

# Future Skills Centre Podcast

## Episode 1: Youth Employment and Skills Training for an Inclusive Recovery

*We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.*

**We know that COVID-19 has had disproportionate economic impacts on certain groups, including women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and newcomers to Canada. We are experiencing an undesirable “K-shaped recovery” where certain individuals and sectors recover more quickly than others.**

This episode highlights key challenges facing certain groups—such as Indigenous students and youth more broadly—when it comes to education and employment during the pandemic. We make the case for a more inclusive skills training strategy, that give all workers the skills to navigate a changing economy (and provides businesses the workers with the skills to help them adapt to future technological changes and economic shocks).

Kory Wilson from BCIT, and Chris Duff and Erick Pelayo Aubert from the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity join us to share their perspectives.

### Guests

Kory Wilson – Executive Director, Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships, BCIT

Chris Duff – Executive Lead, Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP)

Erick Pelayo Aubert – Undergraduate student and Coordinator, CCYP

### Host

Linda Nazareth

### Links

Future Skills Centre and Conference Board of Canada links, such as recommended articles and webpages, social media handles, etc.

#### Future Skills Centre Homepage:

<https://fsc-ccf.ca/>

#### Future Skills Centre Twitter:

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#### The Conference Board of Canada Homepage:

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#### Recovery for All: Finding Equities in Education and Employment:

<https://www.conferenceboard.ca/futureskillscentre/sounding-tours>

#### Hire Next Tool:

<https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/youth-jobs-ai/>

#### Indigenous ICT Development Centre:

<https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/indigenous-ict-development-centre/>

## Transcript

### Linda Nazareth:

You're listening to the Future Skills Centre Podcast, gathering experts from all over Canada to explore the most crucial challenges to the future of work. I'm your host Linda Nazareth. This podcast is brought to you by the Future Skills Centre and the Conference Board of Canada. The Future Skills Centre is a Canadian organization dedicated to creating a future in which everyone has lifelong access to career advice, learning opportunities and decent jobs.

The Conference Board of Canada is the foremost independent applied research organization in Canada and delivers unique insights into Canada's toughest problems. Canada's facing wide demographic and technological changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these disruptions to our work environment.

Our economy is changing fast, and this means we have to change fast too. In season two of the Future Skills Centre Podcast, we're looking at what we are learning from practical solutions already implemented across Canada. And how they can change the world of work. Each episode, we'll highlight a unique challenge facing Canadians, with some episodes focusing more specifically on the post-pandemic recovery, while others will explore broader and more long-term challenges.

We know that COVID-19 has had disproportionate economic impacts on certain groups and has presented unique challenges. The Canadian Human Rights Commission describes the pandemic as both amplifying inequality and expanding the circle of vulnerability. While those with higher incomes were more likely to be able to work from home, did financially better during the pandemic, others were getting left behind, in terms of jobs, debt and housing. Looking back to the early months of the pandemic, workers in certain industries, such as accommodation and tourism, were particularly affected by shutdowns and lost work.

For some people with disabilities, ongoing challenges with isolation and being able to access services were amplified.

Racialized individuals, Indigenous peoples, and young people were also more likely to lose work. Our guests will share some personal stories and some reflections on important nuances and considerations, stemming from their close work with groups highly impacted by the pandemic.

The Conference Board of Canada and Future Skills Centre, spoke with hundreds of leaders in education, skills, and employment from every province and territory. Our research examines the concerns expressed by these leaders about the pandemic's disproportionate impacts, particularly for youth, women, Indigenous peoples and newcomers.

Since we know that youth is one group particularly effected by the pandemic, we spoke to a student to tell us more about his experiences as a young person finishing up school during a pandemic. Eric Pelayo Aubert lives in Montreal and is finishing up his undergraduate work at McGill University in International Development and Political Science. He's also a part-time coordinator with the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity, a government funded national nonprofit that works to support the youth workforce development ecosystem.

### Erick Pelayo Aubert:

During COVID of course there was an immense amount of uncertainty, which was very evident when it came to employment prospects.

