

Youth Employment Trends

An Overview of
Youth Employment
in London



Child & Youth Network

The CYN would like to thank the young people who took the time to share their stories and experiences. Your input was invaluable to the creation of this paper.

Meet the Authors

Laura Orton

Laura received her B.A. (Honours) in Psychology from Carleton University then went on to receive her M.A. in Applied Social Psychology from the University of Saskatchewan. Laura's research interests focus on forensic psychology, program evaluation and research, and bringing evidence-based practice into policy. Although Laura now happily works at Western University, she has experienced the downfalls of the current employment landscape. Laura is hopeful that increased research and attention to current employment standards issues and conditions will bring about a better and more secure future.

Patricia Mockler

Patricia recently graduated from King's University College at Western University with an Honours Double Major in Political Science and Social Justice and Peace Studies. At the time of writing, she was employed as a teaching assistant at her alma mater, a peer tutor at The Write Place at King's University College, and a sales associate at Downie Street Bakehouse. As of September 2015, she will be pursuing a Master's degree in Political Studies at Queen's University in Kingston. Her research interests include political participation by youth, social movements, and women's representation in formal political structures.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to the following people for contributing their knowledge and expertise about youth employment in order to create this paper.

Robert Collins,

Director of Workforce Development with the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)

John Grundy, PhD.,

Postdoctoral Scholar, School of Occupational Therapy, Western University

Katherine Krakowski,

Career Services Team Leader with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU)

Brittany Medeiros,

Manager of Business Development with the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC)

Mike Moffat,

Assistant Professor at the Ivey Business School

Chris Monteiro,

Case Worker with Housing and Social Services

Debra Mountenay,

Executive Director of the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board

Darlene O'Neil,

Senior Manager with Employment and Student Entrepreneurial Services

Steve Pellarin,

Executive Director of the Small Business Centre

Debbie Rudman, PhD.,

Associate Professor, School of Occupational Therapy, Western University

An additional thank you to the following organizations who shared their expertise with the Child & Youth Network.

Employment Sector Council of London and Middlesex (ESCLM)

Hutton House

Literacy Link

Pathways

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU)

Table of Contents

About this Paper	7
Why it Matters	7
What we Asked	8
What we Learned	8
Current Youth Employment Trends	9
Youth Employment Trends across Canada, Ontario, and London	9
What we Heard... From the Literature	14
What we Heard... From Young People	15
What we Heard... From Academics	16
A New Indicator: Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)	17
Precarious Employment Scales	17
References	19
Appendix A: Survey Results	20

About this Paper

Youth employment is the fifth topic in a series aimed at identifying systemic problems contributing to the cycle of poverty experienced by Londoners with recommendations for specific changes to break this cycle. This is the first of two papers about the nature of youth employment in London. This paper, “Youth Employment Trends” will provide an overview of the data surrounding youth employment in London, providing a better understanding of the nature of this issue in our community. This paper will describe local youth employment trends, share local stories, and provide local perspectives in order to inform recommendations to the provincial and federal levels of government, which will be provided in the second paper of this series. Information in this report was gathered from Statistics Canada data, a review of the literature on youth employment, consultations with local stakeholders and academics, youth-serving employment agencies, the economic and employment sector, and a sample of youth age 15-29.

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 in breaking the cycle of poverty.

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. In the current social climate, there is increasing doubt about the ability of post-secondary education to guarantee young people a future career.

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 youth in London and break the cycle of poverty. 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 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 and provide meaningful opportunities that provide income security and a greater quality of life.

What we Asked

Through conversations with young people and other relevant stakeholders in our community, the following questions were asked to help guide the recommendations provided in this report:

- What is the context of youth employment in London, as told by the data and by young people?
- What are the causes contributing to this context?
- What can be done to address these causes?

What we Learned

From conversations with the community about youth employment, there were several overarching themes identified:

- Youth employment in London was worse in 2014 than it was in 2007, demonstrated by lower employment, lower participation in the labour market, higher unemployment, and a wider gap between youth and adult labour market outcomes
- In 2007, almost 1 out of 2 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were working, with more working full-time compared to part-time. In 2015, 1 out of 2 young people were working, predominately in part-time employment (London CMA)

The Government of Ontario estimates that almost 12% of young people aged 15 to 29 are "Not in Employment, Education, or Training" (NEET). In London, that translates into 9,675 young people.

- Some of the challenges young people experience include:
 - Information and networking barriers
 - Lack of experience and limited opportunities to gain relevant experience
 - Quality of available work; the changing nature of work towards more precarity

Current Youth Employment Trends

Youth Employment Trends across Canada, Ontario, and London

Like other Canadians, young people across the country are still feeling the effects of the global economic recession, most notably through a lack of stable, full-time employment. Ontario's young people have been particularly affected with an unemployment rate of 16-17%. This was the second highest unemployment rate in 2013 behind Newfoundland, and even higher than the national youth unemployment rate of 13.5-14.5%. Unfortunately like the rest of Ontario, London's numbers have not significantly improved since the end of the recession.

London, along with Windsor, Oshawa, and Brantford, all had youth unemployment rates above 20% in 2013, with London's youth unemployment rate just over that margin at 20.3% for young people aged 15 to 24.

