

Successful transitions, prosperous futures

House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
Submission to the study on youth employment in Canada, March 2014



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Introduction

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC) commends the Standing Committee on Finance for leading a study on youth employment in Canada. In studying this issue, the Committee will have heard from numerous experts sharing the latest employment data and statistical analyses. BGCC will not repeat these analyses here. Rather, we will contribute what we know best – how to support young people’s successful transition to employment and achievement throughout their life. We will make three points:

1. **Canada’s Youth Employment Strategy is of high value to young people** – Government should continue to fund the Youth Employment Strategy and consider increasing the program to meet high demand.
2. **Youth employment programs reduce violence in vulnerable communities** – Government should partner with youth-serving organizations to explore promising employment programs that combine a job, mentoring, and social-cognitive skills programming.
3. **Partnerships provide youth with skills and training to be competitive in the labour market** – Government should contribute to innovative cross-sector partnerships by supporting rigorous evaluation and scaling up evidence-based practices that help meet Canada’s training and employment needs.

1. Youth Employment Strategy of high value to youth

In 2013, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada commissioned one of the most comprehensive surveys of young people ever conducted in Canada in order to learn more about their hopes, dreams and current state of mind. Three thousand children and youth (aged eight to 24) completed the 10-minute online survey. Data collected were weighted by GlobeScan research consultancy to reflect the demographic makeup of Canadian youth by gender, age and geography.

We found that when considering the future, the things that are most important for youth are a good job – 56%, family – 37% and financial stability – 24%. Financial stability grows in importance as teens become adults and “having enough money” is an important concern for young adults (30%). When asked what adults can do to help them be successful, young people overwhelmingly identified their need for support, encouragement and guidance. They also want adults to help them with studies and provide opportunities to learn new skills.

A significant way to support youth is to offer them a job where they can learn new skills and connect to the workforce – a connection that will follow them for a lifetime and improve their chances of being employed in the long term.

Hundreds of youth involved with Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada benefit from Employment and Social Development’s Youth Employment Strategy. Students are hired through Career Launch, youth get their first summer job thanks to the Summer Jobs Grant, and vulnerable youth become more employable through Skills Link programs.

In 2013, 53 Boys and Girls Clubs benefited from the Canada Summer Job Grant, hiring and training nearly 300 youth. Beth, who was hired at the Boys and Girls Club of Whitecourt and District, wrote to her MP to tell him about her experience.

In the fall of 2013, I plan to attend the University of Alberta in the faculty of Engineering. This summer job has helped me to prepare for the future by improving my public speaking abilities as I speak to groups of 20-50 kids on a daily basis; improving my time management as I am responsible for up to 20 children at a time, running educational and fun activities for them to learn and grow. But most importantly this job has increased my self-confidence. Working with the Boys and

Girls Club I have learned to trust my thoughts and judgement and I can quickly and efficiently put these into action. Thank you, once again, for supporting the dreams of a student and a future engineer! – Beth

A total of 124 youth wrote to their MP last year, conveying what they had learned.

- They are better leaders for other youth in their community
- They have a sense of direction for their studies and career options
- They saved for postsecondary studies and gained financial stability
- They took pride in giving back to their community
- They developed marketable skills and confidence in their abilities

The government's investment in Canada Summer Jobs increased young people's attachment to the labour market and their chances of being employed in the future. It helped ensure youth were making good use of their summer months, contributing positively to their community, and avoiding negative behaviour. Most importantly, these employment opportunities provided valuable training and skills development for Canada's future workforce.

Affirmative work experiences during early career development are positively correlated with long-term career prospects. This is true for both low and high-skilled youth who often need applied experience to integrate into the labour market.¹

A TD economic report estimates an impact of 23 billion to Canada's GDP over the next 2 decades, as a result of the rise in youth unemployment. The government has already seen the wisdom of reallocating funds to bolster its Youth Employment Strategy, committing an extra 50M over two years (2011-2013).

In BGCC's pre-budget submission to the Standing Committee on Finance, we asked the government to help youth integrate into the labour market by making permanent its extra commitment of 25M per year to the Youth Employment Strategy. While several new investments were announced, this extra, and much needed funding, does not appear to have been renewed. This increase, along with support for innovative and collaborative cross-sector solutions to youth unemployment and skills shortages, would prepare Canada for a competitive economic future.

