been increasingly found that work-integrated learning opportunities are less accessible to students from low-income backgrounds pursuing post-secondary education. Work-integrated learning programs offered at post-secondary institutions have very high success rates for students to gain full-time employment upon graduation. The challenge is that co-op opportunities are disproportionately accessible to students from middle to high income backgrounds. Currently, the majority of post-secondary co-op programs require students to pay a fee to enter into the program. For some students, this could mean a fee as high as \$1200 prior to beginning their paid employment opportunity. This fee creates a significant barrier to participation for students with less income. The up-front co-op fee is a challenge because such fees are not currently assessed by the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) as mandatory fees, and are therefore not considered in a student's financial aid assessment. For students who rely on OSAP to pay for their tuition and related fees, this fee can serve as an irreconcilable barrier to participation in such programs. In effect, students who are able to afford these fees, likely with the support of their families, are more likely to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities than their less affluent peers. Considering the documented success of work-integrated learning programs in securing full-time employment, it is imperative that there is no financial access barrier to these programs in order to break the cycle of poverty. In order to address the income disparity perpetuated by the administration of co-op programs at post-secondary institutions, this paper offers the following recommendations:

## **Recommendations for the Provincial Government**

**Recommendation 1:** OSAP should change their policies to evaluate co-op fees as mandatory and include this fee in a student's overall financial needs assessment.<sup>2</sup> If co-op fees are added to a student's financial needs assessment, students who require financial support to participate in these programs will be supported by the OSAP program, reducing barriers to participation and allowing students from all economic backgrounds the chance for equal participation.

**Recommendation 2:** The Ontario government recently made changes to the tuition payment schedule for students paying the majority of their tuition with OSAP to allow students to pay once OSAP money had been received. This exception should be coordinated with the payment of co-op fees to allow students receiving OSAP to pay their co-op fees within a reasonable time after they have received their OSAP money and/or have begun their paid employment opportunity. This will better allow students with low income to make payments of co-op program fees, making these fees more financially accessible.

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<sup>2</sup> This change would include co-op fees with a student's total tuition fees, providing the student with enough money to pay for the co-op program.

## Transportation

Many young people in London rely on public transit to travel to school, extracurricular activities, as well as employment. Use of London's public transportation system also includes getting to work and visiting prospective employers during a job search. Participants in the youth focus group for this paper eluded to challenges with both the quality and accessibility of public transit in London. Focus group participants indicated that the efficiency of the transit system was critical to not only gaining, but also maintaining, employment. An efficient and reliable transportation system is critical to make certain young people are able to get to and from work on time while managing different shift times. The focus group also noted that the cost of transit is another barrier to using the service.

In the opinion of local economist and Ivey Business School Professor Mike Moffatt, many young people in London, particularly recent graduates, are not able to afford a car. Considering the existing transit service available in London, not having a car may pose barriers to obtaining work at certain locations throughout the city where transit is not accessible. This is of particular concern in the city's manufacturing sector, where both geographic location and the nature of shift work make it nearly impossible to participate in the workforce without access to a vehicle. Professor Moffatt's concern is echoed by employment service providers in the city who suggest there are limitations when trying to place young people in employment opportunities who do not have access to a vehicle.

Access to efficient and reliable transportation is one of the most important resources in gaining employment. In order to ensure maintained participation in the labour force, it will be crucial to reevaluate existing transportation routes with particular attention to commuter patterns in order to expand employment opportunities. The city's rapid transit initiative (SHIFT) has engaged in extensive community consultations about the future of transportation in London. Through SHIFT, the City has consulted with people in London, including young people, in order to gain a stronger understanding of the transit needs in the city. Consultations about the future of transit in London have reevaluated existing transit routes and will incorporate the feedback of London residents. It is very likely that improvements to London's transit system, and a shift to rapid transit, will improve access to employment opportunities for young people and all London residents.

The challenges associated with the current model of public transit in London pose a significant barrier to employment for young people. Young people without a car cannot apply for work outside of London Transit's service area, and young people who are not able to afford bus tickets must find work within walking distance of their homes. This challenge perpetuates the cycle of poverty by making paid employment opportunities for young people harder to obtain. Youth focus group participants shed light on the challenges associated with transit in gaining employment and particularly noted the challenge of getting to work opportunities outside of the transit system. These circumstances limit the number of opportunities available to young people looking for work. Unfortunately, the transportation challenge can contribute to youth unemployment when young people are not physically able to commute to employment opportunities.

Locally, it would be beneficial for the school boards to further consider the facilitation of a group contract for high school students to create a subsidized pass program. Western University and Fanshawe College receive a reduced rate from the LTC as a result of a brokered contract that allows the educational institutions to purchase passes in bulk. It is possible to do this through a mandatory fee that is charged to post-secondary students with no opt-out options. It might be useful for the school boards to consider if there would be a relevant application of this type of contract for their students in order to make transit more affordable for school-age youth and their families.

