

Youth with Disabilities

System Change for Lifelong Career

Research Brief

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ontario is developing an initiative with the MaRS Solutions Lab (MSL) to examine and address the persistent trend of underemployment for youth with disabilities (YWD). MSL is an intensive research and design environment, featuring multi-disciplinary researchers and practitioners focused on examining a particular problem from a systemic, holistic viewpoint. The MSL framework provides a unique opportunity for the Government of Ontario to sponsor the intensive examination of the multiple factors that contribute to complex socio-economic issues from a multi-sector perspective.

A joint submission from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) titled "Improving the Transition to Employment for Youth with Disabilities" was one of three successful submissions selected by Cabinet Office (CO) and MSL for further research and design.

A preliminary research team from MCSS, MCYS and CO met at the MaRS MSL offices over the course of four sessions in Spring 2013 to develop the following project brief (See page 12, Appendix B: Preliminary Research Team for list of team members and contributors).

While the information presented in the brief is a high level snapshot of the existing environment, it is not meant to direct the MSL research team towards a particular solution, program or demographic within the disability community. It is meant to establish a framework for further research and engagement in the MSL environment to improve the employment of YWD in Ontario.

2. ISSUE

Employment is crucial to youth development. Critical life-skills such as self-efficacy, social skills, self-regulation, support networks and self-confidence are developed through employment. Yet Canada's youth are facing an employment crisis. The youth (ages 16-24) unemployment rate is currently 14.2 percent, approximately double the national unemployment rate (Statistics Canada, 2008)¹. Higher rates of post-secondary education means that there are more youth with higher level qualifications that are competing for entry-level and/or temporary positions that make it more difficult for youth to establish independence (Frenette 2004)².

The 2008 recession is still impacting youth, leading to an increasing employment rate gap between youth and adults. This effect is felt more strongly in Ontario than any other province in Canada.³ The continued effects of the recession have resulted in increased competition for entry

level employment opportunities. In this environment youth may not gain valuable early experience and are more likely to be laid off as they have less seniority than more experienced workers.⁵ While this may seem like a temporary problem, prolonged unemployment increases the likelihood of future joblessness and can decrease future wages for up to 20 years⁴. For the youth population in general, entering the labour market in a severe downturn can result in reduced earnings, greater earnings instability, and more spells of unemployment over 10 to 15 year period (Fong 2012). Research has also shown that employers are not attempting to engage with youth to develop young employees through recruitment and training at the same rate that they might have in the past^{5,6}

The detrimental effects of unemployment and/or underemployment are felt even more acutely by YWD. They experience even higher rates of unemployment than their similarly aged peers and without early employment experience; YWD could miss opportunities to establish a life-long path of success. While the challenges are obvious, there is little research or data available to understand the true scope of this project, the barriers that youth encounter and the programs available that could address the issues.

In term of current programs, it appears that services are fragmented across ministries and service providers and it is not clear whether employers are being effectively engaged in understanding the problem of, or finding solutions to, careers for YWD. Most programs focus on training clients for generic positions - not on career formation and life-long employment, and do not provide adequate support to locate positions for successful clients.

What we do know is that youth with disabilities are likely to have disabilities categorized as mild or moderate (70.2%) with the remaining reporting to have disabilities that are severe or very severe (29.8%). Among youth with disabilities, 69.4% reported that they have more than one type of disability. The most recent figures available related to the employment of YWD are from 2006 and show that 21.9% of those in the 15-19 age bracket as being jobless (compared to 15.9% for those without disabilities). The jobless rate for youth with disabilities in the 20-14 age range is 15.1% compared to 9.9%% for those without disabilities. This data does not consider the effects of the 2008 recession and subsequent effects on employment generally and youth employment specifically and it is unlikely that the rates have improved.

This project brief establishes a foundation for further research by MSL to research and develop solutions that address the following policy questions:

- Why is the unemployment rate for YWD higher than the youth unemployment rate in general? What are the real underlying causes?
- What can the Government of Ontario do to improve the opportunities for YWD to have meaningful lifelong career and growth?
- Where are the possible levers for system change and improved employment rates?