RECOMMENDATION – Government should continue to fund the Youth Employment Strategy and consider increasing the program to meet high demand.

2. Employment Programs reduce violence in vulnerable communities

High unemployment rates for youth, especially over the summer when they are most likely to work, are translating into a situation that will have life-long consequences and high social costs for all Canadians. This is especially evident in low-income neighbourhoods that also have to contend with high levels of crime. Youth in these communities face a triple risk: high unemployment rates, high dropout rates, and high violence.

¹ HRSDC. 2012. Employment Challenges for Canadian Youth in a Changing Economy: A Backgrounder. Symposium. Ottawa, HRSDC & Public Policy Forum. March 27.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada knows from experience that in high needs communities, a summer job can mean the difference between a young person contributing positively to their community or engaging in negative behaviour. Researcher Sara Heller, from the University of Chicago Crime Lab, recently added rigorous evidence to support the power of summer jobs to keep communities safe and young people thriving. Her randomized control trial found that at-risk youth (aged 14 to 21) who participated in the *One Summer Plus* program experienced a 51 percent drop in arrests for violent crime.² Delivered in high-crime Chicago neighbourhoods, the program provided youth with a summer part-time job for seven weeks and included regular interactions with a mentor, and “programming designed to reduce common judgment and decision-making problems related to automatic behavior and biased beliefs”.³ In 2013, the program engaged young men aged 16-24 who had been involved with the criminal justice system. Chicago’s Mayor hopes the One Summer Plus can serve as a model for successful youth employment programs.

Program participation reduced violent-crime arrests during the program year by 8.1 per 100 youth (a 44 percent reduction). It also generated sustained gains in schooling outcomes equal to 0.14 standard deviations during the program year and 0.19 standard deviations during the follow-up year, which we estimate could lead to higher graduation rates of 3-10 percentage points (7-22 percent). Depending on how one monetizes the social costs of crime, the benefit-cost ratio may be as high as 30:1 from reductions in criminal activity alone.⁴

Several Boys and Girls Clubs working in neighbourhoods with elevated rates of violent crime can attest to the power of a job, a mentor, and mental health supports. As mentioned in the first section of this brief, Boys and Girls Clubs employ hundreds of youth each summer with the help of the Canada Summer Jobs Grant. Clubs are unique employers with the capacity to mentor youth and help them succeed in the job market. Additional resources and mental health training for Clubs operating in high-crime neighbourhoods would permit them to implement a model resembling the One Summer Plus program. This has the potential to bolster the impact of Clubs and significantly improve outcomes for youth in these communities.

RECOMMENDATION – Government should partner with youth-serving organizations to explore promising employment programs that combine a job, mentoring, and social-cognitive skills programming.

3. Partnerships provide youth with skills and training to be competitive in today’s labour market

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has developed cross-sector partnerships that provide the youth we serve with opportunities to explore career options they might not have considered, gain new skills, and the confidence and experience they need to succeed in the labour market. This section provides two examples that are helping Canada achieve its youth employment, skill and social development goals.

Skilled4Success

In February 2014, Kal Tire and Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada announced a second year of the Skilled4Success program, a national program designed to help young people explore, discover and develop career possibilities in the skilled trades.

² UChicago News. Accessed March 13, 2014. <http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2013/08/07/crime-lab-study-finds-youth-employment-program-has-impact-violent-crime-arrests>

³ Heller, S., H. A. Pollack et al. 2013. Preventing Youth Violence and Dropout : A Randomized Field Experiment. The National Bureau of Economic Research. NBER Working Paper No. 19014. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19014>

⁴ Heller, Pollack et al. 2013.

In 2013, Kal Tire piloted the Skilled4Success program with youth participating from 15 Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada. There was such a positive response from teens and potential employers that it has become an ongoing national program of Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. According to a 15-year-old youth participant last year, "Skilled4Success taught me a lot of new things. I had no idea what a skilled trade was or that I even had any skills to become a skilled trade worker. I loved having real people come in and talk about their education and career experiences."

