PROJECT INTEGRATE
FINAL REPORT

Bridging Psychometrics and Competencies in a Technology Supported Youth Employment Pathway
Project Period: February 1, 2019 to April 30, 2021

Prepared by: OTEC

May 26th, 2021

Project Partners:

Funded By:

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FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

Executive Summary

Although federal initiatives and funding programs have sought to address skills-related challenges, much of the existing workforce ecosystem and training infrastructure in Canada remains unequipped, unprepared, and unaware in the context of the additional challenges the future of work brings. Most significantly, it persists as a patchwork system, disconnected from many of the needs of youth and the technological abilities that now exist. While local employment service delivery remains a critical component of addressing employment needs, many local services operate in a complicated and layered network that youth and employers find hard to navigate

Project Integrate designed an innovative, evidence-based approach to skills development for the new economy. It explored the potential impact and feasibility of a single technology-enabled employment and training pathway for youth. Working with employment service provider (ESP) networks across Canada, the project conducted systems discovery and field-tested promising employment-related technologies to understand important factors in Systems Navigation and Engagement/Career Laddering.

At the outset, the team collaborated with Blueprint ADE to refine the theory of change and logic model and develop the evaluation framework. These served as foundational frameworks to guide implementation. The team is excited that all outputs and intended outcomes have been met and the goal to recommend a blueprint of a technology-enabled employment pathway has been achieved.

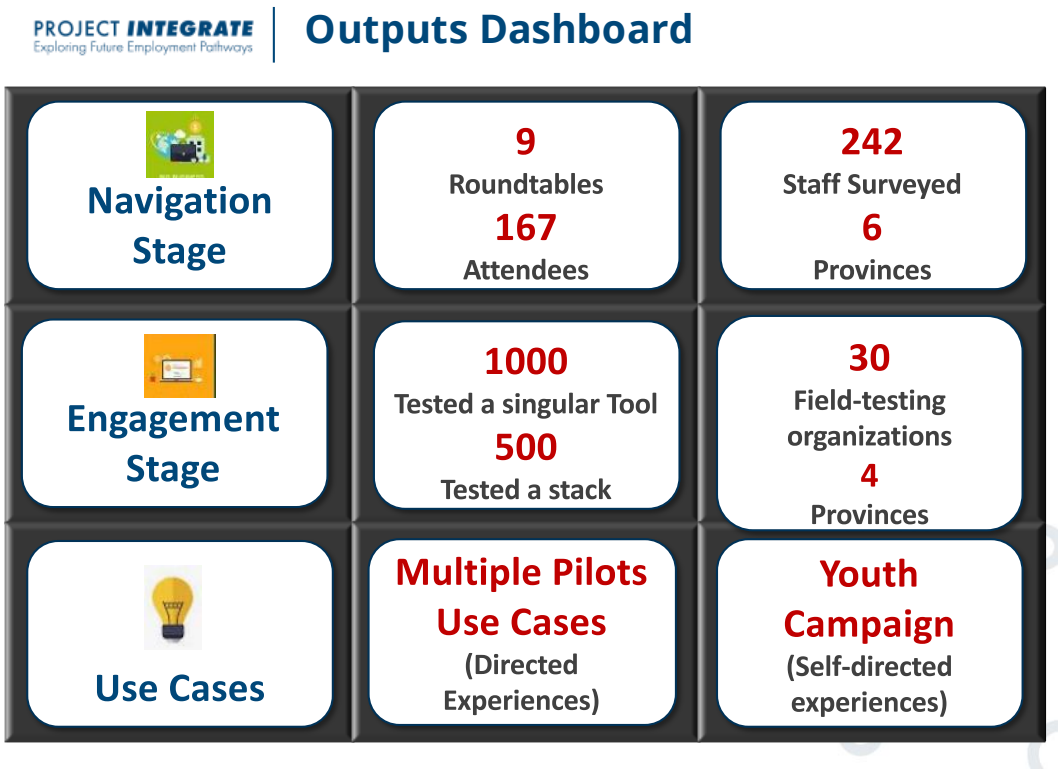
Partnership development contributed significantly to the success of the project. The development of a partnership matrix mapped current and potential partners across provinces and phases of the project. The global pandemic impacted the development of new partnerships within the ESP network in the second phase of the project. As a result of shifting priorities for the ESPs, they were more focused on efforts to reach an operational balance and find solutions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. While this partnership matrix was prepared before the pandemic, the map anchored the team to stay focused and respond to the emerging needs of ESPs to deliver their programs remotely. More than thirty partnerships were formed during the project to support various exploratory learning objectives of the project.