3. PROBLEM

The preliminary research team conducted a brief examination of the economic and social environment faced by YWD seeking employment and discovered a number of potential barriers to employment. However, research and data on this population, the current effectiveness of programs and services offered by the government of Ontario and others, and the population's employment outcomes is sparse and/ or out of date. Early work on this topic suggests that prior to identifying innovative ways of approaching the problem, more research and exploration is needed to establish what the most pressing issues are.

Problem Statement: The Government of Ontario seeks further research on the causal factors that lead to the higher rates of unemployment and underemployment of YWD in comparison to the youth population and population in general in order to develop potential solutions.

4. BENEFITS OF IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT RATES OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Not only do improving employment rates for YWD present a number of benefits for this population but also for the Province of Ontario and its citizens. Improved employment rates for YWD would reduce the cost of social assistance in the province as identified in the final report of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario's, *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario*. Any improvement in YWD or PWD employment rates would improve PWD self-reliance by reducing their dependency on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and public expenditures. Nevertheless, it is likely that improving the employment rate for YWD would reduce the cost of social assistance for the government of Ontario, ease the burden on families of YWD, and increase self-reliance for YWD. The 2011 Federal Labor and Income data show that household and personal income rates are approximately \$20,000 lower for PWD at all age ranges.⁷ Lower household income data for PWD could indicate the inability of YWD to obtain high-wage employment in the current marketplace but as well the need for disabled individuals to live at-home longer relying on family or friends for financial support. Greater economic independence for PWD would also relieve parents and guardians of the need to support some PWD financially, improving their financial and personal health.

The expected shift in Ontario's economy provides additional employment opportunities for youth and YWD to enter the labour market provided they have the right skills, training and networking opportunities to connect with employers. According to Ministry of Finance projections, the anticipated retirement of the baby boom population will create workforce deficits of some 600,000 by 2021, and should pass the one million mark by 2031⁸. Moreover, the nature of the economy is changing to include more technically skilled, knowledge-based positions and can provide employees the flexibility to work from home. This shift in employment presents an excellent opportunity to train, coach and employ YWD in long-term careers and industries as positions become vacant, and a shifting economy that demands novel skill sets.

Improving employment outcomes for YWD would also address social diversity and inclusion goals of the Province. Younger generations have been raised with diversity and inclusion as values, and they may want to see these values mirrored in the organizations that they work for. Providing effective transitional support will allow organizations to successfully integrate a greater complement of youth – and eventually adults – with disabilities into the workplace.

5. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Transitioning from school to employment is a crucial life stage for all youth. Life and work skills taught in school may not match employer needs. All youth experience the difficulties of this transition to some extent, but as youth transition from adolescence to adulthood, either advanced education or first jobs allow youth to gain the necessary skills such as improved self-reliance, self-agency and financial independence. It is hypothesized that YWD face additional barriers to entering the labour market as compared to their peers in their age group and that this may impact their overall transition to adulthood. The headings below outline some of these additional barriers:

Education

Labour market success for all new entrants is increasingly tied to post-secondary education (PSE) as two-thirds of anticipated openings are for jobs requiring PSE or management experience. Currently, YWD have a 26% lower university participation rate than their non-disabled peers, and 11% for college participation. The difference in PSE participation rates mirror trends established in high school where dropout rates are 9% to 26% higher for disabled students.⁹ PSE institutions are making efforts to become more accessible and provide programming geared towards the YWD community.

Service Integration and Accessibility

Although there is a range of local and province-wide employment programs and supports for YWD, these supports are provided through a number of different ministries and may not be effectively coordinated to provide service to clients. It is also difficult to determine what efforts, if any, are taken to coordinate training provided by the federal, provincial and municipal governments during the transition from education to employment. PWD who wish to access disability specific employment supports must apply to ODSP Employment Supports in order to be referred to a service providers that can help them access training provided by an Employment Ontario agency or other community-based organizations.¹⁰ Furthermore, Employment Ontario funding for employment training and skills development for PWD are disjointed, administered through a variety of funds, offered by a number of providers and can be implemented in significantly different ways depending on the training being sought.