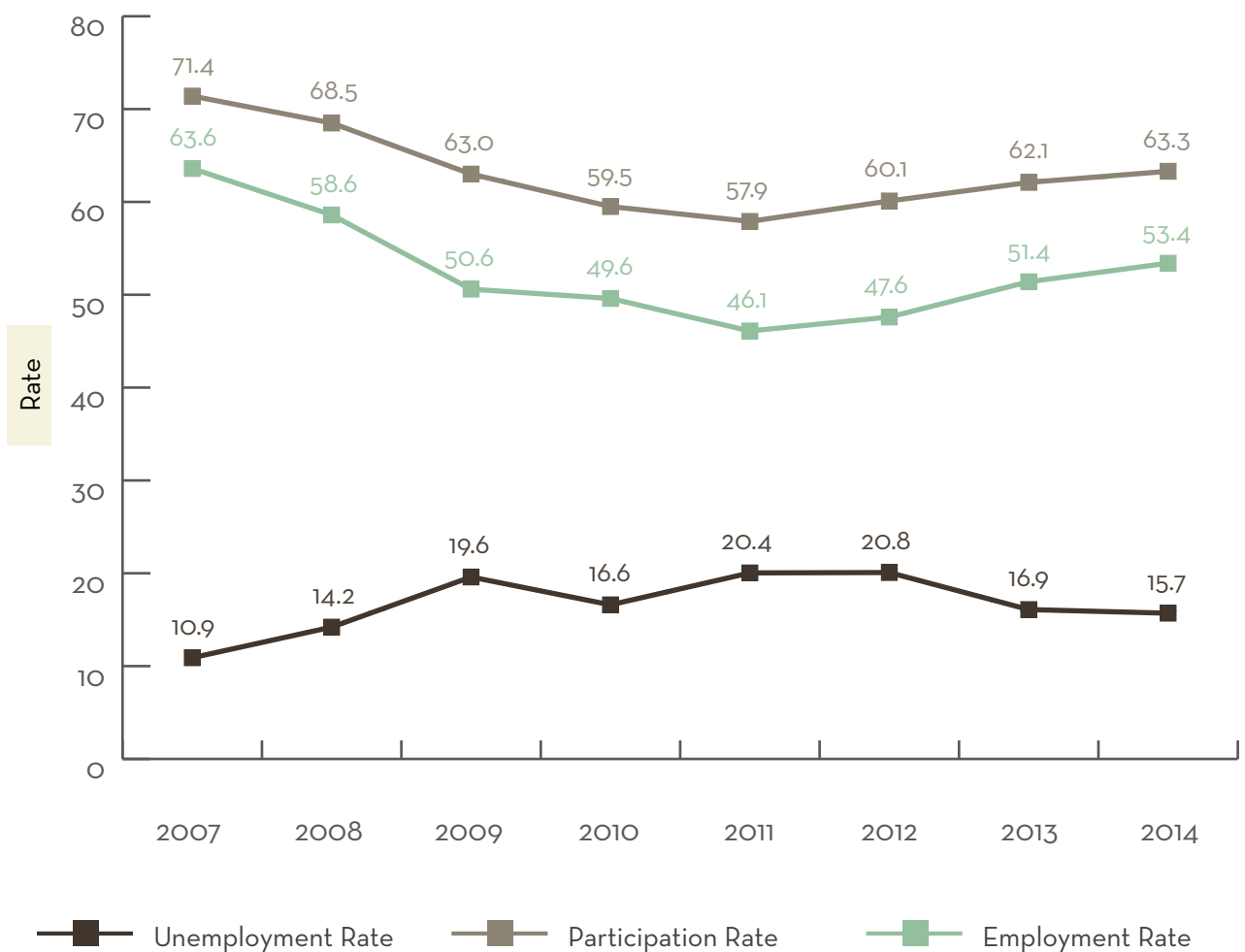
That rate is stark compared to the unemployment rate for adults aged 25 and older of just 6.4% (Foster 2013). More specifically, there is a 13.5 percentage point gap between the employment rates of young people and adults in Ontario (Foster 2013). This is particularly poignant at the provincial level, as Ontario was the only province with a percentage gap in the double digits.

London's low employment rates are further exacerbated by an increasing trend of precarious, part-time employment as an increasingly shared experience for a number of young people. In a 2013 report, CIBC noted that many young people are caught in a cycle where they do not have enough experience to get a job, but are never given a job opportunity in order to gain that necessary experience. This cycle has resulted in at least 14% of labour force non-students aged 20 to 24 working part-time jobs involuntarily, often when they would rather have regular, full-time employment (Tal 2013). Many of the young people caught in this situation can be defined as underemployed. Underemployment can refer to two distinct but related situations: 1) someone who is working fewer paid hours than they would like; or 2) the training or skills of the worker are not being utilized by the job they are performing (Certified General Accountants of Ontario 2012).

The most recent data from Statistics Canada shows the total population of young people aged 15 to 24 in the labour force in 2014 was 70,600, 44,700 (63%). The majority of those young people in the labour force were employed, 37,700 (84%), almost equally split between part-time employment (20,700, 55%) and full-time employment (17,000, 45%). A further 7,000 young people were unemployed, accounting for 16% of the labour force and nearly 10% of the total population.

While these statistics point to significant challenges of the current state of London's youth economy, there are certain government programs specific to youth that have the ability to enhance their employment opportunities. Strategies from the provincial and federal governments are being introduced, or are being updated in order to meet the changing demands of today's youth employment. As well, more of London's community organizations are taking a serious interest in helping young people succeed both educationally and financially.

