



# Mapping Youth Pathways from Education to Employment

What We Know and How to Strengthen Supports Across Canada

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**Blueprint**

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# Acknowledgements

## About the Future Skills Centre

The [Future Skills Centre](#) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).

## About Blueprint

[Blueprint](#) helps leaders use data and evidence to tackle complex public policy challenges across Canada. We partner with government, community, philanthropic, and industry leaders to strengthen public systems and deliver better outcomes. We bring together policy analysts, evaluators, economists, data scientists, and implementation experts—people who know how to turn insight into action. Our work is grounded in deep subject-matter expertise, rigorous methods, and a real-world understanding of how systems operate and evolve. More than just an advisor, we're also partners in change. We provide key support at every stage of the policy and program lifecycle: from early strategy and design to implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

As a consortium partner of the FSC, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

*Mapping Youth Pathways from Education to Employment* is funded by the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).





## Introduction

Canada's youth are facing mounting challenges in their journeys from education to employment. Having borne the brunt of labour market disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, young people saw a brief reprieve in 2022 and early 2023 as employment conditions temporarily improved. But those gains appear to have since eroded. In 2024, unemployment rates reached 13.1% for 15- to 24-year-olds and 7.4% for 25 to 29-year-olds: above pre-pandemic levels of 10.7% and 6.2%, respectively.<sup>1,2</sup> In September 2025, unemployment for 15- to 24-year-olds reached a 15-year high (excluding 2020 and 2021) at 14.7%.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) rose from 10.2% in the 2022-23 academic year to 11.3% in 2023-24.<sup>4</sup> This increase was driven in part by the growing number of young men in their 20s with less education leaving the labour force and high unemployment among racialized youth and university-educated immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

The costs of youth unemployment are borne by both individuals and society. A [2018 Blueprint study](#) estimated the average lifetime cost of one NEET

youth at more than \$423,000 in lost earnings, forgone tax contributions, and increased public expenditures.<sup>6</sup> Multiplied across hundreds of thousands of young people, the collective cost to Canada's economy reaches into the billions. The broader social consequences to mental health, civic engagement, and intergenerational mobility are equally profound.

Major economic transformations compound these challenges. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence and automation threaten to reduce entry-level opportunities that once served as steppingstones for young people. Global economic uncertainty, trade disruptions, and demographic shifts may further constrain job creation.

Reducing youth unemployment is both an important and attainable policy objective. Canada's long-term prosperity depends on how effectively we help young people adapt and thrive. Doing so, however, requires a clear understanding of the challenges they face, evidence on what supports work best, and a coherent system that links education, employment, and social policy to foster success.



In September 2025, youth unemployment hit a 15-year high at 14.7%.

## In this brief

This brief is part of a broader effort to strengthen Canada's understanding of how best to support youth in their journey from school to work. Funded by the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)**, the work situates Blueprint's evaluation portfolio of FSC-funded youth interventions within the wider landscape of youth programming. It aims to connect what we are learning with a broader system view of youth needs and what works to help youth reach their social and economic potential.

Its four main objectives are to:

- **Map the journey.** Present a practical framework for understanding the stages young people move through as they transition from education to employment and the types of supports they may need along the way.
- **Synthesize the evidence.** Summarize what is known about effective interventions at each stage of that journey, drawing on Canadian and international research and on insights from FSC projects where Blueprint is the evidence partner.
- **Map federal programs.** Perform an initial scan of federally funded youth programs and situate them within our school-to-work framework. This mapping exercise clarifies how current initiatives align with different stages of youth need; it does not assess their effectiveness or identify system gaps.
- **Illustrate the broader ecosystem.** Provide a high-level overview of the wide range of programs offered by provinces and territories, with selected examples included in an appendix. This overview is not meant to be exhaustive but to illustrate the breadth of youth programs aimed at supporting education and employment across jurisdictions, underscoring the importance of collaboration across levels of government in building a shared understanding of what works.

This lays the foundation for more in-depth analysis in the future. Future work could systematically map the landscape of provincial and territorial programs, examine complementarity and alignment across systems, and explore how governments can use data and evidence to strengthen programs and better meet the needs of Canada's youth at scale.

This brief contains the following sections:

1. **Segments of youth need (pp. 6–9)** outlines six key stages of the school-to-work journey, describing who is affected, where the main barriers lie, and what supports are most relevant at each stage.
2. **The Future Skills Centre youth portfolio (pp. 8–9)** highlights how relevant FSC-funded projects align with these stages, providing early evidence on how to support youth at different transition points.
3. **Addressing needs across segments (pp. 10–29)** synthesizes evidence from Canada and abroad on effective interventions for each stage of the journey, and presents our initial scan of youth programs in Canada situated in our school-to-work framework.
4. **Lessons learned and opportunities for moving forward (pp. 30–34)** identifies cross-cutting insights and points to areas for future work to strengthen the coordination, visibility, and effectiveness of youth employment and training systems.
5. **Appendix: Overview of provincial and territorial programs (pp. 35–39)** provides examples of youth programs offered by provinces and territories.



# 1. Segments of youth need

Youth represent a diverse population whose needs evolve as they move through a series of key transitions that mark the journey from education to employment. Understanding these transitions is essential to designing effective supports that promote economic independence and social inclusion.

## 1.1. Mapping the school-to-work pathway

While no two youth follow the exact same path, the transition from education to employment often happens through a set of broad stages:

- graduating from high school and pursuing postsecondary education (PSE);
- gaining early work experience through part-time or summer employment;
- completing PSE or training;
- preparing for first jobs through work-integrated learning (e.g., co-ops, internships, applied

placements) that build experience, networks, and career clarity;

- securing initial employment aligned with skills and aspirations; and
- sustaining and advancing in meaningful work, including upskilling as the labour market evolves.

Transitions between these stages can create friction points. While most youth in Canada navigate them successfully, others encounter barriers that require targeted, timely supports.

## 1.2. Segments of youth needs to guide policy and programs

“Youth” encompasses a wide range of life stages, circumstances, and needs. For example, the needs of a high school student, uncertain about their future, differ greatly from those of a recent PSE graduate struggling to enter the workforce. To maximize impact, policies and programs should align services with these distinct transition points and adapt to barriers related to youth background, identity, and context.

Based on the stages outlined above, we identify six broad segments of youth needs, each corresponding to different groups of youth and the supports required to help them navigate these transitions (see **Figure 1** on the following page).

These needs are:

**1. Early education retention.** Disengaged high school students who need support to complete high school and transition to PSE.

**2. PSE persistence.** PSE students and apprentices at risk of leaving without a credential and needing support with persisting and graduating.

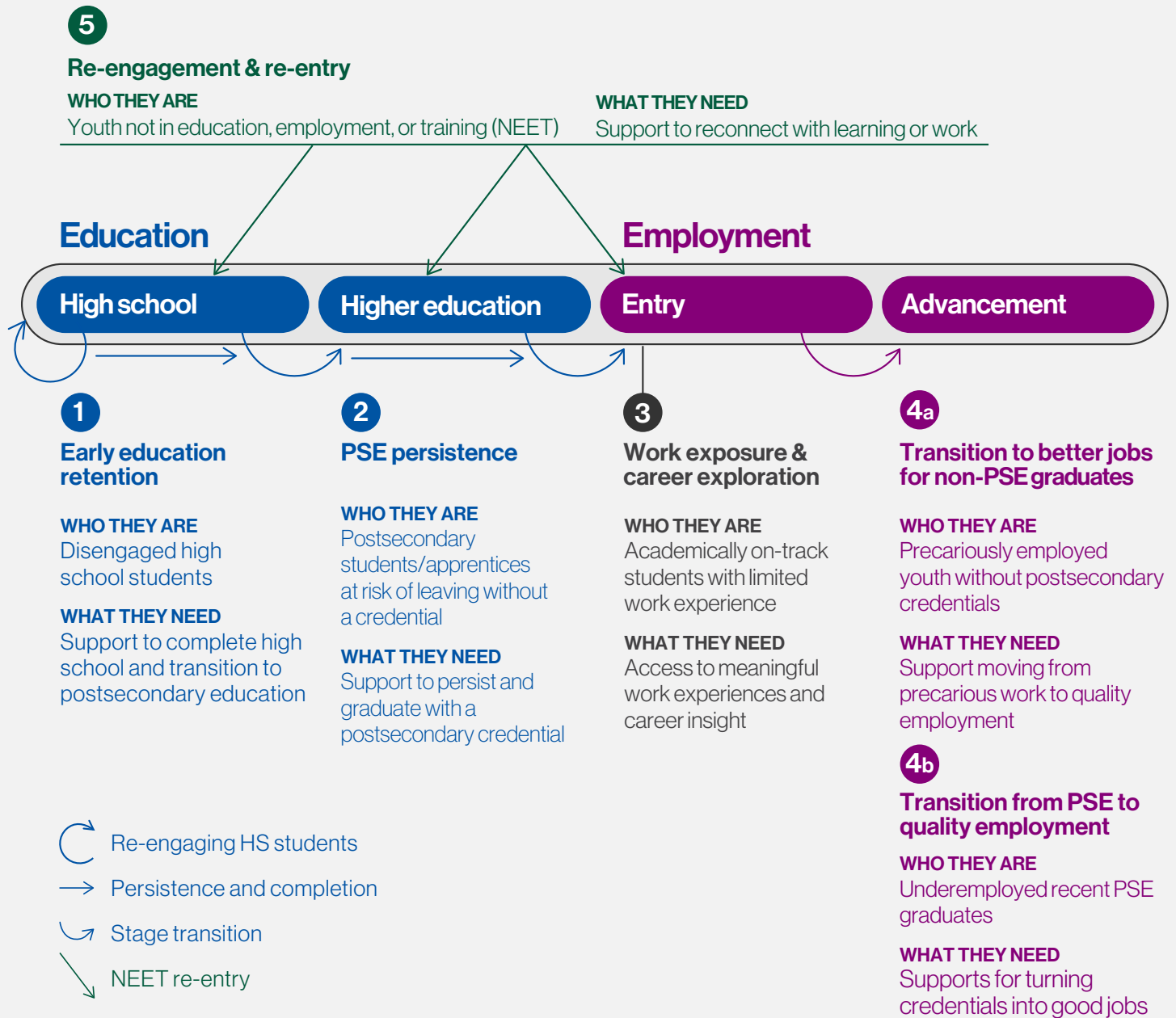
**3. Work exposure and career exploration.** Academically ‘on-track’ students with limited work experience who need access to meaningful work experiences and career insights.