Me being a graduating student, supposed to have graduate in 2021, we're hit with this pandemic in 2020, and I'm put in a situation where I have to reassess and reconsider everything in my next couple of months. I don't see a lot of full-time positions just being readily available for people coming out of school. Which is actually one of the reasons why I decided to extend my studies a little bit to be able to still benefit from this student status. And also just

trying to keep in check the fact that I have to, financially sustain my studies and have summer experiences that would provide me the skills for me to be able to apply for jobs in the coming year. Upper year students like myself, even though we had already that experience of like university life and whatnot, we count on this last one or two years of university to try to make connections with professors, for example, like it's, it's such an important thing and one doesn't even think about it, but when applying for jobs, or even for masters, they're asked for professional references and academic references, and by not having this for the last two years of the studies, it really became hard to be able to think, okay, so who am I going to ask these references to? What will they be?

**Linda Nazareth:**

Chris Duff is the Executive Lead for the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity, based in Ontario. We spoke to him about what he's hearing through his organization's activities with youth, communities and businesses across Canada.

**Chris Duff:**

Another challenge that we were hearing again from an educational perspective was the cancellation of practical training, work studies and co-op programs. And I remember reading a statistic from StatsCan where they had surveyed I believe it was a hundred thousand youth, and 35% of the respondents had. Their placement or their co-op programs either postponed or canceled. And so it presents this really unique challenge for young people where in many cases for some learning styles, the practical training or those work studies or those co-op programs, they really contextualize the learning for them. And then in addition to that there's also the issue of the digital divide. There's this inherent assumption when it comes to online education and even sort of remote work as well, and virtual work - there is this inherent assumption that young people have access to the technology that young people know how to use sophisticated technology but then they also have access to internet right, or even high-speed internet.

A lot of young people are over having to hop on Zoom to digest information that way, in this online context and that's been a challenge for many young people.

**Linda Nazareth:**

We also spoke with Kory Wilson, the Executive Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). She told us about the impact that the shift to online learning had on Indigenous students at BCIT.

**Kory Wilson:**

So we realized the incredible dependency, disproportionate dependency of our Indigenous students on wifi and on our devices. So now when everybody's at home, the parents are at home and the kids are at home, they may not even have one device, let alone have internet in their home. So they were at an incredible disadvantage. And people often think the only reason people don't have internet is because they live in a rural or remote part of Canada that doesn't have internet access, but that's not the case.

The number of Indigenous students that we came across that didn't have internet in their home in Vancouver, simply because of the financial cost and expense, let alone having enough devices or their own old or even one device.

**Linda Nazareth:**

Through the pandemic, we've seen an intensification of existing inequalities and the introduction of new ones. We also see how different identities, social categorization of race, class, and gender, overlap to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

For example, women were more likely than men to work in frontline positions, such as retail, that were laid off during the shutdowns, and more likely to leave the workforce to take care of children. Minimum wage jobs, such as cleaning jobs, as well as healthcare jobs and social services work are more likely to be done by women, and work in these frontline positions put them at higher risk of contracting the virus.

Racialized women are more likely to work in some of these essential jobs, such as long-term care and food processing, and also to use public transit to get there. And so are put at even greater risk of exposure to the virus. And if we look at women who are immigrants to Canada, the gap between their participation in employment, education, or training, compared to non-immigrant women widened during the pandemic, particularly for immigrant women who were also a visible minority. Eric shared with us some perspectives on the experiences of his peers that illustrate this intersection of identities.

**Erick Pelayo Aubert:**

In Quebec there's this youth action plan for 2021 to 2024. And it looks great, right? It has seven dimensions that cover anything from employment, environment, culture, education, citizenship, et cetera. And yet we don't see a category that really tries to orient solutions to areas of urgent need, for example, the very unique, needs of visible minorities. So what have been the disproportionate effects of visible minority youth in the pandemic for example?

Definitely in mental health we've seen a lack of access to mental health services in different mother tongues of different immigrant youth. I personally come from Mexico. My first language is Spanish. We saw how that was a very huge gap in the service delivery in terms of like pandemic response, and heading into an inclusive recovery.

Abrupt changes in immigration programs for youth that are in Canada right now, that were looking to really finalize their process of immigration, which in and of itself can be a very stressful thing. And, this multiplied the stress and uncertainty that youth were having.

**Linda Nazareth:**

As we look forward, there are questions about how different groups will emerge from this crisis. The unusual circumstance of the recession caused by the pandemic popularized a new term in economics. It's a K-shaped recovery. We've seen a wide divergence in industry performance since the beginning of the pandemic. Some

sectors form the top of the "K" - such as technology, which experienced surging demand, while others such as tourism and hospitality, form the bottom, remaining far smaller than they were pre-pandemic. For individuals, this has meant significant and long lasting changes in the types of work that are available as well as the skills that are in demand. Skills are not equally distributed across the population, with many under-represented groups having less opportunities to build high demand skills. More supports for training and other services are needed to ensure that everyone can return to work as quickly as possible. Long-term unemployment can permanently derail a person's career development and reduce their lifetime earnings.