As part of the Systems Navigation phase, a series of nine national roundtable consultations were conducted and pre-and post-consultation surveys administered. This resulted in identifying the systems, operational and user-level enablers, and barriers to technology adoption by the ESP sector. Over 350 digital employment tools used by the sector were curated and presented through an interactive digital visualization platform.

The focus of field-testing in the engagement/career laddering phase was to understand how digital tools contribute to the job seeker's ability to make data-backed career decisions. The project pilot tested five use cases during which 2000 job seekers experienced either ALiGN, planext or both tools within their pre-employment support program.

Throughout the project, over 3000 user feedback touchpoints were achieved from a range of project activities (please refer to Outputs Dashboard below) including feedback interviews with ESPs, job seeker surveys, attendees at roundtable consultations and surveys completed before and after the consultations. The data collected as part of the systems navigation activities scoped the tools currently being used by the ESP sector, the stages within the employment pathway where they are used and enablers and barriers to the adoption of new technology. The quality of data, insight gathered, and the overall body of evidence have informed the strategic takeaways and final design recommendations for a technology-enabled employment pathway which were validated by the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) in the last quarter of the project.

As user feedback data and insights were being collected, the team conducted a further literature review and studied the linkages between early findings and the emerging employment situation post-COVID 19. A series of whitepapers co-authored by OTEC, FutureFit AI, and First Work was published on the project website and promoted through social media channels to support knowledge dissemination.



Project Activities and Milestones

The coalition of partners led by OTEC worked collaboratively to support all aspects of planning and implementation towards the achievement of the project's goals. Some highlights of the project activities are presented in the themes below:

1. Project Building Blocks

Theory of Change and Logic Model

A discovery workshop was jointly planned by OTEC and Blueprint with the participation of core project partner teams. Through the workshop, the team refined and validated the project's theory of change and logic model. Following the workshop, Blueprint prepared a Project Charter to outline the objectives, roles and responsibilities, activities, and deliverables for Blueprint's engagement. The workshop informed the evaluation framework for the key components of the project: Systems Navigation and Engagement/Career Laddering.

Project Advisory Committee (PAC)

The PAC was formed in collaboration with the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP). The committee was comprised of 11 members with complementary experience and expertise to provide strategic insights and feedback on project progress. The PAC convened four times throughout the project to review progress on project implementation, outputs achieved, and accomplishments. Members provided the project with strategic direction and support for partnership development.

Foundational Report

To anchor the learning from project activities, project partner Future Fit AI undertook secondary research and a literature review to prepare a foundational report titled: *Equipping Youth Employment Services for the Future of Work in Canada.* The report maps the employment landscape for youth in Canada, with emphasis on youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET). It summarized technology trends in the adoption of digital tools and assessments, in addition to insights for the development of a blueprint of a technology-enabled employment pathway. (Download report: Click here)

2) Partnership Development

Building a wide roster of partnerships was identified as a critical contributor to project success. At the outset, the teams brainstormed and identified appropriate target partners. They were then mapped by potential role (consultative and/or field-testing partners), deployment contexts (sector, corporate, regional, and community employment service providers), and geographic region. In addition, strategic partners that could contribute to overall project insights including technology expertise were also identified e.g., LinkedIn, D2L, Blue Drop, etc. This partnerships

matrix became a collaborative planning and coordination tool between core project partner teams.

Further to the development of the partnership matrix, OTEC led the collaborative process to streamline the engagement of potential field-testing organizations. A wide range of outreach activities was used to recruit field-testing partners. A project website www.YouthEmploymentPathways.ca was developed to promote the project's work and to further garner interest from employment service providers to support field-testing. This website also served as a repository for the project's knowledge dissemination work, comprised of whitepaper reports and a data visualization map of digital tools identified through the systems navigation phase. A wide range of outreach activities was used to recruit field testing partners and included accessing internal partnership networks, presenting at the roundtable consultations, participating in youth employment events, and building awareness of the project website through social media. A direct marketing campaign was launched to reach out directly to ESPs to communicate the opportunities and benefits of partnering with the project. The project was presented at the Futures Conference 2019 and featured in the trade show at the Futures 2020 Youth Summit on October 27-29, 2020. The project was also featured on the ASPIRE youth employment website to support youth in navigating their careers.