The Ontario Commission on Social Assistance final report *Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario*¹¹ spoke to the need to integrate training programs for both SA and ODSP clients and streamline Employment Ontario programming to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of Ontario employment training and job matching programs and services. The process of applying for disability training benefits results in a feeling of incapacity for PWD and encourages distance from the labour market.

Further, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario reported that persons with disabilities (PWD) are not provided with equitable access to publically provided training opportunities as people without disabilities. ODSP recipients are reported as having fewer employment training opportunities than social assistance recipients. ODSP is perceived to categorize PWD as being able or unable to work upon entrance into the social assistance system, thus, restricting the potential supports received by YWD and their future employment prospects when ODSP does not make such claims. The ODSP disability adjudication process only determines if an individual has a limitation or restriction in one of three areas: in maintaining personal care; in the work environment; and, in social / community functioning. Employment and

career planning is left to the expertise of the service providers contracted to deliver ODSP Employment Supports.

Public training accessibility is exacerbated by an apparent reduction in training opportunities that are being provided by private employers (Mourshed, Farrell, and Barton, 2013)¹² (Fischer, 2013)¹³. Both of these factors contribute to exclusion from the labour market and a barrier to accessing additional supports to improve PWD employment rates. (Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario. 2013)¹⁴.

Given these barriers to employment training supports, disabled youth may have little option but to withdraw from the labour market. More research must be done to determine the number and categories of disabilities which are excluded from employment training opportunities and the efforts taken to improve the integration and collaboration of services to streamline support for YWD.

Employer Misconceptions and Needs

Recent reports from the Canadian federal government, the Ontario government and various disabilities think tanks have all signalled that people with different types of disabilities can be well integrated into the work force (Government of Canada, 2013; Lankin, F. & Sheikh, M. A., 2012). These reports also discuss the need to shift the focus of employment training efforts from creating a “supply” of workers (i.e. YWD) through training and skills development to increasing employers “demand” (i.e. labour market and employer) for YWD in the employment market. Matching the needs of the employer to the abilities of the youth employee is still a major challenge and a key area of research and solutions development for further exploration.

While employees with one or more disabilities are ready to work and actively seeking employment, they may require additional support to socially integrate into the workplace, communicate their personal and professional needs to their employers, or accommodations to alleviate physical limitations.¹⁵ Employers often view these concerns as a major obstacle to hiring disabled employees. For example, the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) report, *Rethinking Disability in the Private Sector*,¹⁶ conducted a survey of Canadian private sector employers and existing research and identified a number of these “myths”:

- Workers with disabilities should be placed in roles where safety is less of an issue because they are more likely to have accidents
- Workers with disabilities do not perform well and require extra supervision.
- The cost of accommodating a person with disabilities is prohibitive.
- Most people with disabilities use wheelchairs.

The misconceptions about people with disabilities’ ability to make contributions equal to that of their coworkers and the accommodation costs associated with their employment create barriers to employment that are difficult to assuage without changing employer perceptions.

Lack of Data/Research

Unfortunately, due to a lack of current and/or complete research and longitudinal data on the transition to employment for YWD it is difficult to determine which of the above barriers, or in what combination, are most important or prevalent. For example, when do these barriers present themselves – is the barrier in the transition from the secondary education system into the job market, or do YWD face barriers to future success as early as elementary school? If we can

identify barriers, what interventions are most appropriate and when? Which barrier presents the biggest challenge and should be handled first? While research and data are sparse, the higher unemployment rates and lower salary expectations over the course of YWD careers indicate that these barriers - cultural and systemic - inhibit personal and professional growth opportunities.

6. RESEARCH NEXT STEPS/PROJECT NEXT STEPS?

Compiling the research for this brief was hampered by a lack of available, timely data and longitudinal data on YWD employment and career choices. The available information is also unable to provide a narrative for the causal factors that lead to positive YWD employment outcomes. Further, the data cannot be readily linked to secondary and post-secondary education participation, Employment Ontario training program outcomes or industry specific employment rates. More robust data sets may have to be identified or created in order to create a holistic narrative of the causes of disabled youth unemployment and outcomes of current efforts to rectify recurring unemployment trends.