Skilled tradespeople play a vital role in the economy and communities in Canada and society depends on the work of skilled tradespeople. Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters predict that in 2016, Canada will have a surplus of 660,000 unskilled workers, with 1.3 million skilled jobs sitting vacant. Skilled4Success was created to help address this imbalance and improve the career prospects of young people in Canada. The program offers job skills training, career planning advice and information about provincially regulated apprenticeship programs.

Through a combination of in-Club programming and off-site field trips, Skilled4Success offers traditional and hands-on learning. Teens are provided job-shadow opportunities with skilled professionals at Kal Tire stores or other work environments. The program also teaches job search strategies, resume writing and general skills that can be applied in a range of careers. While there is a focus on skilled trades; teens are encouraged to explore a range of career options and identify their talents.

Skilled4Success is one of many ways our Clubs encourage personal growth, learning and community involvement. A partnership with the government would allow BGCC to evaluate the program more thoroughly and gauge the value of scaling it up to reach more young people, providing them with knowledge of and experience in more trades.

STE(A)M Ahead!

Fidelity Investment and Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are collaborating to develop STE(A)M Ahead! a new comprehensive national education program that will provide young people with the resources to introduce, enhance, and expand their skills in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art/Design and Math. Together we are designing the program, developing evaluation tools, and identifying program delivery partners and program pilot sites within Boys and Girls Clubs.

STEM education is more than just science, technology, engineering or mathematics – it is an interdisciplinary and applied approach that is coupled with real-world, problem-based learning. It is no secret that STEM skills are increasingly necessary to engage in a knowledge-based economy. There is solid evidence to suggest that the fastest-growing and highest-wage jobs in future years will be in STEM fields and all employees will need to utilize STEM skills for problem solving in a wide range of industries.

Innovation remains tightly coupled with the STEM subjects and research shows that STEM has an impact on high school graduation and post-secondary education enrollment rates. However, art and design are also poised to transform our economy, just as science and technology continue to do – enabling our young people to become true innovators, designers and critical thinkers. Arts education is key to encouraging the kind of creativity that enables innovation – thus, we need to add art into the equation – transforming STEM to STE(A)M.

A STE(A)M-literate student is not only an innovator and critical thinker, but is able to make meaningful connections between school, community, work and global issues. Without this, the future success of our young people, and our society, is compromised.

BGCC and Fidelity Investments know that young people – particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds – are failing to achieve the critical skills during their school years that will enable them to participate effectively and successfully in the world and workplace of the 21st century. By working together, we will help prepare Canada's workforce.

RECOMMENDATION – Government should contribute to innovative cross-sector partnerships by supporting rigorous evaluation and scaling up evidence-based practices that help meet Canada's training and employment needs.

Conclusion

Preparing youth for jobs that meet their needs and interests, and contribute to strengthening Canada's economy requires all of us: governments, youth-serving organizations, the private sector, and young people themselves. We know that youth are concerned about their future and eager to explore what options exist for them. They are searching for the education and experiences that will help them integrate into the job market.

The Youth Employment Strategy and partnerships between the nonprofit and private sector are helping address Canada's youth employment challenges. Furthermore, innovative programs that employ youth while providing additional mentoring and mental health supports hold much promise for those who live in neighbourhoods with high levels of crime – making communities safer while integrating youth into the labour market.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is grateful to the Committee for taking the time to study youth employment in Canada, and we hope that our contributions will be of value to you.

About Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is dedicated to supporting and encouraging children and youth as they grow and develop. We are a national charity serving 200,000 young people in more than 650 locations across Canada. We listen to their opinions and ideas, applaud their accomplishments, lend support during their struggles and provide ways to explore their interests and talents. With this encouragement they develop the confidence and sense of belonging that helps them succeed in school, form positive relationships and mature into responsible, caring adults. For over 110 years we have welcomed children, youth and their families into clubs that reflect the diversity of Canada in small and large cities, rural communities and First Nations Reserves. Visit www.bgccan.com and follow us at www.facebook.com/bgccan and www.twitter.com/bgccan.

A good place to be