In order to address the challenges experienced by London's young people in regards to transit, this paper makes specific recommendations to the provincial and federal governments.

### **Recommendations for the Provincial Government**

**Recommendation 3:** The provincial government should invest in the enhancement of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits by expanding allowable employment related expenses<sup>3</sup> to working-age young people aged 14-18. The Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program legislation should be amended to support transportation costs for working age youth that are pursuing employment opportunities.

**Recommendation 4:** Transportation should be a mandatory benefit paid by the province for all Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients over the age of 18.

### **Recommendations for the Provincial and Federal Governments**

**Recommendation 5:** As an extension of the provincial and federal governments' commitment to supporting youth employment, funding should be allocated to London in order to improve the transit system. The Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy and the Canadian Youth Employment Strategy will be more successful if young people in London, across Ontario, and throughout Canada have the means to access the new opportunities that will be made available to them through these government sponsored employment programs. Enhanced investment in transportation infrastructure will help to support all Canadians in search of long-term employment opportunities. Reliable and affordable access to transit will help to ensure both the participation and success of youth employment programs in London.

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<sup>3</sup> Employment related expenses for Ontario Works recipients may be provided to help cover the costs of child care; clothing or uniforms; safety shoes or work boots; tools and special equipment; transportation; and licensing or professional fees if the recipient is starting a full-time job. To be eligible for this support, the recipient must be over the age of 18.

# Young People Have Opportunities for Meaningful Employment

- Young people have economic independence
- Young people secure their first quality employment experience
- Young people are employed or self-employed

There are several challenges with which young people are faced in the search for meaningful employment opportunities. As noted in the Youth Employment Trends document, precarious employment – characterized by a lack of benefits and job security – has been increasing and is becoming a more normal characteristic of the Canadian economy. The Law Commission of Ontario noted that as of 2012, 33% of Ontario workers were in precarious employment, and in less than a decade, there was twice the number of Ontario workers earning minimum wage (Law Commission of Ontario 2012). Unfortunately, young people are vulnerable to precarious employment situations. This section will focus on recommendations to address precarious employment and unpaid internships, which can be seen as a form of precarious employment.

## Precarious Employment

One of the most pressing and negative trends for youth employment is the rise in temporary and precarious employment opportunities, often characterized by a lack of benefits and job security (Zizys 2011). Unfortunately, young people are particularly vulnerable to precarious employment situations (Foster 2013), especially when considering the number of young people in internships with inadequate benefits and low wages (Attfield and Couture 2014). While requests have been sent to Statistics Canada to track and prevent precarious employment (Attfield and Couture 2014), young people are often left with no other options for employment and remain vulnerable to precarious work, which according to Scott (2014), has increased by 50% in the last two decades.

Those in precarious employment often find themselves without healthcare coverage that tends to be provided by employers in more stable jobs (Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario 2013). This is particularly concerning for younger members of the work force, as they are more likely to be employed in lower, entry level positions. Workers in this situation often cannot afford to visit a dentist or eye doctor, or pay for required medications. Furthermore, workers in precarious employment often have schedules that change from week to week (Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario 2013). This can make it difficult for workers to find suitable child care and to adequately organize their finances. These workers are also more likely to have their rights violated in the workplace (Law Commission of Ontario 2012).

Over time, experiences with precarious employment have been associated with negative impacts on individual and household wellbeing, poorer general and mental health, and fewer people volunteering to benefit their communities (Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario 2013).

The following are recommendations to help address the rise of precarious employment to improve employment outcomes for young people:

### **Recommendations for the Federal Government**

**Recommendation 6:** The Youth Employment Fund, a federal youth jobs program, should have continued investment from the federal government, and be accompanied by additional guidelines that ensure the positions created provide decent wages. It should also offer a training component and create genuine opportunities for advancement and permanent employment (Ontario Common Front et al 2014). This would enhance the ability of this program to create not only meaningful employment opportunities for young people, but also the ability to create strong training opportunities to increase the ability of young people to succeed in future jobs.

**Recommendation 7:** The federal government should continue to evaluate and improve Employment Insurance and consider how the program affects Canada's young people. With precarious employment becoming more and more common place, it is important that social supports that are available to Canadians do not discriminate based on age or amount of time spent in the workforce. In the last federal budget, the government announced changes to the eligibility requirements for EI. Before these changes, to be eligible for EI, an individual had to have accumulated 920 hours of work in the previous 52 weeks. This has now been adjusted to 420-700 hours of work in the 52 weeks prior to the claim, depending on the unemployment rate for the region in which they live. These changes will make it easier for young people to access benefits but the government should continue to consider how programs such as EI are working to benefit young people and should be consistently reevaluated to ensure there are limited barriers to participation in such programs.

