

**- FINAL RESEARCH PAPER -**

**FOLLOWING the SUCCESS:  
Promising Workplace Learning Practices in Marginalized  
Youth Employment**

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**In Partnership with**

*The Boreal Institute for Civil Society,  
The Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres,  
& The Toronto Training Board*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### ***Introduction***

In Canada and elsewhere, a great deal of research has described patterns of youth unemployment and difficulties in youth school to work transitions. A significant proportion of this has focused on the types of barriers facing particular groups of youths who, in turn, become marginalized in relation to labour markets access, career development and society. The *Following the Success* (FTS) project builds on this research and explores additional issues that are less well represented in the literature. These issues spring from three general gaps. First, despite a solid understanding of the effects of marginalization on youth labour market outcomes, the perspectives of both youth and employers on forms of marginalization are less well understood. Second, the bulk of existing research essentially tracks failed labour market transitions. This is important. However, equally valuable is research devoted to understanding instances of ‘success’ during which youth obtain stable and potentially career-establishing positions in the labour market. And third, the bulk of research in this area frames marginalization as a relatively static process. What is needed is a dynamic perspective that takes into account how both youth and employers learn to overcome these marginalizing factors to varying degrees within youth employment. The FTS project was designed to respond to these three main gaps in the research literature in order to further supplement knowledge of the relationship between workplace learning practices, employment and marginalized youth success.

### ***Description of the Following the Success Project***

The FTS project was funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). It was carried out over the course of 2008. Our *objective* was to identify, analyze and share promising employer practices that provide the basis for forms of workplace learning that successfully engage youth facing social and economic exclusion, to hold first-time, entry-level jobs that benefit both the young people and the employers, and to build sustainable working lives. Our focus was to begin from formal and informal workplace learning in the initial period of employment, explored

through the use in-depth analysis across a variety of cases to understand what works in what circumstances, and why. Our specific research questions were stated as follows:

1. What are employers' criteria for success in engaging youth in conditions of socioeconomic exclusion?
2. In accordance with the criteria from question 1, what types of workplace formal and informal learning have employers found to be critical for these employees to succeed?
3. What techniques, arrangements or practices have the employers found effective in achieving effective learning environments?
4. Are the successful examples, as identified by the employers, also successful from the employee's perspective? In the view of the employees, what are the most important things they learned, how was the learning achieved, and what was effective (or not effective) about the learning environment in the workplace?
5. How do the answers to the above listed questions vary according to different types of employers and different young people?

In order to shed light on these research questions, the FTS project reports on interview research carried out with employers (n=16) and marginalized youth (those facing one or more identified barriers, n=24) in Ontario and sheds light on successful instances of labour market access with specific attention paid to individual efforts, organizational environment and structures, as well as workplace learning practices. Thus, the FTS project entailed a detailed, dynamic and highly contextualized look at the conditions under which marginalized youth experience effective access to their first job and career development.

### ***Key Findings***

The FTS project has identified important sources of success, variations in how this success is achieved and areas where, with additional attention, further success may potentially be realized. The project highlights the role of both formal (e.g. organized workplace training) and informal

(i.e. on-the-job) workplace learning that take place during employee orientation, and ongoing support within organizations. Examples of formal workplace learning in this research include organized orientation sessions led by employers, health and safety classes held at the workplace for employees, and so on. Informal workplace learning in this research included specific instances during which employees learned either technical, social or generalized work-life skills in the course of participating in the work process by working side-by-side with the employer, supervisor or a co-worker where often (though not always) a type of informal mentoring relationship was established. Examples of this included the learning a specific technical task (e.g. carburetor repair, the use of a particular machine or testing equipment), the safe use of chemicals, or, more broadly, employees learning how to present themselves, learn from others and participate in an effective manner in a work organization generally. The project analyzed the perspectives of both youth and employers on marginalization. It also highlighted the processes of internal/external career ladder creation (i.e., the creation of opportunities for advancement either internal to the specific organization or across a particular occupation or sector external to a specific organization), human resource policy, effects of the specific type of workplace, as well as the effects of youth biography and orientations to work. Specifically, the project generated the following key findings:

1. The *individual efforts of employers* played a significant role in the success documented in this research. These employers regularly referred explicitly to either community service goals and/or a general commitment to giving particular youths an initial opportunity in their organizations. These individual efforts were supported by various youth employment services and the work of job developers which was often highly valued by employers. The detailed descriptions by employers of their motivations in these terms, however, suggests that additional educational support could broaden and deepen awareness that would in turn heighten the translation of these motivations into additional success. That is, while often strongly motivated to respond to barriers for marginalized youth, our interview data suggested that employers were not aware of the full range of barriers that these youth face. Employers often focused exclusively on a narrow set of barriers: predominantly this focus was related to difficulties youth

experienced in terms of family life, poverty and/or education achievement. Nor were employers aware of the possible interaction or multiplier effects that combinations of barriers have on youth. Such employer educational supports might also aid in spreading more widely such motivations across employers in Canada more generally.