Throughout the project, 30 organizations offering employment services based in Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia partnered with the project to support field-testing activities. The partner organizations integrated the identified digital tools (ALiGN and planext) within their pre-employment support programs and facilitated their use with their youth clients.

3) Systems Navigation

This component was led by First Work with advisory and research support from FutureFit AI. The main objective of this phase was to conduct ecosystem innovation research to:

- Identify the enablers and/or inhibitors to the adoption of tools and technologies by the ESP sector
- Explore the stages of the youth employment journey
- Curate the tools, technologies, and systems currently being used by ESPs
- Identify best practices and frameworks for encouraging the adoption of technology

The study was conducted through three stages:

i. Secondary research (in partnership with FutureFit AI) aimed at understanding emerging employment tools and technologies, as well as best practices for encouraging their adoption.
ii. A series of roundtable consultations with employment service providers, youth, and employers.
iii. Administration of nationwide pre- and post-consultation surveys.

First Work garnered support from The Canadian Coalition of Community-Based Employability Training (CCCBET), Success Skills Centre (Manitoba), Prospect Human Service (Alberta), The

Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (British Columbia), and Canadian Career Development Foundation to support outreach for regional consultations. Roundtable consultations were integrated within the Futures Conference on October 22-24, 2019 in Blue Mountain, Ontario, and the ASPECT (Association of Service Providers for Employability & Career Training) Conference on November 4-5, 2019 in Richmond, BC.

Nine roundtable consultations were convened in six provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia) and resulted in participation from 167 ESP management and frontline staff. In addition, 4 youth roundtables and one employer roundtable were convened; 240 ESP staff nationwide responded to pre-and post-consultation surveys aimed at understanding the assessment tools, technologies, and systems currently being used at their organizations.

These primary surveys contributed to the identification of 350+ employment tools used by ESPs, and the identification of the five stages of the youth employment journey. The enablers and barriers to technology adoption were then analyzed and presented at three levels - systems, operational, and user. *(The findings were previously submitted with the quarterly report for Oct-Dec 2019)*

4) Field-testing

Implementation

Field-testing was conducted with job seekers registered with employment service providers for pre-employment support services. The two digital employment tools identified were the ALiGN psychometric assessment and the planext career laddering platform.

The implementation of the project's digital employment tools was staged over two phases. In phase one, each digital tool was tested with different groups of job seekers. A feedback survey was then administered to understand the value of a singular tool on the knowledge gained and the application of the knowledge gained in the job search process. In this phase, a total of 300 job seekers experienced either the ALiGN tool or planext through collaboration with 10 field-testing partners across Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia.

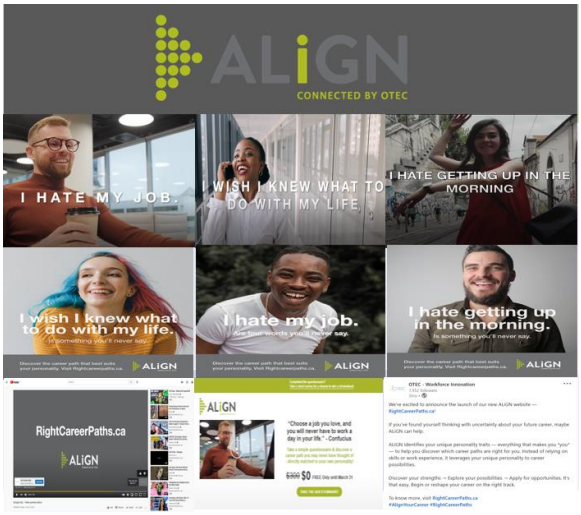
In phase two, both digital tools were offered as a stack to all participating job seekers. The intention was to understand if the value of experiencing two tools is more than the value of any singular tool. To provide a comparative analysis with phase one, the research indicators were consistent with the previous phase. In this phase, 830 job seekers experienced both tools within their pre-employment program in collaboration with 16 field testing partners who integrated the stack of both tools within their program curriculum.