### **Unpaid Internships and the Employment Standards Act**

Over the past year, conversations about the rights of part-time workers have become increasingly topical. With the federal and provincial governments currently examining legislation around unpaid internships, the rights of part-time, often precarious employees, have been increasingly discussed. The Toronto Star published an article entitled "Unpaid Internships demand more action to prevent the exploitation of young" that sheds light on the impact of unpaid internships for young people. In this article, Henderson highlights a job posting for an unpaid internship: "you must be punctual. You must own your own car. You will be emailing and calling seven days a week at all hours. You must never make spelling mistakes in emails. You should be excited to work in the music industry" (Henderson 2015). For most employed adults, this is not an opportunity that would even foster a second glance, and yet this job posting yielded two dozen applications from young people across Toronto.

The owner of the company hiring for this position stated: “The last thing I need is to be paying someone who is completely incapable” (Henderson 2015). The owner also added that he did not believe that this type of job opportunity was against the law.

Despite unpaid internships being technically illegal in Ontario, there are still a number of employers who offer illegal unpaid internship opportunities. On April 29, 2016, the provincial government released the results of the 2015 Ministry of Labour blitz of Ontario internships from 123 inspections across the province<sup>4</sup>:

- 27 employers had no internship programs
- 19 employers had no interns at the time of the inspection
- 77 employers had interns at the time of the inspection
  - 41 were found to have programs that exempted the intern from the Employment Standards Act (Co-op students and specified trainees)
  - 18 had paid interns and were found to be in compliance with the ESA
  - 18 had interns and were found to be in contravention with the ESA
    - Of these 18, \$140,630 was owed to interns that had not been paid
    - The most common violations were vacation pay/vacation time; public holidays/public holiday pay; minimum wage; wage statements; and record keeping

The results of the most recent blitz are troubling because it demonstrates that despite the fact that unpaid internships, on paper, are illegal in Ontario, employers still offer these opportunities to young people. As you can see from the results stated above, almost 15% of employers were in direct contravention with the Employment Standards Act and did not extend the rights that should be afforded to all workers in Ontario. In addition to that, more than one-third of the inspections of these workplaces showed that there were interns who were exempted from pay because of special exemptions provided under the ESA. With these results, it seems that more than half of all internships examined through the blitz were either unpaid through a special exemption or were unpaid by employers in direct violation with the Employment Standards Act legislation. The blanket statement that unpaid internships in Ontario are illegal may on the surface be true, but in reality, there need to be several more protections put into place for Ontario’s young people.

Despite unpaid internships being illegal in Ontario, there is still a culture that persists that convinces Ontario’s young people that they can be paid in the currency of experience. However, if today’s young people are continuing to be pushed to engage in unpaid or underpaid employment opportunities to gain experience, they will need to have the financial support of their families in order to participate. If experience is now being used as the currency with which employers are paying young people, not all young people will be able to participate equally. Not every young person is able to receive financial support from their parents for a variety of different reasons, and if unpaid work is becoming one of the most prominent ways to gain experience, our community will be faced with perpetuating cycles of inequality for those young people who cannot afford to participate without fair compensation.

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<sup>4</sup> Ontario Ministry of Labour, Blitz Results: Internships (April 29, 2016)

Unpaid internships or volunteer positions can provide young people with the experience necessary to gain a full-time position, but require young people to have external, financial support, which disproportionately advantages young people from middle to high income families. This culture is both a challenge to young people and to the economy.

In a recent study about unpaid internships, Attfield and Couture (2014) have noted there is no common definition of an internship, which can have direct safety and legal implications for young people. There are three exemptions under the Ontario Employment Standards Act that would exempt a person performing work for an employer from the rights and protections provided by the ESA. In fact, it was only in November of 2014 that unpaid interns and other unpaid learners were extended protections under the Occupational Health & Safety Act.<sup>5</sup> The Ontario Employment Standards Act (ESA) only applies to interns who are not considered students, trainees, or are working for training according to a set list of criteria. Under these terms, it is possible to disqualify thousands of young people working as interns in various industries from accessing benefits, health and safety assurances, and wage protections. Attfield and Couture interviewed young people who had completed unpaid internships and found that the majority completed work that was at or very near the same level of work completed by regularly paid employees. These young people did not gain career related benefits and were not able to leverage their experience to obtain full-time employment. The majority of young people interviewed were motivated to take part in these unpaid internships as opportunities for networking and gaining relevant work experience, yet many felt they were taken advantage of. In addition, all believed they would have had negative experiences if they had tried to file a complaint with their company (Attfield and Couture 2014).

Many reports on youth employment recommend increasing coordination between education and employers in Ontario and across Canada. These recommendations note the need for increased creativity in the education system to bridge the gap between existing work opportunities and school programs (Geobey 2013 ). Other suggestions include creating wage subsidies for companies that hire young people in the summer, in high unemployment areas (Scott 2014), and creating internship and work placement programs outside of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Moreover, many have called for the outright ban of unpaid internships instead of simply tracking and monitoring them. The Metcalf Foundation has recommended and promoted the use of experiential learning in school as an opportunity to develop on-the-job skills before students become new workers in the labour force (Zizys 2011). This recommendation follows their conclusion that employees themselves are now held responsible for skill development, whereas in previous eras this would have been covered by their employer with on-the-job training.