2. Beyond individual employer efforts and awareness of barriers facing marginalized youth, the research suggests that there are *limited proactive mechanisms* for employer recruitment of marginalized youth and limited evidence of formal employment policy in organizations related to marginalized youth specifically. Beyond a recognized role for youth employment services, success stories appear to be based largely on informal and unspoken policy/practice. This vacuum of formal policy approaches and educational supports is likely one of the reasons that individual employer efforts takes on a prominent role in achieving successful outcomes.
3. Prior research has demonstrated a wide range of *barriers or sources of marginalization* in relation to youth employment. These include youth and parental educational attainment, part-time employment experience as well as factors related to race, ethnicity, immigration, language, social class, disability and gender. The FTS research demonstrates little awareness of these factors amongst either employers or youth. Employers felt that youth ‘work ethic’ was the main barrier to achieving successful employment. This was followed by the need to attend to barriers related to the general organizational environment or culture, and general employability skills of youth. In contrast, the rankings provided by youth indicated that the ‘general learning environment’ of the organization and its match to their orientations to work were the key barriers to success.
4. Even amongst those youth experiencing success, the research demonstrated that *youth are oriented to work in multiple ways*. Minimally these include, i) occupational-orientation, and ii) general paid work orientation. Either of these general types of orientations can produce significant success as we see in this research, although occupational-orientations tend to ensure success more reliably, and under a wider variety of employment conditions. The powerful role of orientations to work has been well

established by research, however the FTS research profiles how these orientations affect patterns of behavior and attitudes, and in turn, the likelihood of effective career laddering within the organization, within a sector, or in the labour market more generally.

5. ***The informal learning environment plays a central role in how youth orientations to work affect success.*** Whether youth orientations are perceived to produce success is dependent on their relationship learning practices. Occupational-orientations amongst youth produce the greatest success under informal learning conditions with greater responsibility and an expanding exposure to work tasks. Under such conditions supervisory mentoring can be particularly directive. By contrast, general paid work orientations amongst youth tend to produce the greatest success with a stable and clearly defined scope of tasks that encourage comfort and confidence in youth who eventually appreciate less directive, flexible supervisory styles that respect the broader life interest and needs of youth.
6. Employers and youth share many perspectives on ***key sources of learning***. However, this research highlights important differences as well. Employers generally felt that formal orientation and, where applicable, formal training, were key sources of learning. Importantly, it was common to find employers discouraging youth from learning from co-workers. In contrast, youth tended to feel that learning informally from a owner/manager (small firms) or supervisor (medium/large firms) was more important. More often than employers, youth valued informal learning from more experienced (or even equally experienced) co-workers. It is likely that these different perspectives are potential sources of difficulty that, if managed well by both employers and youth employees, can contribute to success.

### ***Recommendations***

1. ***The wide dissemination of FTS project findings to create greater awareness of the current limits and future possibilities of addressing the full range of barriers facing***



*youth as well as the attempts that have succeeded thus far in creating conditions of success in initial employment experiences.*

- 2. The development and dissemination of additional materials to support more explicit organizational planning and where relevant formal policy with particular attention to supporting the recruitment, orientation and development of marginalized youth in relation to small and medium sized organizations. In this regard, additional training support for youth employment services personnel on how best to support small and medium sized employers in these terms would also be valuable.*
- 3. The development and dissemination of educational materials to facilitate the creation of positive informal learning environments in the workplace to serve the mutual needs of employers and marginalized youth inclusive of how such environments function best in relation to distinctive youth work orientations.*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

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Although a large body of research addresses youth at risk, high youth unemployment levels, and challenges confronted by social programs designed to address these problems, little is known about employer/employee workplace learning practices that engage marginalized youth (i.e. those who face social and economic barriers) in a way that produces success for both the young people and their employers. In the absence of available and widely disseminated information of this type, many employers continue to shy away from actively recruiting and employing ‘at risk’ or marginalized youth.