**4. Transitions to better jobs for non-PSE graduates.** Precariously employed youth without postsecondary credentials who need support moving to quality employment.

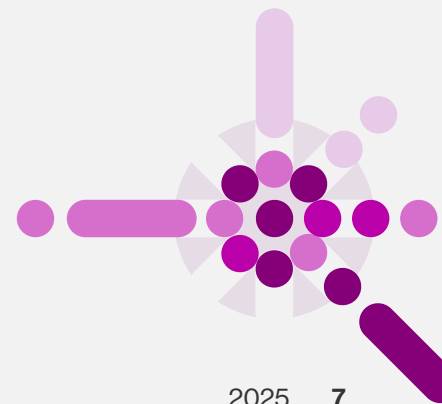
**5. Transitions from PSE to quality employment.** Unemployed recent PSE graduates who need support turning credentials into good jobs.

**6. Re-engagement and re-entry.** Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) who require support reconnecting with learning or work.

**Figure 1 |** Segmentation of youth needs along their school-to-work journey



The average lifetime cost of one NEET youth is more than \$423,000 in lost earnings, forgone taxes, and increased public expenditures.



## 2. The FSC youth portfolio

This brief was developed as part of Blueprint’s partnership with FSC to build the evidence base on what works to help Canadians develop in-demand skills and succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

As part of the [Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio](#), Blueprint serves as the evidence partner for 11 promising training initiatives. Collectively, these projects have reached more than 5,683 participants, including roughly 1,948 youth—about 34% of portfolio participants. Four youth-focused initiatives within it—

the Reboot Plus Expansion, NPower Canada, ADaPT, and Lift/Future en tête—provide us with an opportunity to test approaches that help young people prepare for, enter, and advance in the labour market.

The projects span a continuum of need—from supporting early re-engagement to facilitating entry into stable, higher-quality employment. Together, they provide a window into how targeted training, mentoring, and wraparound supports can help youth across different starting points.

**Table 1** | How the Scaling Up Skills Development portfolio aligns with the youth needs framework

Stage of need	Project	Evidence contribution
<b>Early re-engagement and school completion</b>	Reboot Plus Expansion	Supports youth at risk of dropping out of high school through mentoring, workforce exposure, and wraparound supports; early results show positive graduation and PSE transition outcomes.
<b>Transition to better jobs for youth without PSE</b>	NPower Canada	First randomized controlled trial of a sector-based youth program in Canada; interim findings show strong early employment impacts.
<b>Transition from PSE to quality employment</b>	ADaPT	Randomized control trial to test how targeted digital and professional skills training improves job quality and satisfaction for graduates.
<b>Re-engagement into school and/or work for youth facing complex barriers</b>	Lift/Futur en tête	Demonstrates effectiveness of integrating employment and education supports into youth mental health services.

Hundreds of thousands of NEET youth translate into a collective economic cost reaching into the billions.

Although not in our Scaling portfolio, we also highlight the Calgary Work-Integrated Learning Pilot Project (TalentED YYC) as an initiative that addresses youth needs related to early work exposure and career exploration.

Early evidence from these initiatives is discussed in the next section, *Addressing needs: What we know*, under the relevant youth segments. The next phase of Blueprint's work will deepen this analysis through

linked administrative data. By using Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment (SDLE), we can assess long-term employment and earnings outcomes, identifying which models deliver the strongest returns on investment and hold the greatest potential for scaling within Canada's youth employment ecosystem. The first findings from the linked data analysis are expected in early 2026.

Canada's long-term prosperity depends on how effectively we help young people adapt and thrive.





## 3. Addressing needs: What we know

This section examines each segment of youth need across three dimensions:

- **Who is affected and how?** Addressing the nature and scale of the need in Canada and the populations most impacted.
- **What's promising?** Summarizing emerging or established strategies that show potential for addressing these needs.
- **How is Canada responding?** An overview of federal initiatives and available evidence on their effectiveness; examples of provincial and territorial programs; and selected FSC programs that illustrate promising approaches.

### Segment 1: Early education retention

#### Who is affected and how?

While high school attendance rates have improved, every year, too many young Canadians leave high school early. Statistics Canada data from the 2021-22 school year (the most recent year available) show that about 16% of young people do not graduate high school on time (i.e., three years after starting Grade 10, or Secondary 3 in Québec),<sup>7</sup> and 5% do not obtain a high school diploma by the age of 34.<sup>8</sup>

Youth who leave high school early often have foundational skills gaps and are less likely to pursue further education or training. Without a diploma, they face limited access to stable, well-paying

jobs—particularly as employers increasingly require postsecondary qualifications. This raises the risk of unemployment, underemployment, and long-term disconnection from the labour market.

A range of interrelated factors can contribute to early disengagement, including declining motivation and self-confidence, limited academic or career guidance, financial pressures, and mental health challenges. These stressors often compound, making it difficult for youth to stay connected to school and envision a viable pathway to further education or work.

#### What's promising?

Systematic reviews of hundreds of experimental and quasi-experimental studies<sup>9</sup> highlight promising strategies to help youth complete high school and make the transition to PSE. Although most studies were conducted before 2013 and focus primarily on U.S.-based programs, they offer valuable insights into strategies that remain relevant in Canada today. While numerous approaches show some impact, the most promising interventions are:

- **Vocational learning and work placements.** Programs that combine academic credit with hands-on experience, such as learning a trade or other vocational or career tech models, consistently boost graduation rates.<sup>10</sup> These approaches often combine education with internships, life-skills coaching, transportation, and job-placement support.



Work-integrated learning is associated with higher odds of full-time employment, stronger job–education matches, and higher early-career earnings.

- **Flexible education with wraparound**

**supports.** Evidence on alternative schooling models suggests that offering flexible pacing, small classes, and on-site services, such as child-care or counselling, can raise graduation rates for students who struggle in mainstream settings.<sup>11</sup> Their success seems to come from tailored schedules, intensive academic catch-up support, and social supports (e.g., teachers doubling as mentors).

- **Building coping skills and resilience.**

Interventions that teach emotional regulation, problem-solving, and stress management can also support high school completion.<sup>12</sup> Many programs walk students through “stop-and-think” steps—calming down, stating the problem, weighing options, and acting on a plan—and often use cognitive-behavioural techniques to reframe unhelpful thoughts.

- **Long-term mentoring and counselling.**

Assigning each student to a trusted adult who tracks attendance, talks through problems, and charts goals increases completion.<sup>13</sup> Effective mentors work with families as well as teachers, creating a safety net around the young person. The Check & Connect program—now used in parts of Canada—trains mentors to monitor absences and grades and to problem-solve with students and parents.<sup>14</sup>

- **Guidance toward PSE.** When schools demystify PSE options, offering extra counselling and help with applications and scholarships, graduation rates rise.<sup>15</sup> One Canadian demonstration, [Future to Discover](#), combined career-education workshops with guaranteed bursaries, resulting in more students earning their diplomas and proceeding to further studies.<sup>16</sup> Another Canadian demonstration, [Life After High School](#), provided youth in high schools with lower PSE enrolment rates with a series of workshops teaching them to apply for PSE and financial aid. While the project had no impact on the overall PSE enrolment rates in BC, it increased university enrolment and the use and the amount of financial aid among participants. In Ontario, the program increased PSE enrolment in low-transition schools, resulting in 20% more students attending community colleges.<sup>17</sup>

The most consistently successful approaches are multi-faceted: they connect classroom learning to career pathways, pair youth with supportive adult mentors, provide flexibility and wraparound supports, and build both academic and social-emotional skills. Their ultimate effectiveness depends on local adaptation, strong implementation, and sufficient investment.

## How is Canada responding to the need?

### Federally funded interventions

At the federal level, [Employment and Social Development Canada's \(ESDC\) Supports for Student Learning Program](#) funds organizations that deliver tailored learning supports, both financial and non-financial, for learners at risk of educational disconnection. The program includes [two main funding streams](#):

- **After-School and Wraparound Student Supports**, which help youth at risk of leaving school remain engaged through tutoring, mentoring, and holistic wraparound services.
- **Outbound Student Mobility Supports**, which provide opportunities for students to study or work abroad, building global competencies and engagement.