While the focus of this project is to examine barriers to employment for YWD it must be recognized that all jurisdictions are currently experiencing problems with youth employment, generally. The effects of the 2008 recession created barriers for all youth in the labour market. These barriers should be examined during the course of this project in order to determine the distinct issues faced by YWD in the market, but as well to examine the broad issues that could lead to greater assistance to unemployed youth more generally.

The preliminary research provided a number of sources that claimed to identify causal factors that limited employers drive to hire YWD. For instance, DuPont industries conducted a widely cited study on PWD employment in the workplace and purported to present employer attitudes towards PWD hiring practices¹⁷. However, the study has been identified as being anecdotal at best, not scientifically conducted and being heavily biased to demonstrate the inclusivity of DuPont and other industrial employers¹⁸. Employer reticence to hire PWD remains largely a mystery. It is unclear at this time if the low levels of employment for YWD relates to employer reticence to hire them, or whether they possess lower skills due to other factors. Further research must be conducted to separate these two distinct problems faced by YWD.

Further, research indicates that not all YWD or PWD face similar barriers to employability. Statistics Canada data indicates that employment rates for PWD are varied by the type and severity of the disability¹⁹. Clearly a one-size fits all approach will not be able to reconcile the needs of a diverse demographic. We can assume that visual and auditory impaired YWD will face different barriers, and require different kinds of training and accommodation than YWD with intellectual disabilities or severe learning disabilities. Further research is required to determine the barriers to employment faced by different classifications of disabilities; the variety of services that are available to serve the needs of the population; and, potential access barriers to employment programs and services for persons with severe disabilities.

Preliminary research was also hampered by the lack of a comprehensive system map of YWD employment services and programs within the province of Ontario. While transition planning between the different service systems is an important point of research, a suite of programs and services have not been compiled to analyse their integration or the effectiveness of their design and provision. A better understanding of current training programs and services could also provide examples of successful programs that consistently provide marketable skills that lead to job opportunities, and potentially careers for youth and YWD.

Given the preliminary research presented above, the following research questions are suggested to guide the next phase of work by MSL.

What is the demographic profile of YWD in relation to employment?

- What barriers do YWD face in obtaining meaningful employment and careers? What employment inhibiting factors are unique for YWD and do not have a detrimental impact on youth in general?
- What are the common characteristics of YWD that are meaningfully employed (especially those with significant impairments)? Who are those who have meaningful careers?
- Which categories of disability or impairments of YWD are disproportionately unemployed or underemployed?

How do current economic trends and the current labour market impact YWD?

- Is this an issue of disabled youth unemployment and underemployment or a broader issue of youth unemployment?
- What are the sectors and jobs where YWD have had most successes, and the ones with the least?
- Are there regional differences in YWD employment rates? If so, what are the implications of regional employment rate differences?

What support and training programs are currently available? How effective are they?

- What does the service landscape look like? Who are the key players and what services and supports do they offer?
- What is their primary focus and targeted outcomes of available supports? What demographic are they directed at? Who provides them?
- Are current programs and services effective? If not, what are the issues that must be addressed in current programming?
- Are current training and support programs geared to locate meaningful employment for YWD?
- How can we balance the need to serve a large demographic of YWD with diverse skill sets and needs, current calls for fiscal austerity and the need to provide personalized supports for YWD to achieve their desired employment goals?
- How integrated are training and education programs provided by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Training, Colleges and University and Ministry of Economic Development Trade and Employment?
- What are the most effective interventions for improving employment rates for YWD? When should intervention take place? (Secondary school? Transition period?)

What is the employer's perspective?

- How well are programs and services offered to YWD to obtain employment meeting the needs of employers?