The challenges highlighted in this section in relation to unpaid internships are serious issues that young people are currently facing. Through a better understanding of unpaid internships it is possible to better understand the importance of extending the protections of the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to include young people that end up in precarious work situations such as unpaid internships.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cos-mag.com/legal/legal-stories/4232-ontarios-ohsa-extended-to-interns-co-op-students.html>

In January of 2016, the Toronto Star reported that in a Ministry of Labour blitz from 2015, 78% of 238 businesses inspected were found to be in violation of the Employment Standards Act. This finding highlights the importance of making changes to the ESA and that there is more work to be done so vulnerable workers are not taken advantage of. As the legislation currently stands, those in part-time or volunteer work positions do not receive the full protection of the ESA in Ontario. With an economy that is seeing increased precarious work opportunities and unpaid employment, it is critical that these changes be made to allow young people to garner the relevant experiences necessary to enter the workforce without being exploited.

## **Recommendations for the Provincial Government**

**Recommendation 8:** Extend the rights of an employee in the Employment Standards Act to include all employees, regardless of their relationship to the employer. All employees should be eligible to apply under the ESA for the protection of their rights.

**Recommendation 9:** The Ministry of Labour should continue to crack down on unpaid internships through random blitzes and hold employers accountable for breaking the law and continuing to offer unpaid employment opportunities. Employers in contravention with this law should be made public in an effort to deter others from continuing to offer and create new illegal internships.

**Recommendation 10:** The provincial government should conduct a thorough review of the exemptions currently offered by the Employment Standards Act to determine the impact of these exemptions on young people.

**Recommendation 11:** Place a time limit of no more than 90 days with no period of renewal for unpaid internships offered under special exemption in the Employment Standards Act. After 90 days is complete, the job must be filled with a paid employee; regulations should be put into place to make sure certain special exemptions are not over utilized to replace the position of an otherwise paid employee.

**Recommendation 12:** Following the changes proposed in Bill 64, the provincial government should create an Advisory Council on Work-Integrated Learning. This advisory council would consult with the Ministry of Labour on opportunities to create more paid work-integrated learning opportunities and to recommend ways to reduce the number of unpaid opportunities.

**Recommendation 13:** The Employment Standards Act should be amended to protect high school and post-secondary co-op students and afford them the rights of all other employees, whether paid or unpaid.

**Recommendation 14:** The Ministry of Labour should create an anonymous, third party complaint system so young people feel comfortable coming forward with concerns about potentially illegal unpaid internship opportunities. Currently, to make a complaint to the Ministry of Labour, you must provide your identity, and this deters many young Ontarians from exercising their rights for fear of reprisal from the employer.

**Recommendation 15:** The government should work alongside employer groups and relevant stakeholders to address the societal need for more long-term employment opportunities.

### **Recommendations for the Federal Government**

**Recommendation 16:** The Federal Government should revisit the private members bill, the “Intern Protection Act,” and enact the following changes: 1) expand the definition of an employee; 2) create more strict conditions around which an employee can be unpaid, and; 3) require employers to keep records of the amount of hours that are worked without pay.

# Young People Have the Skills Necessary to Build a Successful Career

- Young people have skills for employment or self-employment
- Young people are satisfied in their careers
- Young people start businesses
- Young people lead successful businesses
- Young people have defined career paths

It is widely understood that there are a variety of skills necessary to not only find, but to maintain employment. It is critical that young people have the necessary skills to be successful in the workplace. These skills often include relevant “soft” skills, such as communication and problem solving, that are often under-utilized in resume building. In addition to workplace skills, there are a host of other skills that young people require to successfully search for a job. In order for London’s young people to build successful careers, it is imperative that they are given the opportunity to build their skill sets. This discussion is particularly important considering that employer funded training has decreased by almost 40% since 1990 (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance 2014 ). This section will also examine the challenges indicated by youth respondents in London in regards to finding a job in London. Some of these challenges include appropriate supports for job searching, lack of experience, and obstacles associated with effective networking. This section will conclude with several recommendations to improve opportunities for young people to build their skills.

## Support for Job Searching

Job searching can be a difficult task that requires a specific skill set. Discussions with young people in the London community suggest that not all young people feel confident about their skills in this area. Some focus group participants and survey respondents stated that they did not know how to build a resume and felt hesitant about seeking help with this process for fear of “being judged” for not having these skills. To highlight this concern, 36% of survey respondents indicated that they did not know where to look for a job. Debra Mountenay, Executive Director of the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, suggested that a lack of job searching skills is a common problem; many people “have difficulty communicating their suitability for the position without sounding like one is bragging or desperate... we don’t teach people how to [adequately market themselves].”

In regard to finding successful employment, Robert Collins, of the London Economic Development Corporation, noted that having family members who are familiar with the rigour of job searching can be beneficial to young people looking for work, as it can provide the opportunity to ask questions about things like how to behave in an interview, what kind of attire is appropriate, and what kind of language to use on a resume.