**Chris Duff:**

Some groups are recovering – or some demographics let's say or groups of people – are recovering while others are not. Whether it's from an economic perspective, whether it's from a prosperity perspective, a financial perspective, an emotional, mental perspective. I think it creates a pull on society and if we don't support these communities that are experiencing these inequities, we're setting ourselves up as an economy for failure.

**Kory Wilson:**

COVID certainly has highlighted the disparities and the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the economy. It's not going to be a recovery – even if some people in parts of our society are making money and doing exceptionally well – because if the other part of our society continues to spiral downward and not be able to participate in the economy, it's going to cost everybody, not only financially, but emotionally, socially, and morally. It's not the right thing to do.

It goes back to the legacy of colonization and the Indian Act and all of the challenges that Indigenous people face in Canada. The same for other equity seeking groups. I mean, we, often forget that our economy and our systems and our institutions were designed and continue to perpetuate Eurocentric ideas and values, that

often aren't about inclusion and about all voices being at the table and all voices and needs and wants and desires being attended to.

You can only keep people down for so long. And particularly if you're talking about Indigenous people, I mean, this is our land. Canada belongs to Indigenous people. We were here first. We shouldn't be beggars in our own land and in our own territory. We need to be true economic partners and participants in not only the economy, but in all of the decisions that are made around what happens and what direction this country goes in.

We're just as vested in the success of Canada as others are. If my First Nation does well, your community will do well. You know, my First Nation, we're fortunate in the situation that we're in, we also have good governance. We have a bunch of initiatives that have allowed us to be very successful.

And by success, I don't just mean monetary, but you know, if somebody in my nation wants to go to post-secondary or to a trades apprentice program, my community can afford to fund it. So we're keeping in giving our kids hopes and dreams and the support to be able to follow those dreams. And every first nation community should be able to do that. Everybody can be trained and given the skills and the abilities they need to do whatever job they want to do. And it makes me think about my culture, which is a potlatching culture, and our society is based off of everybody having a role and everybody contributing. It doesn't take much. I mean, I've seen students, for example, who got fantastic programs and offerings and scholarships that are able to pay for their tuition, but sometimes they don't have enough money to buy steel-toed boots, which is \$200. You know, if we give a student \$200, give them a bus pass, that increases their likelihood of completing the program and being successful, getting their first job, keeping their family off income assistance, keeping their children fed and positive and healthy and happy and able to graduate.

**Linda Nazareth:**

Chris provides an example of how the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity is including the group that it serves – youth – in the process of carrying out its mission, and why this is so essential.

**Chris Duff:**

A lot of this is stemming from a material gap that we're seeing across the youth workforce development ecosystem. And it's simply that, youth voice and youth representation is materially missing from the sector at large. So we've designed an entire system, and in many ways we've excluded the very people that many of us have dedicated our lives to serve by, out of the equation and out of the sentence.

Why not leverage young people to create a pandemic recovery plan? Why not hire youths from across the country to actually develop an economic recovery plan? And if you know anything about economic recovery plans, they are not typically authored or co-designed by young people. There may be a segment in there that speaks to the youth demographic, but typically they're not authored by young people. And so we hired essentially, 77 young people from across the country. We had six to seven different strategic partners, and these 77 youth were placed within our organization as well as spread across these strategic partners that we had working with us. And essentially the goal was simple. We wanted to create this pandemic recovery plan. We wanted to have youth at the forefront of conducting the research for the pandemic recovery plan, and then also have them consult and coauthor this actual report.

**Linda Nazareth:**

In speaking with Kory, Chris and Eric, it was clear how vital it is to include underrepresented groups in the development and implementation of policies and programs affecting them, and how infrequently they actually are as involved as they should be. Erick told us about the impact of his personal involvement with youth advocacy initiatives.

**Erick Pelayo Aubert:**

I had the honor of being invited to moderate a round table, to discuss the different barriers that Latin American youth in Quebec were facing, post-pandemic. Through these conversations, I saw how crucial they were to understanding the lived experiences that young Canadians are having right now. And it really put into perspective for me and for all of the people that have been able to join these conversations.