Youth Campaign

With the second wave of the pandemic and the lockdowns across the country, the focus of the team shifted to leverage current partnerships and maximize data collection opportunities before

the project concluded. Expecting that ESPs would continue to face challenges in recruiting job seekers, and cohort sizes would be small, the project pursued a direct-to-youth strategy to offer the ALiGN assessment. This also provided a new use-case for the project as the pre-dominant use-case within field-testing at that time was for ESPs to integrate the digital tools within existing employment support programs.

Planning for this youth campaign took place between November 2020 and January 2021. It was launched on February 2nd, 2021, and concluded on March 31st, 2021. The campaign encouraged youth to take the ALiGN assessment to identify jobs that best fit with their personality traits and interests. Multiple communication assets (see Campaign Communication Assets Board below) were created and supported with a multichannel media strategy and plan. Upon completion of the assessment, a follow-up feedback survey was sent to gather insights on their experience. In addition, a career guidebook was provided to support them to effectively use their assessment in their career planning.



Campaign Communication Assets Board

5) Training Resources and Guides

At the onset of the pandemic, the team learned through consultations that ESP partners faced many competing priorities as they pivoted to remote service delivery. The project's Pan-Canadian roundtable consultations indicated a major barrier to adopting new technology tools in the employment services sector is 'resistance to try' new technology. ESP staff needed ready-to-use resources that could enable easier adoption and use of the tools.

ESP Toolkits

Two toolkits (see images of Toolkit 1 & Toolkit 2 below) were developed with tips and activities to introduce ALiGN and to debrief the personality assessment with youth job seekers. Program Facilitators were provided access to downloadable presentation modules and facilitation tools to

more effectively guide job seekers on how they can apply knowledge about their personality and traits in their job search, cover letters, resumes, and interview preparation.

> *The toolkits were very helpful and explained things well. I had challenges because I am a one-on-one counselor but with Launchpad, I had to deliver in a group setting. I was thankful to have that toolkit*
> – Sylvia McDonald, Program Instructor, Launchpad Program, Eastern Ontario Training Board

Toolkit 1- Administering the assessment

Toolkit 2 – Facilitating the assessment with job seekers

Guidebook

The youth campaign encouraged the completion of the ALiGN assessment in a self-directed setting. To support self-reflection, a guidebook was developed (see Guidebook image below) and offered complimentary to youth completing the assessment. It was designed to help them apply the new knowledge from their assessment to explore career paths, match occupations that best fit with their personality traits. The guidebook also supported youth to apply for identified jobs by preparing a strong resume and cover letter and to practice answering interview questions based on their unique personality strengths. It was designed to be a fillable and printable guide to accommodate different learning styles.

Guidebook for youth completing the assessment

6) Knowledge Dissemination and Storytelling

The team actively identified opportunities to share project findings and learning. The foundation for knowledge dissemination was built with the development and launch of a new project website www.YouthEmploymentPathways.ca. The knowledge dissemination activities included new whitepapers, presentations at sector conferences, webinars, and online presence. These knowledge dissemination initiatives highlighted the project's research, learnings, and findings in addition to key emerging technology trends in digital tools and assessment and the impacts of COVID-19 on the Canadian employment landscape. All knowledge pieces were published on the project's microsite (https://www.youthemploymentpathways.ca) and promoted to OTEC's network of partners through social media.

Six whitepapers were published on the project website and promoted through social media channels to support knowledge dissemination.

1. Foundational report: Technology Infrastructure Foundational Report - Equipping Youth Employment Services for the Future of Work in Canada (OTEC / Future Fit AI)
2. Report: Up to the Task: Toward a pathways model for enabling Canada's workforce transition (MaRS Discovery District)
3. Executive Summary: A Blueprint for Digital Employment Services for Youth (OTEC / Future Fit AI)
4. 'Getting Youth Back to Work: Digital Employment Services for Youth Amid COVID-19 Uncertainty' (OTEC / Future Fit AI)
5. How digital platforms are tailoring youth pathways to employment (OTEC/First Work)
6. Does one size fit all? Diversity in digital training, employment, and career navigation platforms (OTEC/First Work)