One flagship initiative under the first stream is [Pathways to Education](#), an evidence-based program that combines financial supports, after-school tutoring, and mentoring for youth from low-income families and families without prior PSE. Serving around 6,200 to 6,500 students annually, the program has demonstrated positive effects on high school graduation and PSE enrolment rates, as well as employment readiness and labour market outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

### Provincially and territorially funded interventions

Provincial and territorial programs vary widely in scope and delivery. The following illustrates the wide range of approaches across Canada, with specific examples presented in the **Appendix**.

- **Programs supporting youth health and development.** Some programs address social and health-related barriers that affect educational attainment. They target

youth experiencing poverty, living in remote communities, or managing mental health or substance-use challenges. By improving overall well-being and stability, these programs help create conditions conducive to school engagement and completion.

- **Targeted supports for vulnerable groups.** Some provinces and territories fund programs tailored to groups such as teen parents, Indigenous youth, or students in remote areas. These initiatives offer flexible learning options, childcare support, and wraparound services designed to reduce dropout risks and strengthen educational continuity.
- **Alternative and culturally grounded learning models.** In several jurisdictions, school systems are introducing culturally relevant curricula and localized learning pathways to better engage students and reflect community contexts.
- **Comprehensive transition and empowerment services.** Multi-faceted programs combine academic, social, and life-skills components to help vulnerable youth prepare for adulthood. By emphasizing empowerment and community integration, these initiatives support smoother transitions into further education, training, or employment.
- **Bridging programs between secondary and PSE.** These programs facilitate the transition to PSE by providing mentorship, hands-on industry experience, exposure to college and university environments, and dual high school and university credits. They help youth build momentum to transition to further education.

## Future Skills Centre spotlight: **Reboot Plus Expansion**

Reboot Plus supports early education retention and re-engagement among youth at risk of not completing high school. Funded by the FSC as part of the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, the initiative was developed by Douglas College in partnership with the Burnaby School District in BC. Since its launch in 2015, Reboot Plus has expanded beyond BC with support from the FSC, which enabled testing the model's scalability and adaptability in new contexts.

The program targets young people aged 17 to 24 at risk of dropping out or who have already left high school. Delivered over 16 weeks through a blend of classroom and experiential learning at college sites, Reboot Plus offers career exploration, skills training, and exposure to PSE. Its holistic and flexible design integrates mentorship, workforce preparation, and wraparound supports, including access to mental health, housing, and childcare resources, to address the broader challenges that can hinder educational persistence.

Early evaluation findings<sup>19</sup> are highly promising: 89% of participants report high satisfaction, and analyses show statistically significant improvements in career clarity and self-efficacy. Education outcomes are also encouraging. Almost three-quarters (72%) of high school participants who were expected to graduate<sup>i</sup> had graduated or earned the Canadian Adult Education Credential (CAEC)<sup>ii</sup> or General Education Development (GED) by follow-up. Of those who had not, 83% intended to do so. Of the high school participants who had graduated or earned their CAEC, almost two-thirds (63%) had applied to a postsecondary program, and an additional 28% planned to apply in the future.

For the minority of participants who were not enrolled in high school at baseline, outcomes are less positive but still promising. Among those in this group who had not yet graduated when they joined the program, more than half (55%) at graduation age or older had graduated or earned their CAEC/GED by follow-up, with the remaining 45% intending to do so. Half of these had applied to postsecondary, with the other half indicating plans to apply in the future. Notably, across all of these education outcomes, most participants reported that Reboot Plus contributed to their decision.

With new funding from [Children's Education Funds Inc.](#) and FSC's new REPLICATE investment stream, Reboot Plus will be replicated in Canada throughout 2025-26. Ongoing evaluations will examine the program's long-term impacts, implementation fidelity, and cost-effectiveness to inform future refinement and potential further replication.

Reboot Plus complements but also differs from Pathways to Education, described above, in its approach and target population. While Pathways focuses on keeping high school students engaged and preventing dropouts through comprehensive in-school supports, Reboot Plus operates outside the formal school system, working with youth who have already left high school as well as those who remain enrolled but are significantly disengaged. The program provides a short, intensive bridge to help participants reconnect with education, explore career pathways, and transition toward further education or employment. Together, Reboot Plus and Pathways address different points along the school-to-work continuum and use different approaches to achieve the ultimate goal of youth success.

i A youth born in 2007 or later at the follow-up point (June 2025) was identified as being expected to graduate.

ii The Canadian Adult Education Credential (CAEC) is a high school equivalency credential for adults who did not complete a traditional secondary school diploma. It replaced the previously used General Educational Development (GED) program in Canada in 2024 in all provinces except for BC and Quebec. BC and Quebec use their own high school equivalency credentials: the Adult Graduation Diploma (Dogwood) Program in BC and the « Attestation de l'équivalence de niveau de dixième année (TENS) » in Quebec.

## Segment 2: PSE persistence

### Who is affected and how?

This segment represents youth pursuing a PSE credential and developing skills for sustainable employment. In this report, our scope for this need segment does not include apprenticeship, but apprenticeship completion is a recognized issue in Canada<sup>20</sup> and should be part of future youth needs and program landscape analyses.

Successfully completing PSE is a major determinant of labour market entry, income stability, and long-term economic mobility. Although Canada has one of the highest rates of PSE participation in the OECD, completion remains a challenge for many. The literature typically defines non-completion as failing to graduate within four to eight years of starting a program, with shorter timelines used for colleges offering shorter-duration credentials. Data from Statistics Canada show that on-time graduation rates (i.e., within four years of enrolment) for Canadian undergraduate degree students aged 18 to 24 have remained stable at around 43% across entry cohorts from 2011-12 to 2018-19. Six-year graduation rates have increased only modestly — from 73.2% for the 2011-12 entry cohort to 75% for the 2016-17 entry cohort.<sup>21</sup>

For college-level and professional training certificate programs, results are mixed and not as straightforward due to the variety of programs

involved. Certificate completion within one year fell from 64.2% (in the 2011-12 cohort) to 47.7% (in the 2021-22 cohort), while four-year rates declined from 70.7% to 61.6% over the same period.<sup>iii,22</sup> Diploma completion has been more stable, with three-year rates fluctuating between 45% and 49% and four-year rates increasing modestly from 52.4% (in the 2011-12 cohort) to 54.8% (in the 2018-19 cohort).<sup>iv,v,23</sup>

While the overall trend suggests incremental progress toward higher completion rates, non-completion remains a pressing challenge for our PSE system. Strengthening supports that help students persist and graduate is essential to realizing the full value of Canada's education investments and building a more equitable, resilient labour market.

Students who disengage from PSE may face a complex interplay of barriers, including financial constraints, mental health challenges, family or caregiving responsibilities, and academic preparation gaps. Navigating complex institutional systems, such as financial aid, course registration, and academic advising, can further compound these challenges, particularly for first-generation, immigrant, and low-income students. These youth require supports that promote persistence — integrated, proactive, and accessible services that address both academic and non-academic needs.

iii Refers to programs typically at a college level (including CEGEPs in Quebec) but may also be offered at universities.

iv Graduation rates for one and two years since enrolment are not reported.

v It is not clear from the study what proportion of students dropping out from certificate and diploma programs leave PSE altogether versus continuing into undergraduate programs or apprenticeships.

## What's promising?

A 2022 synthesis of MDRC's PSE research,<sup>24</sup> drawing on 30 RCTs of 39 interventions in U.S. community colleges, identifies key features that strengthen student persistence and completion:

- **Promoting full-time and summer enrolment.**

Programs that encourage full-time study or summer enrolment through financial aid, advising, or information campaigns consistently show higher completion rates. Examples include [The Detroit Promise Path](#) (providing coaching and communication supports), Ohio Performance-Based Scholarship (offering financial incentives), and the [City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Program \(CUNY ASAP\)](#) (providing full-time enrolment and comprehensive supports).<sup>25</sup>

- **Enhanced advising and coaching.** Going beyond academic or administrative guidance, enhanced advising offers personalized and proactive support to help students stay on track. Approaches range from light-touch mentoring to intensive advising with active outreach, financial incentives, and the use of data tools to identify and assist students in need. Programs such as CUNY ASAP and ASAP Ohio demonstrate that more frequent advising yields significant gains in credits earned and persistence. Similarly, [InsideTrack College Coaching](#) pairs trained coaches with students, particularly those facing academic, financial, or personal challenges, to create action plans and connect them to campus resources. A multi-site RCT found the program to be especially effective for first-generation, low-income, and minority students, and it has since been adopted widely across U.S. colleges.<sup>26</sup>