\* \* \*

This research paper reports on the findings of the *Following the Success Project (FTS)*. This project was funded by the Canadian Council on Learning and sought to undertake qualitative research into the conditions under which marginalized youth experience effective access to their first job, employment and career development. Specifically, this project aimed to identify, analyze, and share promising practices that effectively engage youth facing multiple forms of social and economic exclusion in relation to first-time employment and early phases of career development. The project draws on in-depth interviews with youth employees (n=24) and employers (n=16) across the private, public, not-for-profit, and self-employment sectors in Ontario. The project focuses on the formal and informal workplace learning that takes place during employee orientation, and ongoing support within organizations. Examples of formal workplace learning in this research include organized orientation sessions led by employers, health and safety classes held at the workplace for employees, and so on. Informal workplace learning in this research included specific instances during which employees learned either technical, social or generalized work-life skills in the course of participating in the work process by working side-by-side with the employer, supervisor or a co-worker where often (though not always) a type of informal mentoring relationship was established. Examples of this included learning a specific technical task (e.g. carburetor repair, the use of a particular machine or testing equipment), the safe use of chemicals, or, most broadly, employees learning how to present

themselves, learn from others and participate in an effective manner in a work organization generally.

The FTS project builds on prior research and explores additional issues that are less well represented in the literature. These issues spring from three general gaps. First, despite a solid understanding of the effects of marginalization on youth labour market outcomes, the perspectives of both youth and employers on forms of marginalization are less well understood. Second, the bulk of existing research essentially tracks failed labour market transitions. This is important. However, equally valuable is research devoted to understanding instances of ‘success’ during which youth obtain stable and potentially career-establishing positions in the labour market. And third, the bulk of research in this area frames marginalization as a relatively static process. What is needed is a dynamic perspective that takes into account how both youth and employers learn in the face of marginalizing factors within youth employment. The FTS project was designed to respond to these three main gaps in the research literature in order to further supplement knowledge of the relationship between workplace learning practices, employment and marginalized youth success.

The project documents the challenges associated with establishing career ladders, Human Resource (HR) policy, educational background as well as the role of various informal learning practices in organizations. It has identified important sources of success, variations in how this success is achieved and areas where, with additional attention, further success may be realized. The project highlights the role of both formal (e.g. organized workplace training) and informal (i.e. on-the-job) workplace learning that take place across processes of employee orientation, and ongoing support within organizations. The project analyzed the perspectives of both youth and employers on marginalization. It also highlighted the processes of (internal/external) career ladder creation (i.e. the creation of opportunities for advancement either internal to the specific organization or across a particular occupation or sector external to a specific organization), HR policy, effects of the specific type of workplace, as well as the effects of youth biography and orientations to work.

In keeping with the goal of creating impact, the outcomes of this research include not simply this research report, but several more thematic research articles, conference papers as

well as a series of audience specific booklets for employers, social service agencies and unions providing practical suggestions on how the findings from the research may be put into practice.

This report begins with a summary of the most relevant research literature in the area of marginalized youth employment. Following this there is discussion of the research sample and the methods, the findings, and finally of the conclusions and recommendations.

## OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE ON MARGINALIZED YOUTH AND LABOUR MARKET ACCESS

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A review of the research literature on youth transitions to work reveals some important findings that inform the *FTS Project*, particularly in terms of establishing the basis for identifying factors associated with marginalized youth's pathways into their first employment. In general terms, the youth population (15-24 years old) in Canada has been growing since the mid-1990s, reaching more than 4.4M in 2005. This growth is expected to peak soon, in a manner that can be broken down into two age ranges. According to the Canadian Education Statistics Council (2007), the peak has already occurred for the 15-19 years age range, at 2.2M individuals, in 2001, and numbers for this age range are expected to decline until at least 2021. The population aged 20 to 24 years old is expected to peak at 2.3M in 2016, when it will begin to drop and stabilize at about 2.1M by 2026. Canada's general unemployment rate (adults and youth) from the mid-1990s to 2006 showed sustained declines and reached a long-term low of 6.3% in 2006 (Akyeampong 2007). Youth unemployment has been consistently higher than the adult rate, but it too declined to 11.6% in 2006. Youth employment, following a decade-long decline, has been rising since 1997 (Usalcas 2005, p.5). Youth employment is mainly full time (77% in 2005). With an aging workforce and slowing growth of the youth cohort, the Conference Board of Canada (2007) projects that while there may currently be an over-supply of workers, the trend is toward shortages: they project a shortfall of 190,000 workers by 2020 rising to 364,000 workers in the Ontario labour market by 2025.