Youth Employment in the London CMA



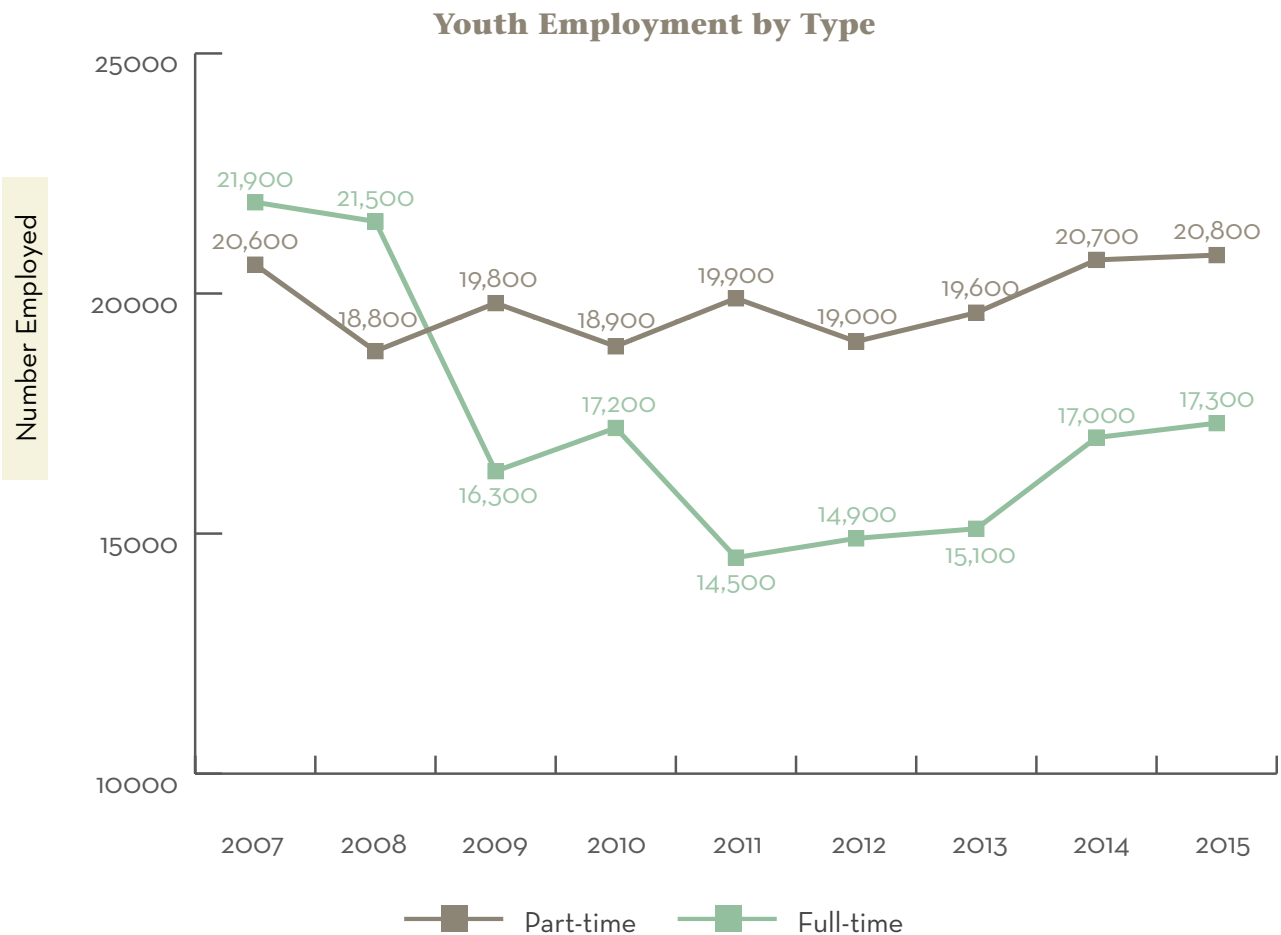
Youth Employment in London – The Data

Youth employment is on an upward trend after hitting a low point in 2011:

- Between 2007 and 2011, the employment status of young people age 15 to 24 was on a downward trend
- 2011 marked a low point for youth employment, with low participation, low employment, and high unemployment
- Since 2011, it appears that youth employment in London is improving, with more young people employed or participating in the labour force, and fewer young people unemployed

An increasing share of employment is part-time, though the trend may be reversing:

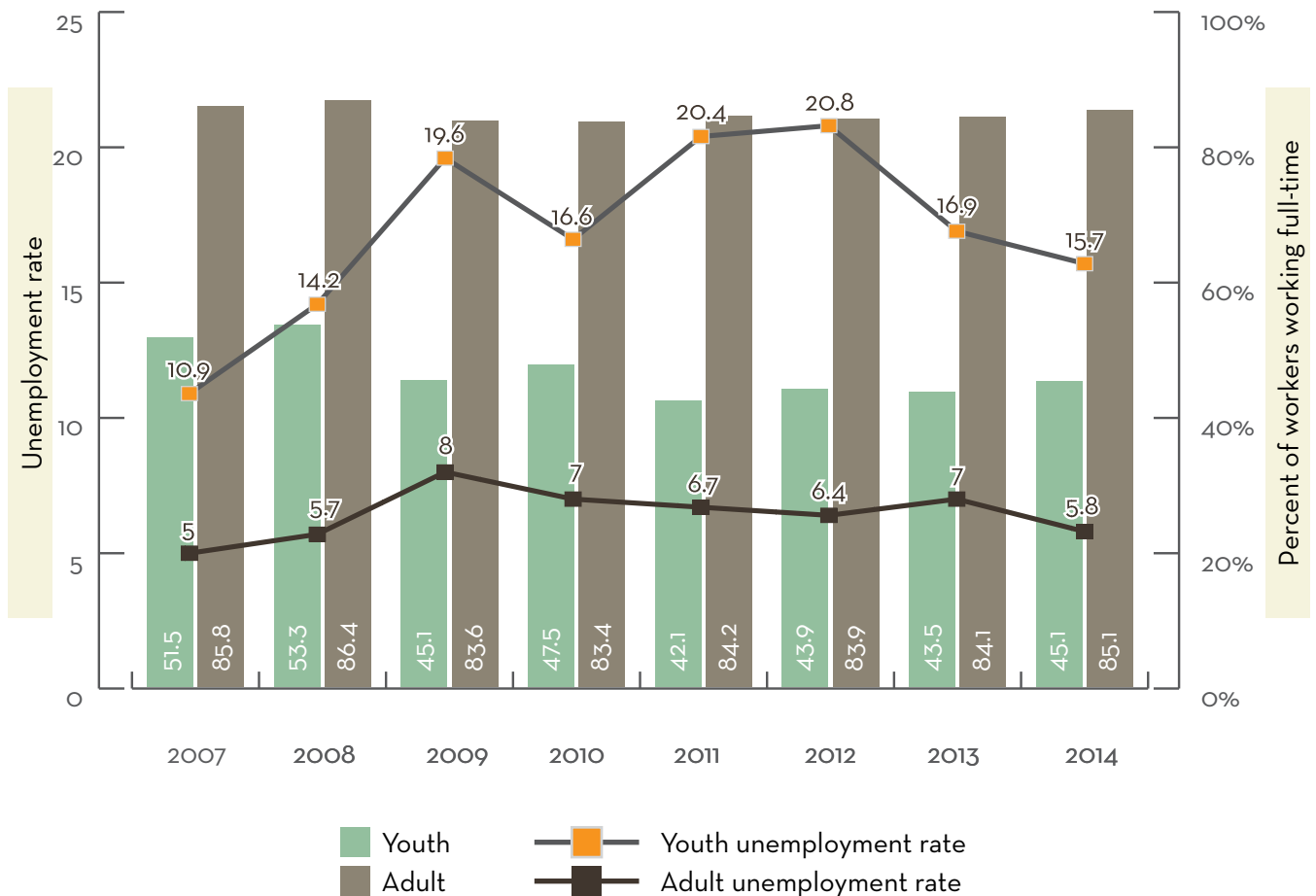
- In 2007, 51.5% of employed young people were working full-time
- This dropped to a low of 42.2% in 2011
- Since 2011, full-time employment is increasing
- In 2015, 45.4% of employed young people worked full-time



London's young people have fallen behind adults in the labour market:

- While the gap in unemployment rates between youth and adults over the age of 25 - which widened between 2007 and 2012 - has slowly begun to close, the youth unemployment rate is more than 2.5 times as high as the adult unemployment rate. In 2007, youth unemployment was 2.2 times as high as the rate for adults
- While the proportion of adult workers with full-time employment has dropped 0.7 percentage points from 85.8% to 85.1%, the proportion of young people with full-time employment dropped by 6.4 percentage points, from 51.5% to 45.1%

Adult and Youth, Selected Employment Indicators



2014 youth employment levels in London match Ontario, however more London young people worked part-time:

- Ontario's youth unemployment rate in 2014 was 15.6%, the employment rate was 52.2%, and the participation rate was 61.9%
- 54.9% of London's young people worked part-time compared to 52.1% across Ontario

Data Sources:

Statistics Canada. Table 282-0129 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by census metropolitan area based on 2011 Census boundaries, sex and age group, annual (persons unless otherwise noted)
(accessed: August 20, 2015)

Statistics Canada. Table 282-0087 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and age group, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, annual (persons unless otherwise noted)
(accessed: August 20, 2015)