While this family support may not exist for all young people, focus group participants spoke highly of the job coaching resources available in the community, suggesting that job coaching programs can help provide this vital knowledge to those who may not have family support.

Another challenge eluded to was that some young people who are seeking employment may not have the literacy skills necessary to successfully connect with an employer. Multiple key informants noted that this underlying issue may limit the effectiveness of traditional job search assistance programs for young people in this situation.

The aforementioned challenges can have the effect of preventing young people from connecting with employment opportunities for which they may be both qualified and well-suited. Youth focus group participants shared their feelings of frustration associated with their difficulties in finding work in London. Seventy percent of survey respondents indicated that they have considered leaving London to search for work in their field. Teaching young people the relevant job searching skills, including resume building, interview preparation, strong literacy skills, and how to properly demonstrate their suitability for a position, is incredibly important to allow London's young people to succeed.

## **Lack of Experience**

Many youth respondents from focus groups and online survey responses (with a range of educational attainment) reported not being able to find postings for which they had the right amount of experience. One participant noted that “[all employers are] looking for experience, but no one is willing to give it.” This can be a difficult cycle to break, as job applicants without experience are often not given the same consideration as those with more experience. Employment service providers in London note that a lack of relevant soft skills can put young people at a disadvantage when looking for work. This is particularly challenging in an economy where many older workers are also searching for jobs, as older adults tend to have more experience and have typically already developed a combination of specific workplace and soft skills. Moutenay notes that employers will often select the applicant with the most experience, whether or not that level of experience is actually required to do a particular job effectively. Furthermore, Collins suggests that older workers who have more experience and are willing to work for the same wage as younger workers may be an attractive option for an employer.

This intense competition can have a negative impact on young people who tend to have lower levels of education. Katherine Krakowski of Youth Opportunities Unlimited notes the “trickle-down effect” that can occur “when a university grad chooses a job that would have otherwise gone to a high school grad; then the high school grad is pushed to take a job that would have been given to someone without high school education.” This trickle-down effect suggests that intense competition for work will have significant effects on younger workers with lower levels of education.

## Networking

The importance of leveraging personal and professional connections to help find work was noted by young people as well as multiple key informants. One focus group participant noted that they had never found a job unless they had known someone at the organization to which they were applying. Many young people noted the benefits of volunteering at a given organization to create personal connections before applying for paid work there. Brittany Medeiros, Manager of Business Development with the London Economic Development Corporation, shared her experience of how extensive networking allowed her to gain a foothold in her chosen industry, even in circumstances where no jobs were immediately available or posted publicly. Other key informants echoed the need for young people to engage in networking activities to improve their employment prospects.

Some youth focus group participants noted they did not know how to network. Others suggested that they “don’t know anyone”; that their existing networks do not include individuals who are able to link them with employment. For young people who have recently moved to London, it can be especially difficult to gain or use connections in looking for work. One focus group participant found it “generally hard to have any idea what is actually out there beyond simply looking online, especially if you’re new to the community.” As it stands, it seems that networking is more feasible for some young people over others. In order to ensure the success of all of London’s young people, it will be important to provide opportunities where young people from all backgrounds have the ability to create important connections through networking.

One such example of a networking opportunity for all young people in London is the Student 2 Business event. The Student 2 Business networking event was lauded by multiple key informants as providing a valuable introduction to networking for students and recent graduates, as well as an opportunity for young people to make personal connections with prospective employers.

## Entrepreneurship

Recent strategies aimed at addressing youth unemployment have led to an increased awareness and understanding of entrepreneurship as a viable career opportunity for young people. Governments have also taken part in the promotion of entrepreneurship and have created initiatives at the provincial and federal levels to provide assistance for young people to start their own businesses.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> These programs include Starter Company, the Strategic Community Entrepreneurship Projects, and federal government support for Futurpreneur (among others).

A recent report refers to Canada “as an example of a G20 country with successful entrepreneurship schemes and policies in place to help spur entrepreneurship among young people” (Ernst & Young 2014). However, data from focus groups and online surveys from London indicated that few respondents have ever started their own business (4.2%), and less than half (40.7%) indicated they had ever considered starting their own business. Few focus group participants noted an interest in starting their own businesses, seemingly because many young people associated this career path with a lack of job security.<sup>7</sup>

London economist Mike Moffatt states that insufficient visibility of London’s successful entrepreneurs may limit the number of young people who may consider becoming entrepreneurs. He states that personal or professional connections with existing entrepreneurs can have a significant impact in determining whether or not someone will choose to become an entrepreneur. Survey respondents ranked not knowing how to go about being an entrepreneur as the biggest reason for not considering this path. This is a challenge for London’s young people because the community may not be accessing the full potential of successful young entrepreneurs. Information from the youth service provider groups noted that deadlines for applications to the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund are challenging for young people due to timing. Applications for this program are due in May, when young people are in school and are not able to put time and effort into an application.