A relatively low unemployment rate overall obscures considerable disparities in detail. To begin with, a variety of social variables shapes the patterns of advance or marginalization through high school and post-secondary education. Several key social variables displayed particularly strong statistical correlation within Hango and de Broucker's (2007) specific pathways model. These included gender, where being female strongly positively correlated, for example, with the being a 'non-gapper' (i.e., continuous engagement in schooling until completion of diploma or degree); aboriginal ancestry, which showed a strong negative correlation with engaging in continuous education transitions toward labour market participation;

urban youth, who were much more likely to be “2<sup>nd</sup> chancers” (i.e., returning to school after a period of non-enrollment); and disability, which showed a strong negative correlation with continuous education transitions toward labour market participation.

The focus of this report and the FTS research, however, is youth transitions. Higher youth unemployment rates have been noted, but these, in turn, are averages which hide substantial social variation. For example, in 2006, the youth unemployment for college graduates was 4%, while for those with less than high school it was 12%; these figures represented a drop from 2002, when they were 5% and 15% respectively. In addition, the profile of youth employment varies by industry sector and is sensitive to economic trends. Youth employment and marginalization also depend on life circumstances more broadly. According to the Canadian Education Statistics Council (2007), in 2004 over one quarter of those youth living in single-parent households (just 7% in two-parent households) were living in poverty and just under half experienced “significant periods of low income” at some time between 1999 and 2004. 2001 census data indicates that 57% of young adults (20-24 years old) were living with their parents (an increase of 10% from a decade earlier). Ontario had the lowest proportion in Canada of young people aged 5 to 24 years old who experienced more than a year of low income between 1999 and 2004.

The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) is arguably Canada’s best data source on youth education and employment transitions currently available (see Radner and Sawchuk 2008 for a full review of studies drawing on YITS up to 2008). Hango and de Broucker (2007) provide a breakdown of their ten core pathways by immigrant status (Canadian born or otherwise), but they do not present a detailed analysis of immigrant youth. Gilmore (2008), using data for Canada as a whole (up to 2006), found that for youth (15-24 years old) who were very recent immigrants, unemployment was highest among those of African and Eastern European origin, followed by those youth born in either Latin American, West Central Asian and the Middle Eastern countries. Youth unemployment for very recent immigrants to Canada was lowest for those from Southern Asian countries (see Table 5.1 in Gilmore 2008, p.29). Still, virtually all immigrant youth groups (with the exception of those born in Asian countries) show higher levels of unemployment than Canadian-born youth.

The quality of youth employment is difficult to assess. Initial analyses relating somewhat to this issue of quality of employment and based on the YITS data analysis of Hango and de Broucker (2007) show, not surprisingly, that earnings are higher for post-secondary graduates regardless of their pathway to graduation. In the minority of cases where university graduates earned less than high school dropouts, this was generally explained by their lower levels of work experience, a factor that diminished in importance over time. Despite their higher rates of employment, ‘gappers’ who graduated from some form of post-secondary education did not show higher earning levels at the time of the study. Female youth tended to earn significantly less upon employment, by almost one third, compared to their male counterparts. More importantly, overall satisfaction with employment is usually high among youth (e.g., Hango and de Broucker 2007, p.60; see also de Broucker 2005). Overall, in Canada, only one in ten youth who were employed were dissatisfied with their job. It is best, however, to interpret such findings in relative terms. For example, dissatisfaction was highest for those who took the following pathways: ‘2<sup>nd</sup> chancers’ with high school or more, followed by ‘non-gappers’ who dropped out of post-secondary education, and ‘gappers/non-gappers’ in the trades or related programs. Those who were the most satisfied with their employment were ‘non-gappers’ who graduated college, followed closely by ‘gappers’ who graduated college and then ‘non-gappers’ who graduate university. High school drop outs, it is interesting to note, showed significant levels of satisfaction with their employment.