- **Enhanced tutoring.** Increased access to high-quality, personalized tutoring, whether one-on-one, small group, or classroom-integrated, has improved course performance and persistence, especially when participation is mandatory or incentivized through financial aid (as shown by CUNY ASAP and ASAP Ohio).<sup>27</sup> Special features of tutoring include one-on-one or small group tutoring, classroom tutoring, specialized content, and involving dedicated staff.
- **Combining financial support with other supports.** Financial assistance through grants, scholarships, tuition waivers, or living stipends remains one of the most common strategies for improving postsecondary persistence. Research has found that financial supports are most effective when combined with other services, such as advising or tutoring, rather than offered in isolation. Interventions providing moderate, sustained financial aid tended to yield stronger results than those offering very high or one-time awards, suggesting that design and targeting matter more than amount. While evidence on financial supports alone is mixed, programs that reduce financial stress and pair aid with personalized guidance consistently improve credit accumulation and graduation rates, particularly for low-income and first-generation students.<sup>28vi</sup> Similarly, a meta-analysis of supports for youth aging out of care found that tuition waivers alone are insufficient to achieve postsecondary graduation rates comparable to those of the general population. The authors recommend combining financial aid with stable housing, counselling and emotional supports, culturally relevant services that normalize help-

vi The literature review used does not list names of programs and interventions that provide financial aid.

seeking, early connections to schools and campuses, and cross-system coordination with specialized training for support staff.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, strong evidence shows that multi-component programs, combining proactive advising or coaching, structured full-time and summer enrolment, and sustained financial support consistently improve credit accumulation, persistence,

and completion. Targeted tutoring further boosts outcomes when participation is encouraged or incentivized. Complementary evidence on youth leaving care reinforces the importance of integrated supports: tuition waivers alone are insufficient, but combining financial aid with stable housing, counselling, and coordinated services significantly improves postsecondary outcomes.

## How is Canada responding to the need?

### Federally funded interventions

The federal government supports persistence in PSE persistence primarily through financial assistance and targeted programs for equity-deserving groups.

- The [Canada Student Financial Assistance Program](#) provides grants and loans with tailored provisions for students with disabilities.
- The [Registered Education Savings Plan](#) and [Canada Learning Bond](#) encourage parents to save for their children's education.
- The [Indspire Program](#), administered by ESDC under the Supports for Student Learning Program, provides financial assistance to Indigenous students not otherwise supported for PSE. Between the fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22, Indspire awarded 12,839 bursaries and scholarships, totalling approximately \$43 million. Outcomes have been strong: 75% of recipients graduated on time, with nearly 90% graduating

within four years, and recipients reported higher employment rates than the broader Indigenous population.<sup>30</sup>

### Provincially and territorially funded interventions

Provinces and territories also fund programs that address financial barriers as well as barriers to apprenticeship (see the **Appendix** for specific examples):

- **Financial supports.** These include grants, loans, scholarships, and tuition waivers designed to cover direct education costs (i.e., tuition and textbooks) and indirect costs (e.g., housing, transportation, and living expenses).
- **Employer subsidies for apprenticeships.** Wage subsidies and tax incentives encourage employers to hire and train apprentices, enabling youth to gain on-the-job experience, strengthen workplace skills, and complete certifications.

## Future Skills spotlight

We did not identify any current FSC-funded interventions that focus on supporting youth postsecondary completion and that have publicly available outcomes data.

## Segment 3: Work exposure and career exploration

### Who is affected and how?

This segment captures youth gaining early work experience, exploring career interests, and developing networks—all key precursors to smoother transitions into sustained employment after graduation.

Early, structured exposure to work helps students connect classroom learning to real-world applications and clarify their future education and career pathways. However, while many Canadian youth progress smoothly through school, obtaining early and meaningful exposure to work can be challenging. Labour Force Survey data provide a useful snapshot: from May to August 2025, between roughly 50% and 60% of returning students aged 15–24 were working or looking for work.<sup>31</sup> As of August 2025, their

unemployment rate was 16.9%, similar to the August 2024 rate (16.3%).<sup>32,vii</sup>

Access to work experience is not evenly distributed. Youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those without strong parental or community networks, and those living in rural or remote areas face limited opportunities for paid or career-relevant work. Structural factors such as transportation barriers, fewer local employers, and lack of awareness of available programs can further restrict participation. To address these disparities, students need accessible and equitable opportunities to engage in career exploration and gain early work experience.

### What's promising?

- **Summer jobs programs with mentorship and other job-readiness supports.** A review of RCTs of Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs) across four U.S. cities (New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia) found that SYEPs that provide summer jobs along with other supports, like life-skills workshops, cognitive-behavioural, or mentoring components, increase summer employment and modestly improve outcomes in the following year.<sup>33</sup> Longer-term employment effects are limited but somewhat stronger for older youth and those with higher rates of school absences. Emerging evidence suggests that adding post-program job search supports may enhance sustained employment, while educational impacts are mixed and concentrated among youth previously less engaged in school.<sup>34</sup>
- **Work-integrated learning (WIL).** WIL—including co-ops, internships, and paid or unpaid work placements—provides valuable opportunities for youth to gain early exposure to the labour market and develop work-relevant skills. However, existing evidence on WIL's effectiveness for improving employment outcomes is largely correlational; we are not aware of any studies that measure causal impacts. According to the 2018 National Graduates Survey, WIL participation is associated with higher odds of obtaining full-time, permanent employment, stronger job–education matches, and higher early-career earnings.<sup>35</sup> University co-op graduates earned about 22% more than non-participants and were less likely to be unemployed or hold temporary jobs. Paid placements raised earnings by roughly 17%, and unpaid placements produced smaller but

vii While some of those not employed in the summer may have previous work experience, we proceed on the premise that, regardless of prior work experience, these youth would benefit from greater access to meaningful job opportunities while in school.

still positive effects. Outcomes vary by design and learner characteristics: co-ops deliver the largest overall gains and greater advantages for men, while paid end-of-program placements appear especially beneficial for women in college programs.<sup>36</sup> These findings suggest that WIL's effectiveness depends on program design, compensation, and equitable access, highlighting the importance of expanding high-quality, inclusive,

and academically integrated opportunities.

Overall, the evidence on what works for youth who need early work experience or exposure is moderate. Findings suggest that structured, well-supported work experiences can aid youth transitions, but more research is needed to determine which approaches deliver sustained impacts and for whom.

## How is Canada responding to the need?

### Federally funded interventions

At the federal level, a range of programs aim to expand access to meaningful work experiences for students and young people.

- ESDC's [Student Work Placement Program](#) helps postsecondary students gain experience related to their field of study through internships, co-op placements, subsidized wage positions, and applied research projects. Since 2017, the program has provided over 249,000 opportunities, serving students in all fields of study from over 380 PSE institutions, with nearly half belonging to underrepresented groups.<sup>37</sup>
- Through the [Youth Employment and Skills Strategy \(YESS\)](#), ESDC and other federal departments, agencies, and Crown corporations provide wage subsidies to employers offering summer jobs, internships, and short-term employment (up to 12 months).<sup>38</sup>
- [Canada Summer Jobs \(CSJ\)](#), the flagship summer jobs program administered by ESDC, serves youth aged 15–30, with approximately 12% reporting no prior work experience. An evaluation found that two-thirds of participants with a high school diploma or higher returned

to their studies following their CSJ placement, suggesting its contribution to sustained engagement in education and work. It also found that CSJ participants who returned to school following participation experienced a 9.7 percentage point impact on their employment incidence two years after and wage increases \$1,592 higher relative to a comparison group.<sup>39</sup>

### Provincially and territorially funded interventions

Provinces and territories offer a variety of programs that connect students with employers, promote career exploration, and strengthen work readiness, including the following (see the **Appendix** for specific examples):

- **Employer wage subsidies.** Many jurisdictions provide wage subsidies or tax incentives to encourage employers to hire students during the summer or throughout the year. These programs reduce employer costs and create more opportunities for students, often prioritizing those facing systemic barriers to employment.
- **High school career and work experience.** Several provinces offer specialized programs that enable secondary students to explore careers, gain early work experience, and earn credits toward graduation.

- **Programs for student subgroups.** Tailored initiatives support students from particular communities or equity-deserving groups, aiming to expand access to meaningful work experiences while addressing barriers related to identity, geography, or background.
- **Fields of study programs.** Some programs target students in designated disciplines, such as engineering, healthcare, or environmental

studies, where applied experience is critical for career entry and professional accreditation.

- **Government work opportunities.** Many jurisdictions offer paid positions within the public service for students. Some are seasonal while others operate year-round, allowing students to gain practical experience while contributing to public programs and services.

### Future Skills Centre spotlight:

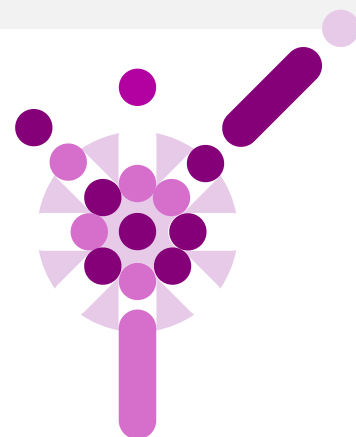
#### Calgary Work Integrated Learning Pilot Project (TalentED YYC)

The [Calgary Work Integrated Learning Pilot Project \(TalentED YYC\)](#), running from April 2023 to March 2025 under Calgary Economic Development, aimed to create a regional model of WIL to strengthen the local labour market by expanding employer participation and increasing the quantity, diversity, and quality of WIL opportunities for students. The project was tasked with developing and demonstrating a viable regional approach to bridging a talent gap between skills provided by postsecondary institutions and those demanded by employers. Spanning a wide range of sectors, occupations, and student demographics, TalentED YYC featured several types of WIL opportunities,

such as cooperative education, internships, service learning, field placement, and professional practicum/clinical placements. Other options—referred to as iWIL (innovative WIL opportunities)—included bootcamps, hackathons, and similar activities, which were shorter than traditional WIL opportunities and meant to serve as precursors to formalized WIL.