What we Heard... From the Literature

Young people in London are facing a new employment landscape where precarious work is more often the rule rather than the exception. Young people encounter numerous obstacles to overcoming precarious employment. According to a report by the Ontario Common Front, in partnership with several other organizations, 33% of Ontarians are currently experiencing precarious employment, often without stability or benefits (Ontario Common Front et al 2014). Further, Scott (2014) noted that the number of young people aged 15-24 in temporary employment positions has increased by almost five percentage points since 1997, reaching 29.9% in 2013. The increase in precarious work has also affected the number of young people left with no other options than temporary, part-time work, or to return to school (Law Commission of Ontario 2012). On top of economic concerns, young people in precarious employment have higher instances of workplace injuries and are less likely to report them for fear of negative consequences (Law Commission of Ontario 2012). Moreover, young people in precarious employment are also more likely to work “longer hours under informal, intermittent and insecure work arrangements” (United Nations Division for Youth, Social Policy and Development 2010).

What we Heard... From Young People



In focus groups conducted for this report, participants discussed challenges they have faced while working in precarious employment. One challenge was the difficulties associated with inconsistent funding for the non-profit sector. According to young people in the focus group, inconsistent funding of non-profit organizations may be contributing to more precarious work opportunities by preventing organizations from providing stable employment opportunities while funding is in flux. One young person recounted an experience their sister had: “I know from my sister’s experience. She’s had a temporary full-time job for the last 4 years. She has gone from contract to contract to contract. It’s been a one year contract renewed for 6 months, then 4 months, then a year, and there’s no certainty.” As well, many young people noted the lack of stable work currently available:

“I feel like there will never be job security. There is no such thing as a job for life unless you’re super lucky, but there’s nothing like a pension plan anymore.”

Multiple focus group participants noted that they have to decide between doing work they are passionate about for little or no pay without any type of job security and working in a more secure position that does not match their skill set or interests.

Focus group participants also indicated they had to take involuntary part-time positions when they would rather be working full-time. Some young people noted that employers do not always allow people to have more than one job at a time, and as one focus group participant mentioned,

“They pay you for 30 hours so that you’re not a full-time employee. They give you enough so that you just don’t qualify - we will make you almost the maximum, but not allow you to do the maximum.”

Moreover, young people noted in the focus groups and the online survey that they have been paid in cash or had employers who attempted to pay them for less than what was owed.

Even when employed, young people often experience negative workplace environments. Focus group participants remarked that they have felt disposable, easily replaced, and that their ideas were not valued or taken seriously.

Focus group participants also mentioned how some work environments can feel “toxic” from competition among coworkers and a constant fear of being fired.

What we Heard... From Academics



John Grundy and Debbie Rudman from Western University's School of Occupational Therapy provided insights about the current problems facing young people. Rudman notes that the challenges young people are currently facing are not being overlooked by academics and service providers:



What we're finding in policy frameworks is an increasing acceptance that this is the new world of work; precarious employment is here to stay... Young people themselves and their expectations about what work is going to be have been structured to align with precarious employment."

This sentiment was echoed by Grundy who noted that "Policies have been promoting labour market flexibility for a long time now, 20 years, 30 years, and it seems to me that kind of short-term thinking has prevailed... policies haven't balanced this need to provide meaningful work, stable job opportunities. The direction over the past few years has been toward flexibility exacerbates inequality that creates barriers for people who want to progress with careers."

Rudman also spoke of the effects that precarious employment can have on young people beyond economic concerns: "Not just people's income but sense of security, ability to plan, and there's also literature to show that this affects health and wellbeing, family cohesion; this affects so many things beyond just income." She also noted that beyond precarious work becoming the new reality for young people, service providers are aware of issues facing young people and are working to create a system that will overcome them: "This problem is bigger than a demotivated client or an individual who is not willing to improve their skills; they're working in a way that's against the grain in terms of not individualizing this problem of precarious employment or unemployment; growing social-political awareness that this problem is bigger than any one person coming through this door."

Zizys (2011) has also commented on the challenges of collecting employment benefits: "Changes to EI rules require more weeks of work to qualify for benefits, but as jobs have become more precarious, more tenuous labour contracts have made it more difficult to accumulate the necessary weeks to qualify." Furthermore, Grundy noted, "if precarious workers can't acquire enough hours during the qualifying period to be eligible for EI, [it is] going to disproportionately affect young people and provisions in EI for new entrants into the labour market."

A New Indicator: Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET)

It is estimated that in 2013, 11.6% of young people aged 15 to 29 in Ontario were not in education, employment, or training. Young people that fall under this category are at a higher risk of persistent poverty and social exclusion (Province of Ontario 2014). As stated, it is estimated that there are 9,675 NEET youth in London. These young people are particularly vulnerable and are an important population when considering improvements to youth employment. Fifteen percent of youth respondents to the survey conducted for this report could have been categorized under the NEET indicator, reaffirming the number of NEET young people in London.

To gain a better understanding about youth employment in London, an online survey was conducted of London youth age 15-29. The complete results of that survey can be found in Appendix A. Information from the survey suggests that “not knowing where to look for work,” a lack of transportation, and having a “resume [that was] not good enough” were the most frequently reported reasons for lack of current employment. NEET youth were most likely to look for work through friends and family, looking at an individual company’s website, and through online job banks (the Federal Government, Charity Village, Monster Jobs). Employment search engines like Career Jet, Wow Jobs, Indeed, and Eluta were also noted as one of the top ways they look for work. Less frequently used methods were job boards at their school or university or visiting employment agencies like Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Employment Help Centre, Pathways, or Goodwill.

NEET youth face many challenges in looking for employment. 36% of survey respondents indicated they were not sure where to look for a job, 28% said their resumes were not good enough, 29% said they had a lack of transportation, 3% said they had a lack of appropriate clothing, 48% said they had a lack of networking opportunities, 66% said they had applied to jobs but were not successful, and 40% said they had received interviews for jobs but were not successful.