While it is important to know the current distributions of youth across different transitional states (e.g. identifying the “10 pathways”) over time and to generate some initial approximations of earnings, quality and satisfaction, what remains absent is a way to understand the different sequences youth experience as they transition; perhaps especially in the case of marginalized youth, who often experience multiple pathway shifts. The YITS represents a powerful data set; it is comparable to the strongest large-scale surveys available, for example, in Europe (e.g., Brzinsky-Fay’s use of the ‘European Community Household Panel’ data set, 2007). However, analyses in Canada and Europe to date have not adequately addressed the types of questions raised by our research beyond identification of aggregate patterns and increasingly complex transition ‘event sets’ or ‘sequences’ based strongly on demographic/biographical

variables. Furthermore, we note that there is far more attention paid in this research on barriers and failed transitions as opposed to supports and successful transitions for marginalized youth (although some interesting European comparative work has offered some useful, though very high-level (i.e., national social policy) modeling of patterns/effects of specific combinations of programs in relation to economic and social conditions in different countries).

The lesson taken from this brief overview is that life-course histories, related in turn to social background, play important mediating roles in youth transition to employment, so that a wide lens on these histories is necessary for both researchers and policy makers. Going deeper, we see that it is relevant to recognize sectoral effects on labour market access for marginalized youth as well. Concentrations of employed youth in some sectors raise concerns about pressures on specific sectors that are also faced with other severe challenges (e.g., manufacturing as opposed to retail and hospitality sectors which are the largest employers of youth but which tend to offer relatively limited career trajectories, pay and benefits). Importantly, there is also evidence that youth-specific issues of perceived discrimination, lack of learning opportunities, and other challenges may affect marginalization.

Our review of general demographic, social and labour market patterns suggests the need for a consideration of broader theoretical perspectives, often implicit, within both research and policy, of the multiple causes, issues and pathways affecting marginalization and successful transition. The literature on a range of competing – and sometimes complementary – perspectives on vocational preparation is clear. The most promising approaches, with regard to broader theoretical perspectives, entail a framework that incorporates multiple life transitions and takes full account of young people’s life stories, experiences, social background and social differences. A general conclusion on the state of the research literature as it relates to Canada and Ontario specifically, suggests the following: in terms of organizational practice, research approaches, and in particular public policy-making, there remains a strong bias towards ‘supply side’ as opposed to ‘demand side’ intervention; a point emphasized by Marquart (1999) almost a decade ago. Yet ‘labour market access’ and positive ‘career development’ are not simply individual accomplishments, they are social accomplishments: collective acts complete with intended and unintended social consequences. Thus, it is necessary, in this context, to track –



through effective measuring and feedback systems – the experiences, perceptions and outcomes of youth combined with results, perspectives and practices at the workplace level as well. And, whereas there is a great deal of analytic attention paid to barriers, there is at least as much to be learned from instances of success.

One final area of existing research that should be noted here concerns youth orientations to work and the conditions under which success that we seek to follow is undermined. The field of cooperative and vocational education studies is one among several that has established a strong lineage of research on youth orientations to work in Canada and elsewhere. In Ontario, however, the context in which youth orientations to work emerge is problematic given the relatively weak linkages between education and industry which, in turn, tend to undermine the quality of work placements. In Ontario there is virtually no effective support for industry to develop clear, explicit policies related to hiring youth generally or marginalized youth specifically. When youth are hired, for example in job placements, employers tend to as inexpensive (and occasionally subsidized) labour assigned to low level tasks that do not help youth build capacity to engage in the most effective pathways to good careers (e.g. Chrysdale 1999). Targeted youth employment subsidy and the administration of these subsidies by youth employment services and job developers in this sense are necessary but perhaps insufficient tools, but as we will see they are likely not the primary mechanisms that establish the conditions of success.

Research has demonstrated that youth orientations to work and the future becomes established through experiences in the home and in the educational system, community and among peer groups (e.g. Poole and Cooney 1987; Trommsdorff 1986; Nurmi 1987, 1994; Nurmi, Poole and Seginer 1995; Pimentel 1996; Csikzentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Malmberg 2001; Gardner 2004; Goodwin and O'Connor 2005; Aronson 2008) . Drummond (2004) demonstrates that despite the challenge of adjusting to the low level tasks to which they are often assigned, despite the difficulty of establishing employment opportunities, and despite the highly mixed experiences they report, youth nevertheless often can maintain a strong orientation toward obtaining a job and performing well at work. In the context of work placement and education, Cruikshank (2006) argues that for success youth employment needs to match and reflect the

youths' broader lives, goals and trajectories. What the prior research establishes in this sense is that out of the various orientations to work, emerge a complex ongoing, biographical outcome; they matter; and, under the right conditions, can be a valuable and resilient resource. However, what is less clear is how conditions at work, supervisory style, task scope, and of particular interest to the FTS project, learning practices, relate to these orientations among marginalized youth.

