

Project Insights Report

Services to Social Impact



PARTNERS

Fora: Network for Change



LOCATIONS

Ontario



INVESTMENT

\$123,000



PUBLISHED

September 2025

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic and its series of lockdowns disproportionately impacted the service industry and many young women who work in this sector. This project provided online workshops and coaching to help young women in the service industry develop transferable social-emotional skills in leadership and confidence, communications, business literacy, job interviewing and networking to support their capacity to undertake career changes.

The project, led by Fora Network for Change (formerly G(irls)20), was initially intended to support young women in transitioning out of the service industry and into social entrepreneurship; however, the project coordinators realized this was too ambitious given the volatile state of the economy and the goals of participants. Instead, they pivoted to the development of transferable social-emotional skills.

Despite the challenges this pivot created, following the project, participants felt more knowledgeable about professional communication, negotiation strategies, steps needed for career transitions and the different career paths that were open to them.

This project highlights the importance of flexibility in the face of changing circumstances in the external environment and meeting participants where they are.

KEY INSIGHTS

1

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had a disproportionate impact on the service industry, particularly affecting the many young women employed in this sector.

2

Given the challenges of a volatile economy and the diverse goals of participants, the project shifted focus from supporting young women in transitioning from hospitality to social entrepreneurship to prioritizing the development of transferable social-emotional skills.

3

This project underscores the importance of adaptability in response to external changes and the need to meet participants where they are in their journey.

▶ The Issue

The COVID-19 pandemic and its series of lockdowns disproportionately impacted the service industry and the many young women who work in this sector. Many young women in this sector were unsure of their future career prospects given the uncertainty in the service industry, but lacked the confidence to pursue alternative careers they were interested in.



🔧 What We Investigated

This project provided online workshops and coaching to help young women in the service industry develop transferable social-emotional skills in leadership and confidence, communications, business literacy, job interviewing and networking to support their capacity to undertake career changes.

✔ What We're Learning

The project was initially intended to support young women in transitioning out of hospitality and into social entrepreneurship; however, the project coordinators realized this was too ambitious given the volatile state of the economy and the goals of participants. Instead, they pivoted to the development of transferable social-emotional skills.

Fatigue with online interactions, heightened anxiety about the future and competing priorities negatively impacted participants' ability to focus and prioritize learning to gain transferable social-emotional skills. Program coordinators pivoted to offer self-paced learning so participants could access content when and where they were able to. However, this led to a few peer interactions between participants.

One-to-one coaching was also negatively impacted by the pivot from a focus on social enterprise to transferable social-emotional skills, as coaches were unclear about their goals and how to achieve them.

Despite these challenges, following the project, participants felt more knowledgeable about professional communication, negotiation strategies, steps needed for career transitions and the different career paths that were open to them.

Participants in the project noted how meaningful it was to see other young women, just like them, as learners, facilitators and mentors. They described the project's approach to representation as genuine and impactful.

★ Why It Matters

Organizations implementing projects should be flexible and ready to pivot according to changing contexts and needs of participants. While the initial ambition to focus on entrepreneurship did not resonate with participants, the decision to pivot to social-emotional learning, confidence building and transferable skills met participants where they were.



State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth

To stem the recent downturn in labour market conditions of youth and to lay the groundwork for them to play a pivotal role in fostering growth and inclusion, it is imperative to address and dismantle the multiple and intersectional barriers they encounter.

► What's Next

Many of the participants in this project were interested in connecting with Fora's other programming, including Girls on Boards and Global Summit.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

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