Realizing that lived experiences and opinions of youth are super valuable. Like I had never thought there was a space for youth to be able to influence, public policy, you know. And with that principle in mind, I have worked ever since, and I probably still will for the remaining of my youth life. I'll continue to try and inform youth that their opinions are valuable because I, myself didn't think so a couple of years ago. And I really think that's something that I should share and I should amplify. And this is why I am in youth advocacy right now and will remain in youth advocacy in the years to come.

**Linda Nazareth:**

Although skills are not the only solution, they remains central to our economic and social wellbeing. Businesses need skilled workers to adapt to future technological changes and economic shocks. Workers need advanced skills to navigate a changing economy rather than being overwhelmed by it.

With the goal of an inclusive skills training strategy, the Future Skills Centre gives particular attention to projects that include underrepresented populations, and that are accessible and relevant to diverse groups. FSC innovation projects are removing barriers for youth to access their important first jobs.

Leslie Woo, from Civic Action, shares the strategy and critical importance behind their Higher Next project.

**Leslie Woo:**

Civic Action developed the Higher Next AI enabled assessment tool, to address barriers that are often embedded in the first step of hiring: the job posting, which uses often non-inclusive words and phrases. We know that at the height of the pandemic, specifically Indigenous, Black and racialized youth, were most dramatically impacted, looking for employment and opportunities for training.

While at the same time, almost 30% of employers are having a difficult time finding diverse talent, especially for entry-level roles. Hire Next will provide employers with specific concrete recommendations on how to update their job postings to attract the young, diverse talent they are looking for.

This step is a step towards a more inclusive economic recovery.

**Linda Nazareth:**

Another project, in Manitoba, supports Indigenous peoples in developing skills and obtaining work in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, all in a culturally responsive way, close to home. Here's Joel from ID Fusion to tell us about the project.

**Joel Dandeneau:**

ID Fusion is a proud Indigenous IT company, whose purpose is to be a tool for positive change for Indigenous people. For the past number of years, we've worked with partners to support and encourage Indigenous people to pursue a career in IT.

Indigenous IT professionals are underrepresented in our industry, and when the opportunity to partner with the Future Skills Centre came up, we were excited to take more of an industry led approach to capacity building. The project was challenging, but rewarding, and the lessons learned from this project were invaluable. As a small company with big aspirations to build IT skills, capacity, and community, we couldn't have learned what we did without the support of the Future Skills

Centre, and our goal is to apply those lessons learned to supporting more Indigenous people, to pursue a career in IT.

**Linda Nazareth:**

An inclusive recovery means the recovery of good employment opportunities for all. From what we've heard today, this means:

- Access to work experiences for youth, such as summer internships and quality mentoring, particularly in the face of periods of lost job opportunities and lack of in-person connections.
- Equitable hiring practices that give everyone a fair consideration.
- Skills development and educational opportunities that provide supports to level the playing field, such as digital access and culturally appropriate learning experiences.
- Involving underrepresented groups in decision-making that affects them.
- And truly inclusive work environments that encourage people to stay.

**Kory Wilson:**

We need to have all voices at the table and each one of us has a role to play in this, in inclusion. And remember diversity is a reality. Inclusion is a choice. So each of us has an obligation to intentionally include others that are different than us. So every place and space that you walk into and you occupy, look around the room, and if everyone looks like you, then you have some work to do.

And I think that's where people have to look at their own privilege and their own unconscious bias. So, how did I get where I am today? Who helped me? Does everybody have those same opportunities? And the reality is it's not true. So how do we give people the opportunities that most of us take for granted and help and inspire them? You can't just wait for post-secondary's to give you the Indigenous CPA that you want, or give you the Indigenous computer scientist that you want. Look to your post-secondary's, and look to the surrounding organizations, and partner with us earlier – get to know these students earlier.

Because in the end, the companies that don't address equity, inclusion, diversity, and reconciliation, 10 years from now are not going to be the companies that are successful, because particularly in this younger population, the under forties are demanding companies and organizations reflect that diversity and reflect certain values and principles.

So the sooner we all get on this, then the better off we all will be.

**Linda Nazareth:**

If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe and recommend the podcast to others who might enjoy it. And join us next time for our episode on the recovery of the hospitality and tourism sector. Thanks for listening to this episode of the Future Skills Centre Podcast. I'm your host, Linda Nazareth, talk to you soon.

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