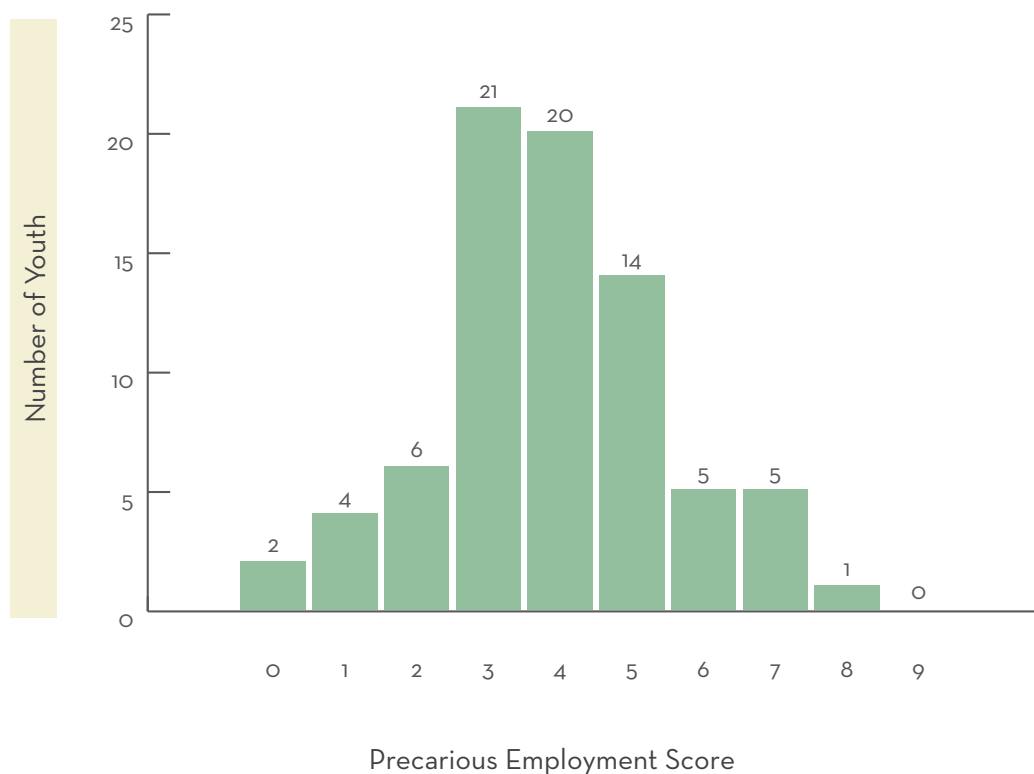
Precarious Employment Scales

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). Young people are particularly vulnerable to precarious employment opportunities. Those in precarious forms of employment often find themselves without healthcare coverage usually provided by employers (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 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).

In an online survey conducted for this paper, young people were asked to answer nine questions adapted from a precarious work survey from Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) (2013). Young people were shown nine statements and were told to indicate which statements were true for their current job, or to select “not applicable” if they were not currently working. Total scores ranged from 0 to 9. These questions were designed to examine factors such as the type and stability of employment, the number of hours worked, and wages and benefits received. Following the categories named in the PEPSO report, 12 young people were categorized as being securely employed, 41 young people were stably employed, 19 young people were vulnerably employed, and 6 young people were precariously employed. The table below displays the frequencies of precarious employment scores for young people.¹

Precarious Employment Scores for a Sample of London Youth



¹Women's Community House. (2015). 2014/15 Annual Report. Retrieved from <http://shelterlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2014-5-WCH-Annual-Report-WEB.pdf>

References

- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. 2015. "Delivering the Good: Alternative Federal Budget 2015."
- Certified General Accountants of Ontario. 2012. "Youth Unemployment in Canada: Challenging the Conventional Thinking?"
- Foster, Karen. 2013. "Youth Employment and Un(der) Employment in Canada: More than a Temporary Problem?" Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Law Commission of Ontario. 2012. "Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work."
- Ontario Association of Food Banks. 2008. "The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario."
- Ontario Common Front. 2015. "Backslide: Labour Force Restructuring, Austerity and widening inequality in Ontario."
- Ontario Common Front et al. 2014. "Addressing Youth Unemployment & Under Employment: Submission to the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities."
- Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario. 2013. It's more than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-Being. McMaster University Social Sciences and the United Way.
- Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario. 2013. "It's More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-Being."
- Province of Ontario. 2014. "Realizing Our Potential: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy 2014-2019."
- Tal, Benjamin. 2013. "Dimensions of Youth Employment in Canada." CIBC World Markets Inc.: In Focus 1-5.
- United Nations Division for Youth, Social Policy and Development. 2010. "Fact Sheet: Youth Unemployment."
- Zizys, Tom. 2011. Working Better: Creating a High-Performing Labour Market in Ontario. Metcalf Foundation.

Appendix A: Survey Results

Limitations. There are a number of limitations of the online survey to note. First, a non-random convenience sample was utilized for adult and youth stakeholder engagement. Second, the responses of three 14 year olds who completed the online survey were included in the analyses, despite the definition of a young person as between the ages of 15 and 29. The survey responses of these three young people were included due to the fact that they could be in the same academic year (just with later birthdays) as the 15 year olds who completed the survey, and would therefore be in the same position with similarly relevant responses. Third, there is the possibility of inaccurate responses to the online survey due to a respondent misreading a question or selecting the incorrect response for their situation. For example, a survey respondent may have not understood when it was more appropriate to select “no” versus “not applicable” to a certain question. Fourth, there may have been additional confusion related to questions that used “current work situation” in the question wording. The question wording could have been more specific and could have more clearly stated that respondents should only answer certain questions according to their employment status (e.g., employed or not). Lastly, our definition of youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 is in accordance with the Province of Ontario’s definition of young people, but is a wide range that covers different stages of life. For example, young people who are 16 years old and do not have to support themselves may have fewer financial obligations than young people who are 27 years old and likely have financial liabilities and/or dependents.

Demographics. The online survey was completed by 118 young people between March and April, 2015. Participants were recruited through focus groups, word of mouth, and social media platforms. There were 17 respondents aged 14 to 17, 43 aged 18 to 21, 36 aged 22 to 25, and 22 aged 26 to 29. The average age of young people who completed the survey was 21.7 years old. The majority of survey respondents were female (n = 86, 73%) and Canadian citizens (n = 105, 89%). Respondents' highest education levels achieved by age group are displayed in Table 1. Overall, 69 youth (58.5%) reported they are currently in school or a training program, 36 youth (30.5%) are working while also in school or a training program, and 13 youth (11%) who are not working reported that they are enrolled in school or a training program because they could not find employment opportunities.

Table 1. Highest level of education achieved for survey respondents by age group (n = 116).