A 2025 evaluation by Higher Education Strategy Associates showed that the project engaged 743 SMEs in the development of WIL opportunities and employer workshops; involved 1,699 completed WIL placements and 1,966 completed iWILs; and engaged 280 employers in iWIL opportunities.<sup>40</sup>

Reaching youth most in need requires more than program quality—it demands visibility, trust, and simplicity of access.



## Segment 4a: Transitions to better jobs for youth without PSE

### Who is affected and how?

This segment represents youth without postsecondary credentials who have transitioned to work but are in low-wage or precarious jobs. Roughly one in four Canadians aged 25 to 34 do not hold a postsecondary credential—a factor strongly associated with poorer labour market outcomes, such as higher unemployment rates and lower earnings.<sup>41</sup> In 2024, 36% of employees with high school diplomas or less earned below the low-wage threshold of \$20 per hour<sup>viii</sup> compared to merely

9.2% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher, underscoring the persistent wage gap linked to education levels.<sup>42</sup>

Youth without postsecondary credentials face barriers to training and career progression. Addressing these challenges calls for flexible pathways that support skill development and help them transition from precarious to stable, higher-quality employment.

### What's promising?

**Sector-based training** focuses on preparing individuals for quality jobs that employers seek to fill in high-demand industries or occupational clusters. While many of these programs do not exclusively target youth, young adults compose a significant share of participants.

Rigorous evaluations highlight the effectiveness of such models that align with employer demand, provide industry-recognized credentials, and offer comprehensive supports to sustain participant

success. For example, [Per Scholas](#) and [Project QUEST](#) in the U.S. demonstrate strong, lasting impacts on employment and earnings. Both combine targeted skills training, career coaching, and employer partnerships to connect participants to in-demand occupations in sectors such as IT, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. Evaluations show that participants achieve substantially higher earnings and employment stability than comparison groups, with benefits that persist over time.<sup>43,44</sup>

### How is Canada responding to the need?

#### Federally funded initiatives

While YESS (introduced on p. 18) is not explicitly designed to address this need segment, the federal government funds a wide range of programs through YESS that support youth as they transition into the labour market. A key component, CSJ, provides wage subsidies to employers to create summer work opportunities for youth. Another core component, the [YESS Program \(YESSP\)](#), offers

five types of support: subsidized employment, skills training, entrepreneurship training, employment services, and support measures, such as mentoring and wraparound assistance.

According to the most recent YESS evaluation (December 2024), approximately one in three CSJ participants had no PSE (excluding those with incomplete PSE who may be students). Among participants who did not return to school after their

viii The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) Expert Group on Quality of Employment defines the low pay threshold as hourly earnings that are less than two-thirds of the median (before taxes and other deductions).

placement, CSJ was associated with positive impacts on employment and earnings and reduced use of employment insurance and social assistance.<sup>45</sup>

In its analysis of the YESSP, the evaluation found that subsidized work experience—either alone or combined with skills training—produced the most immediate and measurable gains in youth employment and earnings. Participants in work-only placements saw the largest short-term impacts: with a 15-percentage point higher increase in employment incidence relative to the comparison group in the first year and a \$4,347 larger increase in earnings. In the second year, impacts on employment incidence was smaller (8.79 ppt), but the impact on earnings was larger (\$5,075). Skills training alone, by contrast, showed negative or insignificant effects within the first two years, suggesting that it is not as beneficial—or its benefits may take longer to materialize as participants complete training and gradually enter the labour market.<sup>46</sup>

However, the evaluation did not disaggregate impacts by educational attainment or job quality, limiting insight into whether these programs are equally effective for youth without PSE or whether they help participants move into more stable, well-paying jobs—a key concern for this youth need segment.

## **Provincially and territorially funded interventions**

Most provinces and territories offer broad employment and training programs that help young people gain basic skills and enter the labour market, but few initiatives appear to explicitly target youth without PSE credentials who are seeking career advancement. While existing programs often provide valuable supports, such as coaching, short-term training, and work experience, they tend to prioritize labour market entry rather than long-term upward mobility.

One program that addresses youth specifically is [BladeRunners](#). Launched in 1994 in Vancouver, BladeRunners is now a provincially supported employment and skills training program in BC for youth facing multiple barriers to employment, including those with limited education or unstable work histories. It provides a blend of life skills training, job readiness supports, certification courses, work experience or on-the-job training, job coaching, and ongoing supports to support youth employment in a number of sectors (e.g., construction, culinary arts, health care, retail, hospitality, and office administration).<sup>47</sup> In 2021, the province invested \$18.6 million over three years through the Canada–BC Workforce Development Agreement to expand BladeRunners to 50+ communities, serving over 4,000 youth through 11 delivery organizations.<sup>48</sup> The program website indicates high completion rates and roughly 75% job placement among participants,<sup>49</sup> though these outcomes have not been independently verified.

## Future Skills Centre spotlight: NPower Canada

[NPower Canada](#) is a national nonprofit organization that delivers free, sector-based training programs to help youth and other equity-deserving groups build in-demand technical and professional skills for digital careers. Its programs, such as Junior IT Analyst (JITA) and Junior Data Analyst (JDA), combine technical instruction, professional skills development, and direct employer engagement. Participants earn industry-recognized certifications and connect to employers who co-design curricula and hiring pathways to ensure alignment with labour market demand.

NPower Canada has expanded across Canada with support from the FSC. It now operates in multiple provinces and serves diverse populations. Just over 90% of its participants identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of colour,<sup>50</sup> and youth under the age of 30 account for nearly half of its participants.<sup>51</sup>

The program is in Blueprint's Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio and is currently undergoing an RCT. This marks the first rigorous evaluation of a sector-based training program for youth in Canada, which will make a major contribution to the national evidence base on what works to help young people without PSE credentials transition into stable, higher-quality employment.

Our outcomes analysis for youth participants (aged 29 and under) shows promising results: employment rate gains of about 21 percentage points 12 months post-program.<sup>52</sup> The RCT will determine whether these outcomes can be causally attributed to the program and will assess longer-term effects on earnings, job stability, and career progression.



Rapid advances in AI and automation threaten to reduce entry-level opportunities that once served as steppingstones for young people.

## Segment 4b: Transitions from PSE to quality employment

### Who is affected and how?

This segment captures youth navigating the transition from PSE to the labour market: those seeking their first in-field job and trying to establish a foothold in their chosen career. Although youth with PSE credentials generally experience better employment and earnings outcomes than those without, labour market outcomes vary widely, as some graduates face difficulties translating education into stable, quality employment.

For example, unemployment rates differ substantially depending on field of study.<sup>53</sup> They also differ by immigration status: in 2023-24, 14.1% of immigrant youth with a bachelor's degree or higher were NEET compared to 6.8% of their Canadian-born peers.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, young immigrant university graduates were 3.5 percentage points more likely to be NEET than in the previous academic year (2022-23),

### What's promising?

For many new graduates, the lack of direct experience in their field is a key barrier to securing stable, well-matched employment. **Programs that provide temporary, wage-subsidized positions** help bridge this gap by giving participants both relevant experience and professional networks. [Career Focus](#)—one of three streams under Canada's former Youth Employment Strategy—was one such program. Delivered by several federal departments, it provided wage subsidies to employers offering recent graduates work experiences aligned with their career goals. A quasi-experimental evaluation found that the program produced positive and lasting impacts on participants' labour market attachment and

whereas no similar increase was observed among Canadian-born university graduates. This increase for highly educated immigrants was observed regardless of time of immigration or where they received their education.<sup>55</sup> These disparities may reflect a combination of factors, including mismatches between graduates' skills and labour market demand, limited professional networks, gaps in foundational or social-emotional skills, and discrimination or other systemic barriers in hiring.

To address these challenges, graduates need targeted supports that connect them to employers, strengthen job readiness and career navigation skills, and promote equitable access to quality employment opportunities aligned with their education and aspirations.

earnings. Over the five-year post-participation period, the average annual earnings of participants were \$5,535 higher than the comparison group. Positive impacts were relatively larger for men. A cost-benefit analysis also showed that incremental impacts five years after program participation were projected over a five-year period. Over this 10-year horizon, the program generated a positive return on investment for both participants and society as a whole.<sup>56</sup> Canada Summer Jobs, a component of the YESS, offers a similar opportunity, though it no longer targets PSE graduates exclusively.

Overall, there is limited evidence on what works to support youth with postsecondary credentials transition into quality employment. Few effective

strategies have been identified for graduates who continue to face barriers after completing their studies. WIL appears promising as a more proactive approach—suggesting greater impact may come

from providing students with field-aligned work experience and networks during their studies rather than after graduation.

## How is Canada responding to the need?

### Federally funded interventions

Described above, YESS supports a range of programs that may benefit recent PSE graduates. Through its network of funded organizations, YESS provides skills training, subsidized work placements, and employment services that help young people, including PSE graduates, build experience, strengthen job readiness, and transition into the labour market.