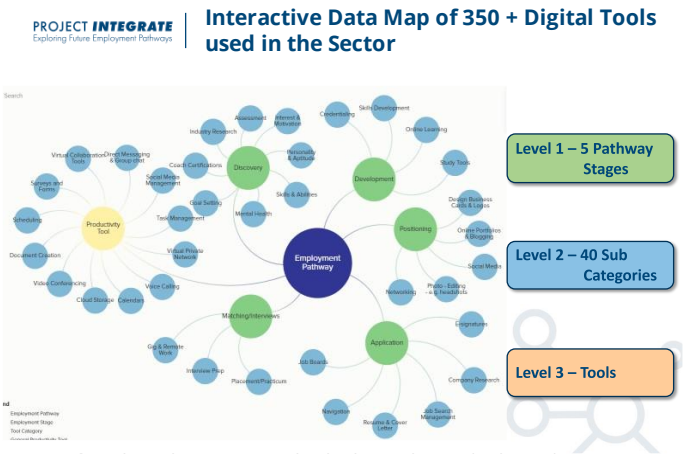
Project Integrate was introduced at the Futures 2020 Youth Summit on October 27-29, 2020 where youth participants were provided an opportunity to experience the digital tools. At this event, 100 youth attended the project presentation and 21 youth completed the ALiGN assessment and reviewed the planext tool during this session. The ASPIRE Youth website (www.youthaspire.org) also features Project Integrate and the digital tools ALiGN and planext that are available for youth to help them in career navigation.

Project partners collaborated to deliver a webinar to the First Work network of ESPs. The team presented findings and insights on the youth employment pathway and the challenges youth face in their job search. The webinar was an efficient way to reach a large group of ESPs. It positioned ALiGN and planext as relevant digital solutions to test and/or adopt. Participants understood the features and benefits of the tools in the context of the employment challenges faced by youth and how these tools can enhance their capacity to support their clients.

As part of storytelling about the project, a human-interest article written tells the story of Lynn who participated in the field-testing through her employment service provider Multi-Service Centre, one of the project's field-testing partners. Please refer to page 11 for additional details on Lynn's employment journey.

Data visualization map:

Early project research helped curate a database of 350+ digital tools used nationally among employment service providers. To enhance shareability and interactivity this database was presented through an interactive data visualization map (see image below). The interactive map enables the reader to explore the digital employment tools categorized by the five stages of the employment pathway - Discovery, Development, Positioning, Application, and Matching. The data visualization map was published in February 2021 and shared with ESP networks. It was also published on www.YouthEmploymentPathways.ca



Lessons Learned

Use technology as a means and not an end

A key lesson learned was the value of digital tools can be maximized if they are purposefully integrated within the workflow and curriculum of pre-employment programs and services. The lockdowns due to the pandemic pushed ESPs to move from an in-person model of program delivery to an online delivery. They increased the use of their current digital tools and introduced many new tools in their workflow. Convincing them to engage in field-testing with two new tools seemed daunting. The team recognized this trend and focused efforts to communicate the true value and role of the tools. ESPs were provided with guidelines on the use of the tools and opportunity points during their programs to use the new knowledge gained from the tools. Milestones in the curriculum were identified – from assessing motivations and aspirations, identifying personality traits, setting employment goals to preparing application documents, and applying for appropriate jobs. This approach to recognize the emerging challenges and adopt a solution-focused approach contributed to acceptance by ESPs to support field-testing and ultimately in confirmed participation in field-testing.

The analysis of feedback data showed that job seekers found the maximum value from the stack of digital tools if the tools were integrated within their program and facilitated through reflective sessions and discussions at appropriate points within their pre-employment program.

User-Centric Design

Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (Fred Davis, 1989) shared in the project's Foundational Report, perceived 'usefulness' and perceived 'ease of use' of new technology are critical factors in adoption. This was validated by the roundtable consultations where ESPs identified 'User-friendliness' as the most important enabling factor to adopt new technology.

The team used this insight in phase two and identified ideas to enable ease of use of the digital tools provided. A range of ready-to-use resource toolkits and tip sheets were developed for Program Facilitators to support them as they introduced the tool to job seekers and to simplify tool adoption within their programs. This resulted in increased adoption and use of the employment tools. During feedback interviews, Facilitators shared that the toolkits significantly helped them in their program delivery and their participants were more engaged through the pre-employment program.