	14 to 17 (n = 17)	18 to 21 (n = 42)	22 to 25 (n = 35)	26 to 29 (n = 22)
Less than high school	15 (88.2%)	3 (7.1%)	0	0
High school diploma or equivalent	2 (11.8%)	20 (47.7%)	3 (8.6%)	2 (9.1%)
College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma	0	3 (7.1%)	4 (11.4%)	2 (9.1%)
University certificate below bachelor level	0	3 (7.1%)	1 (2.9%)	0
University degree, certificate, or diploma at or above bachelor level	0	13 (31.0%)	27 (77.1%)	18 (81.8%)

Current Work Situation. In total, 66 (56%) respondents are currently working. Of those who are not working, “cannot find work” (n = 30) and “concentrating on school” (n = 27) were the most frequent reasons why they were not working. When asked why employment is important to them, the most frequently reported answers were “need to support myself” (n = 96), “gaining work experience” (n = 93), “building my resume” (n = 84), “extra money for myself” (n = 83), and “saving for school” (n = 50). Many youth also indicated that employment was important to them in order to pay off debts and student loans (n = 6), to support their family (n = 33), and to feel a sense of independence (n = 3) and contribution to a particular field (n = 3). For young people who are currently working, just over one-third have only one job (n = 41, 34.7%), but some reported having two to five jobs. The majority of these are permanent part-time positions (n = 24, 20.3%), although participants indicated having a variety of job types: permanent full-time (n = 13, 11%), temporary part-time (n = 17, 14.4%), temporary full-time (n = 10, 8.5%), contract (n = 20, 16.9%), casual or temporary (n = 16, 13.6%), and self-employed (n = 6, 5.1%). Of the 66 participants who indicated they are currently working, just over half (n = 34, 51.5%) said they are working in the field they want to be in.

Similarly, only a slight majority of youth (n = 37, 56.1%) who are working reported that they are working as much as they want to be. In contrast, some young people (n = 21, 31.8%) are working less than they want and others (n = 13, 19.7%) are working more than they want.

In terms of satisfaction, a majority of young people stated they are either somewhat satisfied (n = 25, 21.2%) or very satisfied (n = 22, 18.6%) with their current work situation. A smaller proportion of young people stated that they are somewhat dissatisfied (n = 14, 11.8%) or very dissatisfied (n = 6, 5.1%) with their current work situation; only seven young people (n = 5.9%) indicated that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their work situation. Young people were also asked if they had received appropriate levels of training while at their current or most recent job. A majority indicated that they had received appropriate on-the-job training (n = 72, 61%) and appropriate health and safety training (n = 79, 67%). When asked if their current work situation allowed them to be financially independent, only 23 (19.5%) said yes whereas 25 (21.2%) said no, and 21 (17.8%) said somewhat.

Precarious Work. Young people were asked to answer nine questions adapted from a precarious work survey from PEPSO (2013). Participants were shown nine statements and were told to indicate which statements are true for their current job or select “not applicable” if they are not currently working. These questions were designed to examine factors such as the type and stability of employment, the number of hours worked, and wages and benefits received. Table 2 shows the distribution of responses for the precarious work index.

Table 2. Precarious employment index for young people.

I usually get paid if I miss a day's work.	16 (20.5%)
I have one employer, who I expect to be working for a year from now, who provides at least 30 hours of work a week, and who pays benefits.	11 (14.1%)
In the last 12 months, my income varied from week to week.	41 (52.6%)
It is likely that my total hours of paid employment will be reduced in the next 6 months.	12 (15.4%)
In the last 3 months, I often worked on an on-call basis.	13 (16.7%)
I know my work schedule at least one week in advance.	52 (66.6%)
In the last 3 months, a portion of my employment income was received in cash.	7 (8.9%)
I receive other employment benefits from my current employer(s) such as a drug plan, vision, dental, life insurance, pension, etc.	15 (19.2%)
My current employment would be negatively affected if I raised a health and safety concern or raised an employment rights concern with my employer(s).	11 (14.1%)

Looking for Work. Young people indicated they look for employment opportunities through a variety of sources. Word of mouth through friends and family was the highest rated response (84, 71.2%) followed by online job banks including Service Canada and Charity Village (76, 64.4%), an individual company's website (73, 61.9%), employment search engines including Career Jet and Eluta (61, 51.7%), the job board at a high school or university (46, 38.9%), websites like Kijiji (43, 36.4%), or physically visiting an employment agency like Pathways, Goodwill, or YOU (32, 27.1%). Young people also noted they look for work through fitness centres, the Boys and Girls club, hospital websites, networking events, and in the newspaper. Only a small group of respondents indicated they look for work through temp agencies (13, 11%) or have ever gotten a job through a temp agency (17, 14%).

Young people who completed the online survey were also asked to indicate what kind of challenges they have experienced when looking for work. Applying to jobs but not being the successful candidate (78, 66.1%) was the highest rated challenge followed by receiving an interview for a job but not being the successful candidate (48, 40.7%), a lack of networking opportunities (48, 40.7%), being unsure of where to look for a job (43, 36.4%), not having a good enough resume (34, 28.8%), a lack of transportation (34, 28.8%), English as a second or additional language (5, 4.2%), and a lack of appropriate clothing (4, 3.4%). Participants also noted that having a lack of experience was a challenge for them when trying to find work in a competitive market, as well as a lack of jobs available that are not part-time, competition with other (often older) generations for the same positions, and a lack of meaningful employment in their field. The majority of respondents (82, 70%) indicated that they have considered moving out of London to find a job in the field they want.

Career Development. The vast majority of respondents know what kind of work they want to do in the future (89, 75.4%) and feel as though they have learned the skills necessary to get the job they want (88, 74.5%). A smaller number of young people (25, 21.2%) were not sure what kind of work they want to do and were unsure if they have learned the necessary skills (16, 13.6%). Again, the majority of respondents (78, 66.1%) felt that they are getting or have received the information needed to help them decide their future education, while only 20 (16.9%) participants were unsure of this. Just over half of young people surveyed (69, 58.5%) believe the work they will do when they complete their education will allow them to be financially independent, while 7 (5.9%) said no, and 25 (21.2%) were not sure. Moreover, almost all respondents (105, 88.9%) are hopeful that in the future they will gain employment that they will like.

Entrepreneurship. Only a small number of survey participants (5, 4.2%) have ever started their own business, and only 48 (40.7%) indicated that they have considered starting their own business. When asked what would stop them from becoming an entrepreneur, the highest rated response was that they were not sure how to go about it (64, 54.2%), followed by not being able to afford it (59, 50%), not thinking they were that kind of person (52, 44.1%), not interested in being an entrepreneur (48, 40.7%), and not thinking they have the right skills (42, 35.6%). Only a quarter of participants (30, 25.4%) had heard of the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund through the Ontario provincial government.

Internships, Apprenticeships, Work Placements, and Volunteering. Young people were asked to indicate the level of experience they have with internships, apprenticeships, work placements and/or co-ops, and current or past volunteering. As shown in Table 3, the majority of young people had no experience with internships or apprenticeships, but nearly 40% of young people had completed a work placement or co-op.

Table 3. Youth level of experience with internships, apprenticeships, work placements, and co-ops.