## Recommendations for the Provincial and Federal Governments

**Recommendation 17:** Encourage mentorship of young people by successful entrepreneurs and support young people to make informed decisions regarding future employment opportunities, including entrepreneurship.

**Recommendation 18:** The provincial government should adjust deadlines for entrepreneurship funding to be accessible by young people who are in school at the time of the application. Deadlines for entrepreneurship funding should be respectful of the lifecycle of a young person and align important timelines with the academic calendar.

**Recommendation 19:** The provincial and federal governments should continue to invest in the expansion of paid internship programs in order to facilitate skill building opportunities for young people (CCPA).

**Recommendation 20:** All levels of government should continue to support community-based organizations that provide coaching to young people searching for employment.

**Recommendation 21:** The provincial government should update its administrative practices to ensure that funding for youth employment related programs has predictable funding cycles that are realistic, predictable, and sustained. Employment providers will be more successful in providing job opportunities to young people when funding is received on time and occurs on a predictable timeline.

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<sup>7</sup> One focus group participant had successfully started their own business and noted the fear of a lack of job security as motivation to work even harder to succeed.

## Young People Have Jobs Related to Training and Education

- Young people have jobs based on training
- Young people are satisfied with their training
- Young people are satisfied with their employment

The Child & Youth Network has identified “jobs related to training and education” as an important outcome to break the cycle of poverty and enable London’s young people to be successful in the labour market. In order to make certain that young people in London have access to opportunities that will allow them to be more successful in finding work related to their education, this section will explore how it is possible to expand these opportunities to more young people.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), a provincial, post-secondary, student-led research and advocacy group, has found that graduates who have taken part in a co-op or work-integrated learning opportunity have a distinct edge over their peers in finding employment that is related to their degree (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance 2015 ). According to OUSA, students who had some work-integrated learning as a part of their post-secondary experience were more likely than their peers to be working full-time, in a field related to their degree, and to earn more than the median average for recent university graduates with a similar degree. Students from focus groups conducted by OUSA revealed that they found these opportunities to be effective in the development of relevant workplace skills. Students across the province indicated that after participating in a work-integrated learning opportunity, they were more likely to be more comfortable in interviews, preparing resumes, and effectively communicating their learning to prospective employers.

In order to encourage employers to offer work-integrated learning experiences in the community, the provincial government should make adjustments to the existing co-op tax credit. Currently, this tax credit offsets the wages of a young person in a co-op opportunity up to an amount of \$3000 (Ministry of Finance 2010). The challenge for small or medium sized businesses is that this money comes after wages are paid, when a company files their tax return; sustaining the wages of a new employee in the short-term may not be affordable within a smaller day-to-day operating budget. Considering London’s economy is particularly reliant on small businesses – between 2008 and 2013, 96.5% of economic growth in London was attributable to self-employed business owners and small business owners (London Free Press 2015 ) – investment into small businesses can create more opportunities for not only young people, but all Londoners. In order to encourage a more diverse selection of businesses to offer co-op opportunities, the co-op tax credit should be enhanced and improved upon to make certain more companies are aware of this opportunity. Instead of paying this amount in a lump sum, it might be useful to consider monthly payment of this credit to support ongoing staff wages.

In addition to encouraging employers to offer co-op opportunities for young people, the government must work to incentivize co-op opportunities outside of the traditional STEM disciplines. The number of students who have taken part in work-integrated learning is three to four times higher among business and engineering students than in the social sciences; and yet the social sciences and humanities have significantly more students across the province (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance 2014 ). Work-integrated learning opportunities are much less likely to be available to students outside of STEM disciplines and, considering the benefit of these opportunities, it is important they are available to students from diverse program backgrounds. OUSA recommends that the provincial government set aside a funding envelope to support the development of work integrated learning outside of STEM in order to incentivize the creation of opportunities for all students (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance 2015 ). It is suggested that funding should be measured by performance in the following areas: percentage of students undertaking work-integrated learning opportunities, availability of opportunities by area of study, student and employer satisfaction with placements, and the existence of resources to support effective placements.

Understanding the benefit of work-integrated learning opportunities for all students, it is recommended the new federal government should expand their investment beyond the STEM disciplines. The federal government has invested \$40M to create more co-op opportunities for science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and business students. Knowing that co-ops are over represented in these disciplines, the government should reconsider this allocation to include the creation of work-integrated learning opportunities for all students, regardless of discipline. With STEM students 3-4 times more likely to have engaged in such an opportunity than their peers in social science, investment in more opportunities for STEM students is disproportionate. In order to prepare all of Canada's students for the work force and assist them with finding a job related to their education, these opportunities will have to be expanded.

## **Recommendations for the Provincial Government**

**Recommendation 22:** As an extension of their commitment to youth employment, the provincial government should create an accessible database of entry level job postings to be advertised in high schools and targeted towards young people.