### Provincially and territorially funded interventions

Provinces and territories use a range of approaches to support recent graduates' transitions into employment. These include the following (see the Appendix for specific examples):

- **Programs connecting graduates to field-specific work experience.** These initiatives provide recent PSE graduates with employment or internship opportunities in their field of study.

They are often paired with mentorship or career coaching to support professional development and longer-term career entry.

- **Public service internship programs.** Paid internships or fellowship programs within government departments and agencies help recent graduates gain professional experience, networks, and exposure to public service careers.
- **Wage subsidy programs for employers.** There are various financial incentives for non-governmental employers to hire and train recent graduates, enabling them to gain stable, career-relevant work experience while stimulating employer investment in workforce development. Subsidies typically support newly created positions rather than replacing existing staff.

Youth who leave high school early face limited access to stable, well-paying jobs and a higher risk of long-term labour market disconnection.



## Future Skills Centre spotlight: Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT)

The **ADaPT** program, developed by the Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University in partnership with TECHNATION, is an online digital skills training initiative designed to bridge the gap between PSE and employment in Canada's digital economy. Funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and evaluated by Blueprint, the program provides non-STEM graduates and final-year students—particularly those from equity-deserving groups—with digital and professional skills needed to access IT-related roles. The RCT compares a live instruction stream, which includes one-on-one coaching, with a self-directed stream and a comparison group that has access to LinkedIn Learning. This project represents an important contribution to the field, as there are few programs (let alone rigorously evaluated ones) specifically designed to support young postsecondary graduates in navigating the transition from school to work.

Findings from 971 RCT participants, 97% of whom identified as equity-deserving and 68% as youth aged 29 or younger, show that most participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the program.<sup>57</sup> They found ADaPT accessible, flexible, and relevant to their career goals, with many crediting it for building both digital and professional competencies and improving their confidence in the job market. At the nine-month follow-up, the results showed small-to-moderate positive effects on career planning, digital design, digital office, business financial, and written communication skills. Virtual stream participants were about 12 percentage points more likely than the comparison group to hold digital roles. We also found that digital design and office skills at exit are positively related to employment in a digital role. Notably, youth in the program were shown to have higher job satisfaction and perceived advancement opportunities compared to older participants at the nine-month follow-up.<sup>58</sup>



## Segment 5: Re-engagement and re-entry

### Who is affected and how?

NEET youth are a highly diverse population whose circumstances, barriers, and support needs vary widely by factors such as age, gender, disability, and family responsibilities. These youth may have missed or disengaged from multiple stages of the school-to-work pathway and require support to rebuild confidence, reconnect with systems, and identify viable next steps.

In the 2023-24 academic year (September to April)—the most recent period for which data are available—approximately 853,800 Canadians aged 15 to 29 were neither studying nor employed (11.3% of all in this age group).<sup>59</sup> NEET rates differ across age groups. Younger youth (15–19) are least likely to be NEET due to high participation in high school and PSE, and their rates have remained relatively stable. In contrast, older youth (20–29) are more

affected by labour market fluctuations, caregiving demands, and financial pressures, which can complicate their re-entry into education or work.<sup>60</sup>

NEET youth often face complex and intersecting challenges, such as mental health issues, unstable housing, past trauma, disabilities, and disconnection from education, training, or employment systems. While some NEET youth are aware of available supports and are willing to use them, many lack awareness of services that could benefit them, encounter gaps in service availability, or find that the support they receive does not fully meet their needs.<sup>61</sup> Addressing these barriers requires flexible, integrated supports that combine outreach, counselling, and skill-building opportunities to help them reconnect with learning, training, or work in a way that meets their individual circumstances.

### What's promising?

- **“Place-then-train” employment services.** The strongest and most consistent evidence for improving outcomes among NEET youth comes from [Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\)](#), a structured intervention originally developed for individuals with serious mental illness. Rather than requiring participants to complete pre-employment training before entering the workforce, IPS emphasizes rapid entry into competitive employment followed by individualized, ongoing support. Two RCTs found substantial improvements in employment for participating NEET youth with mental health conditions along with gains in mental health and overall well-being.<sup>62,63</sup> These findings demonstrate

the effectiveness of models that combine rapid job placement with individualized, ongoing support.

- **Multi-component programs combining sector-based training, work experience, and wraparound supports.** Several large-scale programs targeting out-of-school and unemployed youth have shown promising results in rigorous evaluations. The [YouthBuild](#) program in the U.S. targets low-income youth aged 16 to 24 who have dropped out of school, combining academic instruction, vocational training (primarily in construction), leadership development, and comprehensive supports. While employment impacts were modest, participants were more likely to earn vocational

credentials and re-engage with education: key steps toward long-term economic participation.<sup>64</sup> Another strong example is [Year Up](#), a U.S. program serving low-income young adults, many of whom are NEET at intake. It combines six months of intensive technical and professional training with a six-month internship at a corporate partner. A randomized evaluation found earnings gains of up to 30%, which persisted for several years after program completion, highlighting the effectiveness of employer-engaged, demand-driven models that

link disconnected youth to practical skills and career pathways.<sup>65,66</sup>

In summary, the strongest evidence for NEET re-engagement points to place-then-train employment models and multi-component programs integrating training, work placements, and individualized supports. Efforts to address youth disconnection should prioritize intensive, relationship-based, and demand-driven models targeting both immediate employment outcomes and long-term labour market attachment.

## How is Canada responding to the need?

Various supports and programs are offered at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels may help re-engage disconnected young people. Though many do not exclusively target NEET youth, these offerings may still be relevant to re-engage them in the labour market by providing work experience, skills development, and/or wraparound supports.

### Federally funded interventions

At the federal level, certain initiatives provide financial assistance and pathways toward stable, career-oriented employment. YESS supports youth facing barriers to employment through a mix of skills training, subsidized work placements, and employment services. As discussed above, recent evidence shows YESS had a positive impact on participants' labour market attachment, helping many youth move toward more stable employment.<sup>67</sup>

Other federal programs may also be relevant to NEET youth who wish to reconnect with education or training. The Canada Student Financial Assistance Program, described above, provides loans and grants that enable youth to return to postsecondary studies, helping them strengthen

credentials and re-enter the labour market.

Similarly, the federal government offers several apprenticeship supports, such as the [Canada Apprenticeship Loan](#) and related grants and tax credits, which help young people pursue training and certification in the skilled trades.

### Provincially and territorially funded interventions

Available examples illustrate the range of supports that provinces and territories offer to re-engage NEET youth (see the **Appendix** for specific program examples):

- **Financial incentives for trades and in-demand careers.** Programs offering tax credits, grants, or wage incentives encourage youth to pursue careers in the trades and other high-demand sectors. These initiatives promote re-engagement by offering both a professional pathway and financial motivation to remain in the workforce.
- **Job-readiness and employability programs.** These programs help youth overcome personal and systemic barriers to employment through individualized training, coaching, and

wraparound supports. They focus on building job skills, confidence, and stability to support sustained employment.

- **Community-based employment service centres.** These centres aim to provide access to holistic supports—including career counselling, mental health services, and job placement—to help youth facing complex

challenges transition into the workforce.

- **Wage subsidy programs.** Several provinces and territories offer employer subsidies to encourage the hiring of young or inexperienced workers. These programs help participants gain meaningful work experience while supporting local workforce development.

### Future Skills Centre spotlight: Lift/Futur en tête

Lift/Futur en tête, a project in Blueprint's Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, is an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program designed to support youth facing mental health and substance-use challenges by integrating employment and educational supports directly into mental health services. Developed by leaders from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Douglas Mental Health University Institute, and the University of British Columbia, the program emphasizes rapid placement into competitive employment or education followed by ongoing, individualized support, rather than traditional pre-employment training.

Implemented across Integrated Youth Services (IYS) hubs in multiple provinces, including Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, New Brunswick, and British Columbia, the program has shown promising results. Employment rates among participants increased from 28% at intake to 67% after 12 months. Participants reported high satisfaction with the program, noting its effectiveness in helping them achieve their employment and educational goals. The initiative continues to expand, aiming to embed integrated supports as a core component of youth mental health services across Canada.



The most consistently successful approaches are multi-faceted: career-connected learning, mentoring, flexibility, and wraparound supports.

## Summary: What we know

**Table 2** summarizes findings from the preceding sections for each youth need segment: 1) early education retention; 2) PSE persistence; 3) work exposure and career exploration; 4a) transitions to better jobs for youth without PSE; 4b) transitions from PSE to quality employment; and 5) re-engagement

and re-entry. It highlights emerging and established strategies that show potential to address these needs, provides an overview of federal initiatives and available evidence on their effectiveness, and presents examples of provincial, territorial, and FSC programs that illustrate promising approaches.