	No experience	Started, but not completed	Completed
Internship (n = 110)	89 (80.9%)	5 (4.5%)	16 (14.6%)
Apprenticeship (n = 108)	104 (96.3%)	3 (2.8%)	1 (0.9%)
Work placement/Co-op (n = 115)	57 (49.6%)	11 (9.6%)	47 (40.8%)
40 hour high school volunteer requirement (n = 116)	6 (5.2%)	10 (8.6%)	100 (86.2%)
Additional volunteering (n = 116)	17 (14.7%)	24 (20.7%)	75 (64.6%)

Participants were also asked to report on whether they were supposed to be paid and were paid for these positions, if they received appropriate on-the-job training, if they were mentored in their position, if they learned new skills, and if they found the position to be valuable. Tables 4 to 6 display these results for internships, apprenticeships, and work placements/co-ops respectively.

Table 4. Youth experiences with internships.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
I was supposed to be paid for my work (n = 94)	10 (10.6%)	11 (11.7%)	73 (77.7%)
I was paid minimum wage or higher (n = 93)	8 (8.6%)	9 (9.7%)	76 (81.7%)
I was informed of my safety & training rights (n = 90)	13 (14.4%)	5 (5.6%)	72 (80.0%)

Table 4. Youth experiences with internships.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
I was mentored, given help and guidance at work (n = 88)	13 (14.8%)	3 (3.4%)	72 (81.8%)
I learned new skills that will help me in the future (n = 89)	16 (18.0%)	2 (2.2%)	71 (79.8%)
I found the experience to be valuable (n = 88)	13 (14.8%)	3 (3.4%)	72 (81.8%)
The experience assisted me in finding full-time work (n = 88)	9 (10.2%)	7 (8.0%)	72 (81.8%)

Table 5. Youth experiences with apprenticeships.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
I was supposed to be paid for my work (n = 85)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	81 (95.2%)
I was paid minimum wage or higher (n = 85)	1 (1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	82 (96.4%)
I was informed of my safety & training rights (n = 85)	3 (3.5%)	1 (1.2%)	81 (95.2%)
I was mentored, given help and guidance at work (n = 85)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	81 (95.2%)
I learned new skills that will help me in the future (n = 84)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	80 (95.2%)
I found the experience to be valuable (n = 85)	2 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)	81 (95.2%)
The experience assisted me in finding full-time work (n = 84)	1 (1.2%)	3 (3.5%)	80 (95.2%)

Table 6. Youth experiences with work placements/co-ops.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
I was supposed to be paid for my work (n = 99)	8 (8.1%)	43 (43.4%)	48 (48.5%)
I was paid minimum wage or higher (n = 101)	7 (6.9%)	39 (38.6%)	55 (54.5%)
I was informed of my safety & training rights (n = 99)	40 (40.4%)	13 (13.1%)	46 (46.5%)
I was mentored, given help and guidance at work (n = 98)	44 (44.9%)	8 (8.2%)	46 (46.9%)
I learned new skills that will help me in the future (n = 97)	46 (47.4%)	5 (5.2%)	46 (47.4%)
I found the experience to be valuable (n = 99)	47 (47.5%)	5 (5.0%)	47 (47.5%)
The experience assisted me in finding full-time work (n = 99)	24 (24.2%)	20 (20.2%)	55 (55.6%)

Focus Groups. Focus groups were held with 47 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 to have a more in-depth discussion about how they are treated in the workplace, challenges they have encountered while looking for employment, and their experiences with and opinions of internships, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, and work placements/co-ops. Focus groups were held with young people through Youth Organizing Leadership Opportunities (YOLO), which is affiliated with LUSO Community Services, Middlesex London Health Unit, Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), Volunteer YA, and the London Youth Advisory Council (LYAC).

Current Challenges at Work. Participants indicated they have experienced negative situations in the workplace. Some respondents mentioned that their wages have been paid in cash under the table, or that attempts had been made to pay them less than what they were owed. Young people also mentioned they feel as though their ideas are not taken seriously or that they feel they are considered to be “disposable” by their employers. Further, some participants indicated that there were instances of intergenerational animosity in the workplace where there was ageism against both the youngest and oldest workers. As one participant noted, “As a young person in an older adult dominated setting, I struggle to feel included and taken seriously. I often do not feel appreciated for the work that I do, and even once my concerns are voiced, little is done to change the situation.”

In terms of precarity, respondents noted that it is difficult to be constantly searching for and applying to jobs, and it is difficult to find a job that offers full-time hours on a permanent basis, instead of variable hours or temporary contracts. Some young people also mentioned their lack of employment stability affected their ability to plan for their immediate and long-term futures: they might have to decide between moving home with their parents or hoping they will have enough money to pay rent for two more months, or decide between working in the field they want for lower wages and fewer hours or working more secure hours in a field that is not related to their education or skill set.

Looking for Work. Many young people mentioned they find themselves in a difficult cycle where they cannot find a job because they do not meet the experience requirements of the employer, but no employers are giving them a job opportunity that would let them gain that necessary experience. As one participant said, “everyone is looking for experience, but no one is willing to give it.” According to another young person, “I have found that when employers are looking to hire a worker, they are usually trying to find someone with a lot of work experience in the field. It becomes difficult as a new graduate to find work if I do not have any work experience in my field.” As such, many young people turn to volunteer opportunities to gain experience in their field and for networking opportunities. Participants noted the importance of networking, but also referred to limitations of this approach. Some stated that “they don’t know anyone,” and suggested 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 when looking for work: “I find it’s generally hard to have any idea what is actually out there beyond simply looking online, especially if you’re new to the community.” Other challenges respondents noted when applying for work includes a lack of professional references to offer to a prospective employer, and competing with older individuals who have much more on-the-job experience. One respondent suggested that a job database should be created for opportunities that require no experience, which could be advertised at high schools; they suggested the name “noexperience.com.” Transit was also highlighted as a challenge that young people sometimes face, specifically with the cost of a bus pass and being dependent on the bus’s schedule to get to work on time. It was suggested that there should be subsidized bus passes for high school students to match the type of assistance currently available for college and university students in London.

Opinions also varied on work placement and co-op experiences offered through schools. Some young people stated they can be fun experiences and give you an idea of what a particular job would entail. Other young people noted that the quality of the experience depends greatly on the placement; some placements were likened to “free labour,” and offer little opportunity for real skill development. Other placements were considered to be valuable and enable participants to develop transferable skills or a better idea of future career goals. In terms of apprenticeships, participants stated that apprenticeship positions are hard to obtain, even after relevant college programs and information about apprenticeships is not very accessible or discussed in high schools. Multiple respondents noted the success that Germany has had with their well-integrated apprenticeship program and stated that would be a good model of better practices.

Many young people also noted the necessity to “encourage companies to accept co-op students. This makes the students gain experience.” Similarly, another participant said that “more co-op or placement services will give the young people more experience and could lead to more permanent positions.”