**Recommendation 23:** The provincial government should enhance the existing co-op tax credit for small and medium businesses to include high school co-op students, in addition to post-secondary students, in order to incentivize employers to provide young people with meaningful, paid work experience.

**Recommendation 24:** The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development should create a funding envelope for universities to incentivize the development of work-integrated learning, especially outside of STEM programs.

## Recommendations for the Federal Government

**Recommendation 25:** The federal government should adjust its investment into co-op opportunities to focus on all students, regardless of discipline.

**Recommendation 26:** The London community should work to organize forums for networking that can include all young people. A good example of this is the Student 2 Business conference that is hosted by the London Economic Development Corporation every year, but it is important that these networking opportunities are open and accessible to all young people, not just young people in post-secondary education.

**Recommendation 27:** The current suite of youth jobs programming should be expanded to include teaching young people how to effectively network.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper explored the employment of young people in London through the four employment outcomes outlined in the CYN Youth Framework. These outcomes are: relevant experiences, tools, and resources; opportunities for meaningful employment; skills to build a successful career, and; jobs related to training and education. The first section of this paper examined the relevant experiences, tools, and resources young people need in order to be successful in the job market. Changes to the Employment Standards Act, increasing accessibility of co-op opportunities, and appropriate transportation were all explored as important resources for young people in London. Next, this paper examined opportunities for meaningful employment for young people in London. This section looked at the increasing precarity of employment for young people, considered the current opportunities for young people on behalf of the literature, academics and feedback from young people, as well as an examination of entrepreneurship and unpaid internships in the local economy.

The next CYN employment outcome stresses the importance of having relevant skills to build a successful career. Within this section of the paper, an overview of existing government programs was provided, as well as a discussion about the challenges with which London's young people are faced in gaining necessary job skills. Young people in London eluded to the major skills challenges as support for job searching, lack of experience, and skills associated with networking. In the last section of this paper, jobs related to training and education were further explored. This section specifically focused on the effectiveness of co-op and work-integrated learning opportunities. This section provided recommendations to expand the existing co-op tax credits to assist small and medium business and to expand the number of opportunities available to students outside of the traditionally co-op heavy STEM disciplines.

The precarious nature of work has had, and will continue to have, an increasing impact on all Londoners. London's young people are particularly vulnerable to precarious work and as such, it is important that young people have access to the tools needed to be successful in the job market. Strong, adaptable, and prepared young people are the future of London and supporting them to achieve these four outcomes will serve to break the cycle of poverty and to build a stronger community for all of London.

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# Appendix A: Summary of Recommendations

## 1. Young People Have Relevant Experiences, Tools, and Resources

- Young people are engaged in meaningful opportunities to gain practical career and education skills
- Young people have employability skills
- Young people have resources and relationships to facilitate entry into employment or self-employment
- Young people have careers that fit with the needs of the market
- Young people have exposure to employment or self-employment opportunities

## Access and Affordability of Co-Op Programs

### Recommendations for the Provincial Government

**Recommendation 1:** OSAP should change their policies to evaluate co-op fees as mandatory and include this fee in a student's overall financial needs assessment.<sup>8</sup> If co-op fees are added to a student's financial needs assessment, students who require financial support to participate in these programs will be supported by the OSAP program, reducing barriers to participation and allowing students from all economic backgrounds the chance for equal participation.

**Recommendation 2:** The Ontario government recently made changes to the tuition payment schedule for students paying the majority of their tuition with OSAP to allow students to pay once OSAP money had been received. This exception should be coordinated with the payment of co-op fees to allow students receiving OSAP to pay their co-op fees within a reasonable time after they have received their OSAP money and/or have begun their paid employment opportunity. This will better allow students with low income to make payments of co-op program fees, making these fees more financially accessible.

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<sup>8</sup> This change would include co-op fees with a student's total tuition fees, providing the student with enough money to pay for the co-op program.

## Transportation

### Recommendations for the Provincial Government

**Recommendation 3:** The provincial government should invest in the enhancement of Ontario Works benefits by expanding allowable employment related expenses<sup>9</sup> to working-age young people aged 14-18. The Ontario Works legislation should be amended to support transportation costs for working age youth that are pursuing employment opportunities.

**Recommendation 4:** Transportation should be a mandatory benefit paid by the province for all Ontario Works recipients over the age of 18.

### Recommendations for the Provincial and Federal Governments

**Recommendation 5:** As an extension of the provincial and federal governments' commitment to supporting youth employment, funding should be allocated to London in order to improve the transit system. The Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy and the Canadian Youth Employment Strategy will be more successful if young people in London, across Ontario, and throughout Canada have the means to access the new opportunities that will be made available to them through these government sponsored employment programs. Enhanced investment in transportation infrastructure will help to support all Canadians in search of long-term employment opportunities. Reliable and affordable access to transit will help to ensure both the participation and success of youth employment programs in London.