- How are employers integrated into the education and training design process? How are employers engaged to participate, if at all?
- Do employers value YWD or PWD employment? What efforts are being made in the private sector (independent of the public sector) to improve PWD employment rates?
- How can we dispel the myths surrounding the employment of disabled youth as illustrated in the HRSDC report? (work place safety, performance/supervision issues, accommodation costs, most disabled individuals use wheelchairs)

7. APPENDIX A: RESOURCES AND STAKEHOLDERS

People with lived experiences

- National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)
- Wheel Trans Community (on transportation issues)
- TDSB Alternate Schools, such as Inglenook Community School
- Provincial Residential Schools (E.C. Drury [deaf], Brantford [blind], etc.)
- Canadian Association of the Deaf and other disability organization

Other ministries

- Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities – Employment Ontario, internships and other programs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment – various economic and job stimulation programs/funds, Accessibility Directorate, Youth Job Creation priority in budget 2013:
 - Ontario Youth Employment Fund
 - Ontario Youth Entrepreneurship Fund
 - Ontario Youth Innovation Fund
 - Business-Labour Connectivity and Training Fund
- Ministry of Labour

Other governments

- Federal government; Municipal governments
- School boards

Employment and diversity innovators

- Social Capital Partners (SCP) applies market-based approaches to address systemic social challenges and produce long term impact. SCP focuses their efforts on solving employment challenges faced by over 1M Canadians by partnering with private, public and non-profit organizations to make the path to employment quicker, simpler and more effective.
- Essential Skills Ontario (ESO) works to find the most innovative, efficient and effective solutions to provide low-skilled adults with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly-changing world.
- Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a social policy research organization based in Canada, with a focus on designing, implementing and evaluating large-scale demonstration projects.
- Randy Lewis, SVP Supply Chain and Logistics, Walgreens. Transformed the company's distribution centers and employment opportunities. Walgreens' two newest distribution centers employ an inclusive and integrated workforce composed of 40% of PWD.

- Career Edge / Ability Edge – paid internship program for recent Canadian graduates who have identified as PWD
- Ability First Coalition – brings employers together to share best practices and experiences related to hiring and retaining PWD.
- Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)
- Canadian Association for Community Living; Community Living Ontario
- Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion (IRIS)
- The Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion (CIDI-ICDI)
- HRSDC Rethinking Disability In The Private Sector panel members
- Pasi Sahlberg, Helsinki – Director General Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation – speaks to school boards internationally about holistic Finnish school system and curriculum

Experts and academic institutions

- Peter Szatmari, Professor and Vice-Chair, Research, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, at McMaster University. Canadian researcher of Autism and Asperger syndrome.
- Dr. Sally Lindsay, Scientist at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and Assistant Professor in the Departments of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy and the Graduate Department of Rehabilitation Science at the University of Toronto.
- National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR)
- Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- CANCHILD Centre for Childhood Disability Research, McMaster University
 - Peter Rosenbaum
 - Debra Stewart
 - Matt Freeman (was advisor on the development of CanChild’s Youth KIT)
- Marg Spoelstra, Executive Director, Autism Ontario

Employer Outreach and Engagement

- Employers: TD Canada, RBC, Tim Horton’s, Shoppers Drugmart, Starbucks, McDonald’s
- Human resource and employment agencies: Adecco, Randstad, Manpower Group, Aon, Ian Martin Group, David Aplin Group
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)
- Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Association; Food Processors of Canada
- Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO); Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association; Ontario Public Service HR
- Kiwanis, Lion’s Club
- Startups and investors
- Local chambers of commerce, trade associations, Business Improvement Areas, trade and business associations
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- High skills employer with robust recruitment programs (e.g. Deloitte)

Labour

- Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Unifor, Ontario Public Services Employees Union

Community outreach and engagement

- College/Universities Students Associations

Schools, Colleges and Universities

Service providers

- Employment Ontario support service providers
- ODSP employment supports service providers
- Other community services and supports providers

8. APPENDIX B: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH TEAM

This document is a synthesis of preliminary research and discussions by policy experts and managers from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), Cabinet Office (CO) and the MaRS Solutions Lab.

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Susan Paetkau (Contributor)	MaRS	OPS Fellow, MaRS Solutions Lab

9. ENDNOTES

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