Future Prospects. Young people were divided when discussing the accessibility of work. Some believed that it is possible to find work if you put in the effort, whereas others believed that there are few opportunities available right now. Of particular and time-sensitive concern was the topic of summer jobs, where many participants felt that employers are not likely to hire young people and train them for a four-month long position, or for only two months if they are in high school. Many respondents also noted they are not sure where to start looking for work and often require assistance to improve their resumes and other job search skills. Young people also mentioned that some employers do not want their workers to have more than one job at a time, which can put constraints on employees who may require extra income to support themselves. It was recommended that young people be encouraged to look for positions that are not directly related to their training, but that draw on skill sets developed through education. Feelings of fear and anxiety were common when planning on how to pay off tuition fees and student debt, as well as when trying to make plans for the future without having an income or any stable prospects.

Further, young people mentioned that the requirement for pre-work training or certificates presents a barrier to finding work, coupled with experiences where employers do not want to pay for or provide extensive training. Networking was also noted by respondents as a necessary component to finding employment, and stated they often rely on friends and family to hear about opportunities or to be offered a position. As shown in the online survey results, few young people showed an interest in becoming entrepreneurs because the income was viewed as not stable or secure. Further, the early-May deadline for the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund applications conflicted with students’ school schedules. However, one participant was optimistic about their future as an entrepreneur, suggesting young people should simply “follow [their] passion and the money will come.”

Service Provider Focus Group. Six individuals from service-providing community organizations participated in a focus group to discuss London’s youth employment situation. These individuals came from Hutton House, Pathways, Literacy Link, the Employment Sector Council of London and Middlesex (ESCLM), and Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), though the opinions expressed by these individuals were their own. When asked to describe the picture of youth employment in London, the service providers stated that increasing unemployment, the increasing number of young people on Ontario Works (OW) benefits, and the number of entry-level jobs requiring 2-3 years of experience are clear barriers and challenges to young people gaining employment. One service provider also brought up the prevalence of NEET youth specifically, suggesting that if these young people are not participating in the programs currently offered, those programs are not working for this particular group of young people and other strategies should be developed to engage them.

The service providers noted similar barriers to employment as those described by the young people who participated in the focus groups and completed the online survey. One service provider indicated that there needs to be a stronger connection between secondary school courses and young people's career plans. Technology and reliable transit/transportation were also raised as concerns by the service providers. One service provider noted that many young people will have their phones cut off, or will not have enough calling minutes on their cell phones to receive and respond to calls from potential employers, making it even more difficult for them to find work. In light of this type of situation, some service providers are using alternative means of communication like Facebook or text messages to connect with young people and engage with potential employers. Furthermore, some service providers noted that there are some young people around the ages of 18-22 who have never had a job before, and can, at times have different philosophies and lack soft skills necessary to succeed in the job market. Communication skills, cell phone usage, and workplace behaviours were all noted as areas where young people often differ from older adults, and have a disadvantage when competing with these adults for the same work. One service provider also mentioned that there should be a greater understanding among young people that a job opportunity is less of an entitlement to certain benefits than an opportunity to earn those benefits, to prove oneself, and to develop credibility.

When asked about federal programs, the service providers viewed Skills Link as a good program, but did note that the disbursement of its funding is sporadic, so they are never certain if they will have funding for specific programs or know how many young people they can serve under their funding constraints. One service provider noted that many young people they work with would benefit from programs in the community, but do not hear about them until the deadlines have passed. One service provider suggested that there should be a schedule of programs across London organizations available to all organizations and the public. Another service provider noted that the Canada Summer Jobs program is not always successful, as organizations often only receive information about how much funding they will receive in April or May, even though applications are due in December.

Similarly, when asked about provincial programs, the service providers noted that the Ministry of Advance Education and Skills Development's summer job service program has not increased their funding in line with the recent increases in minimum wage. One service provider noted that current provincial programs that help people who are currently employed do not help unemployed young people, but ideally they would help adults move up in the workplace opening up entry level positions for young people. Another service provider recommended that community organizations better coordinate efforts between each other in order to share information about which group has how much funding to most effectively and efficiently provide services for London's young people. Another service provider noted that provincial funding puts pressure on programs to outline and indicate outcomes and success levels. This service provider suggested that there is a need to change how success is measured, and that there is a disconnect between the stated goals of the province and the allocation of funding and other program supports.

Service providers suggested that an initiative that could work for London would be to increase the importance of innovation, something they noted that was not often rewarded at the ground level. Changing this perspective could increase the amount of innovative programming in London that could reach young people in different ways to meet their diverse needs. Another service provider posed the question that if young people are not attending programs or they are attending, but not succeeding, “who owns that?” This service provider said that we need to change success indicators from the top down and from the bottom up, and that we should not always point the finger at young people when they are not succeeding.

Key Informant Interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with individuals highly involved in London’s employment, economic, and social service sectors. Specifically, interviews were conducted with Chris Monteiro, learning, earning and parenting Ontario Works case worker; Steve Pellarin, Executive Director of the Small Business Centre; Darlene O’Neil, Senior Manager with Employment and Student Entrepreneurial Services; Brittany Medeiros, Manager of Business Development with the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC); Robert Collins, Director of Workforce Development with the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC); Mike Moffat, Assistant Professor at the Ivey Business School; Katherine Krakowski, Career Services Team Leader with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU); and Debra Mountenay, Executive Director of the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board. Insights gathered from these interviews was used to guide this paper.

About the Child & Youth Network

The Child and Youth Network (CYN) is composed of over 170 agencies and individuals that span the education, health, recreation and social services sectors. The CYN supports *happy, healthy children and youth today...caring, creative, responsible adults tomorrow.*

The CYN is dedicated to helping build strong families and breaking down the barriers that put our children, youth and families at risk. We do this by collectively planning, facilitating collaboration, building awareness, providing education and improving access to services.

The CYN began in 2007, with about 50 members and a vision to create a brighter future for our children. In September of 2008, the network committed to a set of priorities, goals and strategies to achieve the best for our children, youth and families, setting out an ambitious plan agenda for our work up to 2015. In this Child and Youth Agenda, we identified four priority areas, which we believe are the key to happiness and health among children, youth and families: Ending Poverty, Making Literacy a Way of Life, Leading the Nation in Health Eating & Healthy Physical Activity, and Creating a Family-Centred Service System.

The Child and Youth Agenda continues to guide our work today, and has resulted in significant progress toward our goals. In only five years, the CYN has grown to include over 170 member organizations, As a result of our growing community support, we have been able to build a network of committed organizations and a portfolio of successful initiatives focused on strengthening the lives of our children, youth and families.

To contact the CYN, please email cyn@london.ca



Youth Employment Trends

An Overview of Youth Employment in London