**Table 2** | Summary of findings

	Segment					
	1. Early education retention	2. PSE persistence	3. Work exposure and career exploration	4a. Transitions to better jobs (no PSE)	4b. Transitions from PSE to quality jobs	5. Re-engagement and re-entry (NEET)
<b>Who they are</b>	Students at risk of disengaging before finishing high school.	Students enrolled in PSE at risk of leaving without a credential.	Students with limited work experience.	Youth without PSE credentials in precarious jobs.	Recent graduates facing under-employment or job mismatch.	Youth not in employment, education or training.
<b>What works (international evidence base)</b>	Strong evidence. Multi-faceted, school-to-work, and mentoring models improve completion and transitions when implemented with fidelity.	Strong evidence. Multi-component supports (financial aid plus advising plus structured schedules) improve credit accumulation and graduation.	Moderate evidence. WIL and summer employment improve early labour outcomes; quality of placements matters.	Strong evidence. Sector-based, employer-engaged programs with wraparound supports yield sustained earnings gains.	Limited evidence. There is early-stage evidence; targeted graduate programs show promise but lack causal evaluations.	Strong evidence. Integrated employment, mental health, and wraparound support models deliver lasting gains in employment and stability.
<b>Federal programs</b>	Supports for Student Learning Program; Outbound Student Mobility Pilot	Canada Student Financial Assistance Program; Canada Learning Bond; Indspire	Student Work Placement Program; Canada Summer Jobs; YESS	YESS	YESS; Career Focus (legacy); Student Work Placement Program	YESS; Canada Student Financial Assistance Apprenticeship Grants & Loans
<b>Provincial and territorial programs</b>	A systematic landscape review is needed to understand P/T offerings (see the Appendix for examples).					
<b>Relevant FSC projects</b>	Reboot Plus Expansion	N/A	TalentED YYC	NPower Canada	ADaPT	Lift / Futur en tête



## 4. Lessons learned and opportunities for moving forward

Canada has made progress in several areas for youth in their journeys from school to employment—higher high-school completion rates, greater PSE access, and expanded employment programs—but persistent gaps remain and new risks are emerging. Technological change, especially the adoption of AI, may be transforming entry-level jobs, raising concerns about job displacement and its long-term consequences for recent PSE graduates early in their careers.<sup>68,69</sup> Economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and global market volatility further complicate the transition from education to work.

Addressing these pressures requires shared effort across governments and sectors. The federal government funds broad programs such as YESS

and the Canada Student Financial Assistance Program, while provinces and territories deliver other supports across education, employment, and social portfolios. Municipalities, postsecondary institutions, nonprofits, and employers also operate their own initiatives. Yet the degree to which these programs align or overlap remains unclear. In an era of fiscal constraint, maximizing impact will depend on improving coordination, scaling proven models, and ensuring that public investments deliver measurable outcomes for youth.

Against this backdrop, and drawing on current evidence and program analysis, we identify several lessons and opportunities for strengthening Canada's approach to youth transitions.

### **Lesson 1:** **There are significant knowledge gaps on funded projects.**

Information on youth programs in Canada remains fragmented and incomplete. Publicly available materials often lack key details on target populations, delivery models, and outcomes, making it difficult to understand what services are available or how effective they are.

Evaluation efforts are also limited. While evaluations of federal funding programs provide rigorous insights into their *overall* effectiveness, they could go further in presenting more granular information—on what works best, for whom, and under what conditions. There is also no consolidated knowledge resource that compiles and shares evidence from across Canada and

internationally. It is sometimes challenging to uncover what government has learned from the data collected through previously funded projects.

Taken together, these gaps make it challenging to navigate the current ecosystem, assess complementarity, or make evidence-based funding choices. The result is a risk of duplication, inefficiency, and missed opportunities for innovation and continuous improvement.

#### **Opportunity: Build a stronger knowledge infrastructure.**

Governments at all levels can play a role in strengthening the knowledge base for youth programming.

- **Map the program landscape.** The federal government, in partnership with provinces and territories, could lead a review of government-funded youth programs. The review could classify interventions by segment, type, target outcomes, and funding source to assess the degree of alignment, complementarity, effectiveness, and value for money.
- **Generate stronger evidence.** To better understand what works, for whom, and in what contexts, governments can incentivize and support rigorous evaluations of funded projects. These evaluations could inform decisions about funding and program improvement and ensure public

investments are aligned with measurable outcomes in education, skills, employment, and earnings.

- **Preserve and share knowledge.** Canadian jurisdictions could collaborate on a pan-Canadian knowledge hub of funded projects and evidence-based practices. This hub could synthesize and communicate lessons from funded projects, highlighting what has been learned about effective practices, common challenges, and areas for improvement. These feedback loops, along with other types of knowledge mobilization, would strengthen alignment, encourage continuous learning, and support system-wide improvement.

Integrated employment and mental health supports deliver lasting gains in employment and stability.



## Lesson 2: Reactive programming is more common than proactive approaches.

Most youth employment programs in Canada are reactive, addressing challenges only after young people fall behind in education or employment. A proactive approach, focused on prevention, early guidance, and informed decision-making, would better prepare youth for a changing labour market and reduce further challenges.

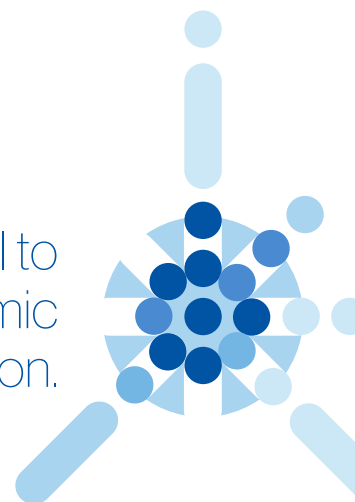
Providing comprehensive career guidance starting in high school, grounded in current labour market information, can help students make informed choices among university, college, and apprenticeship pathways. Early interventions also have ripple effects across the school-to-work journey. For example, helping students complete high school boosts postsecondary participation and improves long-term employment outcomes. Investing in these early, multi-impact interventions can yield lasting benefits and reduces the need for more intensive supports later.

### **Opportunity: Rebalance proactive and reactive programming.**

Governments could explore how Canada's youth employment ecosystem could be rebalanced to place greater emphasis on prevention and resilience. This requires identifying root causes and developing proactive measures through targeted programs and support systems.

- **Shift upstream.** Governments could consider expanding early interventions that help youth develop foundational and career-relevant skills while identifying those at risk of disengagement. For example, data-informed early warning systems, supported by educators and community partners, could flag students showing signs of disconnection and connect them to tailored supports. Integrating essential skills and labour market knowledge earlier in schooling can help students see the relevance of learning and sustain engagement.
- **Collaborate across ecosystems.** Future efforts could explore how collaboration with employers, postsecondary institutions, and local workforce organizations can ensure guidance reflects emerging skill needs and supports informed, future-oriented decision-making.
- **Assess long-term impact.** Governments could invest in rigorous evaluations to identify which preventive measures deliver the greatest long-term value. Longitudinal studies using administrative data can track outcomes over time, ensuring that public investments support sustainable, cost-effective results.

Understanding youth transitions is essential to designing supports that promote economic independence and social inclusion.



## Lesson 3:

### There are challenges in engaging the youth most in need of support.

Even where strong programs exist, many youth—especially NEET youth—struggle to find or access them. Supports are often fragmented, delivered by multiple actors with limited visibility or coordination.

Some jurisdictions outside of Canada have introduced “youth guarantees”—clear, public commitments that every young person will have

a pathway to employment, training, or education within a defined period.<sup>70</sup> While Canada’s context is different, the principle of visibility and guaranteed access is highly relevant. A more coherent and visible set of entry points could help ensure that youth who are disconnected from school or work can still access timely, appropriate support.

### Opportunity: Improve program reach and engagement.

Reaching youth who are most in need requires more than program quality—it demands visibility, trust, and simplicity of access. Governments can explore how to strengthen these dimensions through several strategies:

- **Invest in outreach.** Governments can explore opportunities to fund interventions that involve proactive outreach and engagement models that go beyond passive program delivery. This can include engaging dedicated outreach workers—especially those from trusted peer or cultural backgrounds—who can identify unmet needs, build relationships with affected youth, and gently guide them toward proper services.
- **Increase visibility and access.** Governments could explore the development of a pan-Canadian “youth guarantee” or equivalent model to ensure that all young people, especially those not in school or work, have a clear, well-publicized pathway to training, employment,

or re-engagement supports. A single, visible entry point, whether digital or in-person, could make the system easier to navigate and raise awareness among youth and families.

- **Target more strategically.** Federal, provincial, and territorial governments could invest in building the data and analytical capacity of service providers to more systematically analyze information on youth needs, barriers, and outcomes. This would help providers tailor interventions more effectively, better identify and support youth who may not self-identify as needing help, and ensure that public investments are targeted to those who will benefit from them.

## Moving forward

Helping young people navigate the school-to-work transition is a significant challenge. But it also represents an opportunity to strengthen Canada's long-term economic and social resilience. Canada already has a diverse set of programs and strong innovation partners, like the FSC, testing promising models. The next step is to connect these efforts—to understand how different programs complement one another, where duplication may exist, and how the most effective approaches can be scaled.

The task ahead is not about reinventing the wheel, but about aligning efforts, sharing knowledge, and ensuring that youth receive services that are timely, appropriate, and responsive to their circumstances. With stronger collaboration and a commitment to building knowledge and evidence, Canada can build a system that is proactive, inclusive, and resilient—one that gives young people the confidence and opportunity to thrive and strengthens our society as a whole.

The next step is to connect efforts across governments, institutions, and communities ...  
Canada can build a system that is proactive,  
inclusive, and resilient.