## 2. Young People Have Opportunities for Meaningful Employment

- Young people have economic independence
- Young people secure their first quality employment experience
- Young people are employed or self-employed

## Precarious Employment

### Recommendations for the Federal Government

**Recommendation 6:** The Youth Employment Fund, a federal youth jobs program, should have continued investment from the federal government, and be accompanied by additional guidelines that ensure the positions created provide decent wages. It should also offer a training component and create genuine opportunities for advancement and permanent employment (Ontario Common Front et al 2014). This would enhance the ability of this program to create not only meaningful employment opportunities for young people, but also the ability to create strong training opportunities to increase the ability of young people to succeed in future jobs.

<sup>9</sup> Employment related expenses for Ontario Works recipients may be provided to help cover the costs of child care; clothing or uniforms; safety shoes or work boots; tools and special equipment; transportation; and licensing or professional fees if the recipient is starting a full-time job. To be eligible for this support, the recipient must be over the age of 18.

**Recommendation 7:** The federal government should continue to evaluate and improve Employment Insurance and consider how the program affects Canada's young people. With precarious employment becoming more and more common place, it is important that social supports that are available to Canadians do not discriminate based on age or amount of time spent in the workforce. In the last federal budget, the government announced changes to the eligibility requirements for EI. Before these changes, to be eligible for EI, an individual had to have accumulated 920 hours of work in the previous 52 weeks. This has now been adjusted to 420-700 hours of work in the 52 weeks prior to the claim, depending on the unemployment rate for the region in which they live. These changes will make it easier for young people to access benefits but the government should continue to consider how programs such as EI are working to benefit young people and should be consistently reevaluated to ensure there are limited barriers to participation in such programs.

## **Unpaid Internships and the Employment Standards Act**

### **Recommendations for the Provincial Government**

**Recommendation 8:** Extend the rights of an employee in the Employment Standards Act to include all employees, regardless of their relationship to the employer. All employees should be eligible to apply under the ESA for the protection of their rights.

**Recommendation 9:** The Ministry of Labour should continue to crack down on unpaid internships through random blitzes and hold employers accountable for breaking the law and continuing to offer unpaid employment opportunities. Employers in contravention with this law should be made public in an effort to deter others from continuing to offer and create new illegal internships.

**Recommendation 10:** The provincial government should conduct a thorough review of the exemptions currently offered by the Employment Standards Act to determine the impact of these exemptions on young people.

**Recommendation 11:** Place a time limit of no more than 90 days with no period of renewal for unpaid internships offered under special exemption in the Employment Standards Act. After 90 days is complete, the job must be filled with a paid employee; regulations should be put into place to make sure certain special exemptions are not over utilized to replace the position of an otherwise paid employee.

**Recommendation 12:** Following the changes proposed in Bill 64, the provincial government should create an Advisory Council on Work-Integrated Learning. This advisory council would consult with the Ministry of Labour on opportunities to create more paid work-integrated learning opportunities and to recommend ways to reduce the number of unpaid opportunities.

**Recommendation 13:** The Employment Standards Act should be amended to protect high school and post-secondary co-op students and afford them the rights of all other employees, whether paid or unpaid.

**Recommendation 14:** The Ministry of Labour should create an anonymous, third party complaint system so young people feel comfortable coming forward with concerns about potentially illegal unpaid internship opportunities. Currently, to make a complaint to the Ministry of Labour, you must provide your identity, and this deters many young Ontarians from exercising their rights for fear of reprisal from the employer.

**Recommendation 15:** The government should work alongside employer groups and relevant stakeholders to address the societal need for more long-term employment opportunities.

### **Recommendations for the Federal Government**

**Recommendation 16:** The Federal Government should revisit the private members bill, the “Intern Protection Act,” and enact the following changes: 1) expand the definition of an employee; 2) create more strict conditions around which an employee can be unpaid, and; 3) require employers to keep records of the amount of hours that are worked without pay.

## **3. Young People Have the Skills Necessary to Build a Successful Career**

- Young people have skills for employment or self-employment
- Young people are satisfied in their careers
- Young people start businesses
- Young people lead successful businesses
- Young people have defined career paths

## **Entrepreneurship**

### **Recommendations for the Provincial and Federal Governments**

**Recommendation 17:** Encourage mentorship of young people by successful entrepreneurs and support young people to make informed decisions regarding future employment opportunities, including entrepreneurship.

**Recommendation 18:** The provincial government should adjust deadlines for entrepreneurship funding to be accessible by young people who are in school at the time of the application. Deadlines for entrepreneurship funding should be respectful of the lifecycle of a young person and align important timelines with the academic calendar.

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## 4. Young People Have Jobs Related to Training and Education

- Young people have jobs based on training
- Young people are satisfied with their training
- Young people are satisfied with their employment

### Recommendations to the Provincial Government

**Recommendation 22:** As an extension of their commitment to youth employment, the provincial government should create an accessible database of entry level job postings to be advertised in high schools and targeted towards young people.

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**Recommendation 27:** The current suite of youth jobs programming should be expanded to include teaching young people how to effectively network.



# **Youth Employment Recommendations**