Convergence

The curated data on digital tools was gathered pre-pandemic. It is estimated that the number of tools adopted by the sector has doubled since the pandemic. During this time, PAC members also shared that many new technology-based ideas have gained momentum to address the needs of workers and employers – micro-credentials, digital badges, etc. Many tools operate in isolation, minimizing data capture to the immediate need in which the tool is used and fail to address the full range of what job seekers need. The new realities for both job seekers and ESPs should be reflected to address the true long-term scope of user need. In the future, all of these platforms would need to provide the worker the convenience of control over their information, compliance with privacy legislation and data privacy, and skills transferability.

The project exploration and consultations clarified the design principles for the adoption of new technologies. Learning and findings from the project have informed the design considerations for a new technology application called SkillsPath which is integral to the response and recovery project funded by the Future Skills Centre for the Tourism and Hospitality sector. Testing this prototype will bring an understanding of the needs and considerations to refine the user-managed interface providing the potential for convergence of technologies; and for job seekers, more control over their personal information and portability of their data.

Project Findings and Takeaways

As a result of the systems exploration and field-testing use case analysis, the project gathered a range of strategic insights and takeaways for further consideration and exploration. The six key insights and the design considerations that informed the blueprint recommendations are included in a supplementary document titled *'Project Integrate: A Blueprint for a Technology enabled Employment Pathway for Youth'* submitted alongside this final report.

Project Success Story: Lynn Manary

Pursuing Purpose

With the help of sophisticated psychometric technology - Lynn Manary has forged a path to success – harnessing what she once viewed as weaknesses into her own unique strengths

By Sarah Fox

Choosing a career path is one of the most challenging decisions a young person can make in their life. So many potential doors for you to walk through, so many decisions to make. Not to mention the doors you don't know even about.

After graduating high school, Lynn Manary struggled to figure out what she wanted to do. She tried two different college programs but couldn't find the motivation to finish. She struggled to focus and turned to self-medicating to "feel something".

"A lot of people work their whole lives, never acting on their purpose," Manary says. Just months ago, the 22-year-old Social Service Work student was heading down this path.

"I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder a few years ago, and I recently diagnosed with ADHD," Manary says. "Throughout high school, I didn't get good grades; I couldn't pass tests. I tried to focus, I tried to understand and learn, but I just couldn't."

When Manary's mother suggested she attend the Youth Job Connection (YJC) program at the Multi-Service Centre in her hometown of Tillsonburg, Ontario, Manary was apprehensive. She was worried it would be like school, something she hadn't had much success with in the past.

With assurances in place, Manary took the leap. In the three-week program, she tapped into an area of knowledge she hadn't before: *herself*. The program's assessments helped her to discover her own personality and where her unique skills and talents lay.

"Before, if someone asked me about myself, I wouldn't know what to say," she says. "Now, everything is clear."

Manary credits one particular assessment used by the YJC as making the most significant impact on her life - the ALiGN psychometric assessment tool. The assessment helped to identify personal characteristics, qualities and strengths that Manary wasn't able to pinpoint on her own. For example, she learned that she's extroverted, people focused, a big picture thinker, and discipline driven.

"The ALiGN assessment was tailored to me personally, instead of generalizing," she says. "It was interactive, detailed and there were so many different things I could read. For me, it was so accurate."

The Ontario Tourism Education Corporation's (OTEC) **Project Integrate** aims to understand how to better support young job seekers facing barriers to employment, by looking at how technology-based tools such as ALiGN can help Employment Service Providers (ESPs) across Canada positively impact their youth clients.

"For job seekers, new labour market technologies can help individuals to better understand their marketable skills and how they can be applied to different sectors and geographic markets," says Adam Morrison, OTEC's President and CEO. "They can better identify specific micro-skills that they need and focus on the most efficient pathways to new opportunities."

Through her work using ALiGN's sophisticated psychometric personality assessment, Manary recognized that she had the abilities and skills to lead a successful career. Realizing that she could actually use her personal struggle and experience with mental health to help others was a true game-changer.

"With my experiences in and out of the hospital, I realized I'm meant to help people. I think I always knew that, but I couldn't pinpoint it… and never knew that I could actually get a job helping people with it," says Manary.