## Appendix: Examples of provincially and territorially funded programs

**Table A1** | Examples of programs supporting youth at risk of educational disengagement

Program type	Examples	Description/Key features
<b>Programs Supporting Youth Health and Development</b>	Ontario – Youth Mentorship Program	Provides mentorship and skill-building opportunities to help at-risk youth make healthy life choices and reach their goals.
	Ontario – Youth Outreach Worker Program	Connects youth aged 12–25 with community supports, helping them build positive relationships, improve well-being, and stay engaged in education.
	Ontario – Restorative Justice and Conflict Mediation Program	Offers conflict resolution and restorative approaches to support youth in addressing behavioural challenges and strengthening relationships.
<b>Targeted Supports for Specific Vulnerable Groups</b>	Yukon – Teen Parent Centre	Helps young or soon-to-be mothers graduate from high school through flexible education options, free childcare, and wraparound supports.
	Yukon – Gadzoosdaa Student Residence & Boarding Allowance	Provides subsidized housing, meals, and academic supports for students from remote communities to continue their education.
<b>Alternative and Culturally Grounded Learning Models</b>	Yukon – Individual Learning Centres	Offer flexible, self-paced learning environments for youth who do not thrive in conventional school settings or have family/work commitments.
	Manitoba – Career Development Internship Program	Allows students to earn up to two high school credits for skills and experience gained through unpaid internships, fostering experiential learning.
<b>Comprehensive Transition and Empowerment Services</b>	Quebec – Programme qualification des jeunes (PQJ)	Supports youth aged 16–25 at risk of marginalization in developing life and employment skills, fostering independence, and reconnecting with education or work.
	Saskatchewan – Integrated Youth Services	Provides rapid access to integrated, culturally safe supports including health, education, employment, and community services for youth aged 12–25.
	Alberta – Transition to Adulthood Program	Helps young adults transitioning from care to independent living, PSE, and employment.

Program type	Examples	Description/Key features
<b>Bridging Programs Between Secondary and Postsecondary Education</b>	Ontario – Youth Apprenticeship Program	Offers students opportunities to explore skilled trades while earning high school credits and gaining hands-on experience.
	Northwest Territories – Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP)	Connects high school students with skilled trades careers, combining academic study with paid work experience to support smooth school-to-work transitions.
	Yukon – Trades & Apprenticeship Pathways	Provides work experience and training opportunities in trades, helping students transition from high school to employment or apprenticeships.
	Yukon – Dual Credit Program	Allows students to take up to two free courses at Yukon University that count toward both high school and postsecondary credits.
	Alberta – Dual Credit Program	Offers high school students the opportunity to earn credits applicable to both secondary school and postsecondary programs.

**Table A2 | Examples of programs supporting postsecondary persistence and completion**

Program type	Example	Description/Key features
<b>Financial Supports</b>	British Columbia – Youth Futures Education Fund	Provides financial assistance to postsecondary students with care experience, helping cover tuition, textbooks, and living expenses to promote persistence and graduation.
	British Columbia – StudentAid BC	Offers loans, grants, and scholarships to support students' access to and completion of postsecondary studies, with additional provisions for youth from care.
	Yukon – Yukon Excellence Award	Recognizes academic achievement among Yukon students and provides financial awards to reduce financial barriers to PSE.
	Yukon – Yukon Grant	Provides funding to Yukon residents pursuing postsecondary studies, supporting access and completion by alleviating financial pressures.
<b>Employer Subsidies for Apprenticeships</b>	Northwest Territories – Trades and Occupational Wage Subsidy Program	Administered by the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment, this program offers employers a \$9/hour subsidy for up to 3,200 hours over two fiscal years to support training and hiring of apprentices.

**Table A3** | Examples of programs providing work experience

<b>Program type</b>	<b>Province /Territory</b>	<b>Program name</b>	<b>Description/Key features</b>
<b>Government Work Opportunities for Students</b>	Nunavut	Summer Employment Opportunities; Tuglirjavut Student Employment Program	Administered by the Department of Employment, Training and Career Development, these programs provide students with seasonal and year-round placements in the public sector, offering practical experience and exposure to career options.
	Nunavut	Summer Student Employment Equity Program	Run by the Department of Human Resources, this program provides secondary and postsecondary Nunavut Inuit and Nunavummiut students with paid work experience in the territorial public service.
	Northwest Territories	Summer Student Employment Program; Wage Subsidy Program; Summer Career Placement Program	Administered by the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment and Finance, these programs offer wage-subsidized summer and short-term jobs to students, encouraging employers to provide meaningful work experience.
<b>Programs for Specific Student Sub-Groups</b>	Ontario	Indigenous Youth Work Exchange Program	Offered by the Ministry of Natural Resources, this eight-week program provides Indigenous youth with paid summer employment and skill development in natural resource management.
	Ontario	Youth Job Connection; Youth Job Connection Summer	Delivered by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development, these programs serve youth facing barriers such as poverty, homelessness, or disability, offering paid employment and pre-employment training.
<b>Programs Linked to Specific Fields of Study</b>	Ontario	Summer Law Student Programs	Administered by the Ministry of the Attorney General, this program provides paid summer employment to first- and second-year law students, along with mentorship, training, and professional networking opportunities.
<b>High School Career and Work Experience Programs</b>	Ontario	Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)	Offered by the Ministry of Education in all publicly funded high schools, SHSM enables students to gain specialized skills, knowledge, and certifications relevant to chosen industries through sector-focused courses and work experiences.
	Alberta	Work Experience Program	Allows high school students to earn credits toward their diploma while exploring career paths through supervised placements, including within Alberta Health Services.
<b>Employer Wage Subsidy Programs</b>	New Brunswick	Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) Program; Youth Employment Fund	Provide wage subsidies to small businesses and non-profits that hire students for summer positions, promoting work experience and skills development in local communities.

**Table A4 |** Examples of programs supporting underemployed youth with PSE credentials

<b>Program type</b>	<b>Program and jurisdiction</b>	<b>Description/Key features</b>
<b>Field-Specific Work Experience Programs</b>	Ontario – Engineering Development Program	Provides recent civil and geotechnical engineering graduates with qualifying experience toward professional licensure and progression into senior roles within the Ontario Public Service. Focuses on developing technical, leadership, and project management skills in a public-sector context.
	Alberta – CyberAlberta Work Experience Program	Offers recent graduates with degrees in cybersecurity or related fields paid, full-time placements in the provincial government’s Cybersecurity Division. Participants rotate through multiple teams, gaining hands-on experience, mentorship, and personalized development plans. The program bridges the gap between academic training and the province’s growing demand for cybersecurity professionals.
<b>Public Service Internship Programs</b>	Ontario – Ontario Internship Program (OIP)	Provides one-year paid internships in the Ontario Public Service across a variety of fields, including information technology, program and service delivery, business and financial planning, human resources, communications, labour relations, and policy development. Aims to prepare graduates for long-term careers in government.
	Northwest Territories – Internship Program for New Graduates	Offers similar opportunities to Ontario’s OIP, but prioritizes Indigenous graduates and those with established residency in the Northwest Territories prior to their studies. Helps participants gain professional experience and transition into roles within the territorial public service.
<b>Wage Subsidy Programs for Employers</b>	Nova Scotia – Graduate to Opportunity (GTO)	Administered by the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, GTO provides wage subsidies to small- and medium-sized employers who hire recent graduates into new, full-time permanent positions. Sub-programs (GTO Grow and GTO Innovate) support the hiring of graduates from diverse backgrounds and in innovation-focused roles.

**Table A5 |** Examples of programs supporting youth who are NEET

<b>Program type</b>	<b>Program and jurisdiction</b>	<b>Description/Key features</b>
<b>Financial Incentives for Trades and In-Demand Careers</b>	Nova Scotia – More Opportunity for Skilled Trades and Occupations (MOST)	Provides a tax refund on the first \$50,000 of income earned in the province by registered apprentices, certified journeypersons, or licensed nurses.
<b>Job-Readiness and Employability Programs</b>	British Columbia – Young Adult at Risk Program	Offers skills training and employment supports tailored to participant needs to help unemployed or precariously employed youth aged 16–29 overcome barriers such as housing instability, incomplete education, or mental health challenges.
	Quebec – Jeunes en mouvement vers l'emploi (Youth Moving Toward Employment)	Supports youth aged 15–30, especially those far from the labour market, with flexible, tailored services addressing their challenges and helping them gain skills and confidence for sustainable employment.
<b>Community-Based Employment Service Centres</b>	British Columbia – WorkBC Centres	Provide youth with one-on-one counselling, resume and job search assistance, skills training, work placements, and mental health supports to help them enter or re-enter the workforce.
	Quebec – Carrefours jeunesse-emploi (Youth Employment Hubs)	Provincially funded hubs for youth aged 16–35 offering socio-professional integration, educational support, and access to health and social services.
<b>Wage Subsidy Programs</b>	Northwest Territories – Wage Subsidy Program	Provides funding to employers to hire residents with minimal experience or education for up to 52 weeks, offsetting training costs and supporting meaningful full-time employment.
	Nunavut – Hamlet Employing Youth Program	Offers subsidized work experience and training for unemployed youth aged 18–30, while providing Nunavut hamlets with additional operational support workers.

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