O'Higgins (2001) argues that in Canada it remains likely that not enough attention is paid by government or employers to improving learning outcomes of youth employment. The FTS research challenges simple notions that youth do not have the employability skills necessary; a view that emerges in distinct ways from both employers and youth interviewed. However, the FTS research also seeks to fill an important gap in both policy and research that looks at the employment-based learning experiences of marginalized youth specifically. Kainer (2008) confirms that research on youth experiences in work placements rarely explores the needs of the disabled, racialized and other marginalized youth. Looking at youth transitions into work, Heinz (1999, 2002) has gone further in his research on German youth labour market access to identify how this inequity is reproduced for different marginalized youth in terms of what he calls 'biographical agency' (i.e., the effects of personal history on how opportunities are perceived by youth) on the one hand, and 'social structures' (e.g., the social and economic health of the community or region where a youth grew up) on the other. Such research confirms the importance of perceived opportunities which is closely linked with work orientations mentioned earlier. And, the FTS research specifically builds on this dual approach of people's personal efforts and the organizational and structural conditions they face, while addressing the role of barriers and marginalization.

Related to these issues, Pohl and Walther (2007) indicate that 'incentives' do affect 'interest or need' among marginalized youth specifically. They go on to show that incentives both affect and are affected by 'subjective expectations' and 'feeling[s] of control and self-efficacy' (p.536). Pohl and Walther conclude that 'extrinsic motivations' (e.g., those imposed on youth by educators, peers or parents) can play a role if they are supportive of existing 'intrinsic motivations' infused with autonomy and self-direction. At the same time, Pohl and Walther are

careful to note that autonomy and self-direction are highly dependent on available resources, as well as a subjective ‘sense of trust’ (p.537) in the perceived fairness of institutions such as education and the labour market. They go on to show that labour market training for employability, in the absence of strongly perceived opportunities for employment and the application of skills, and without attention to perceived self-efficacy, control, autonomy and so on, is not effective in altering the quality of transitions for marginalized youth. Issues of subjective expectations and motivations as well as autonomy are matters that the FTS research project addresses, confirming their importance but also their origins and relationship to learning environments and work orientations.

Pohl and Walther (2007) also summarize the research discussion on clusters of policy that respond to either individual deficits or structural conditions. Their analysis attempts to show where specific policy responses can be used to attack identified barriers or sticking points in the transition process. So, for example, where research identifies ‘individual deficits’ as a key problem, then counseling programs, occupational readiness profiling and workfare might be recommended. As we shall see, the FTS research highlights that with supportive employers and an appropriate matching of learning and supervisory environments along with job structure, individual deficits become less and less important. Pohl and Walther go on to demonstrate that where structural barriers are identified as the problem (lack of opportunities), then job-creation, subsidies and programs to support expanded youth self-employment are recommended, but add that ‘Individualized Action Plans’ (used in several European countries they examined) are likely a suitable resource for coordinating both youth planning and development as well as service supports. These authors go on to combine these two factors in a model that also identifies preventive versus compensatory policy strategies which combined with the individual and structural factors forms a useful matrix to direct research, policy and practice. In the end, Pohl and Walther (2007) advocate for an ‘individual life trajectory’ perspective which is not dissimilar from the approach we take in our research.

[S]ocial inclusion implies not only fulfilling institutional criteria of placing individuals into training or jobs but also giving access to subjectively meaningful life perspectives. Individual motivation to engage in or drop out of counseling, education, training or

employment determines the sustainability of policy initiatives. Other research (Walther et al. 2006) has confirmed that *motivation, in terms of identification with one's own transition process and active engagement in constructing learning biographies, emerges from possibilities of active participation*. Participation should not be restricted to including young people in any kind of program but implies that they are provided with rights and resources that enable them to take responsibility for their transitions. This depends upon: having a choice between different options; starting from individual strengths and interests rather than from deficits and failures; keeping processes of guidance and counseling open rather than channeling job-seekers to low-status routes from the beginning; providing space for non-formal learning in terms of experimentation and self-determined projects; and addressing young people in a way that allows them to develop trust in institutions and professionals. (Pohl and Walther 2007, pp.552-553; our emphasis)

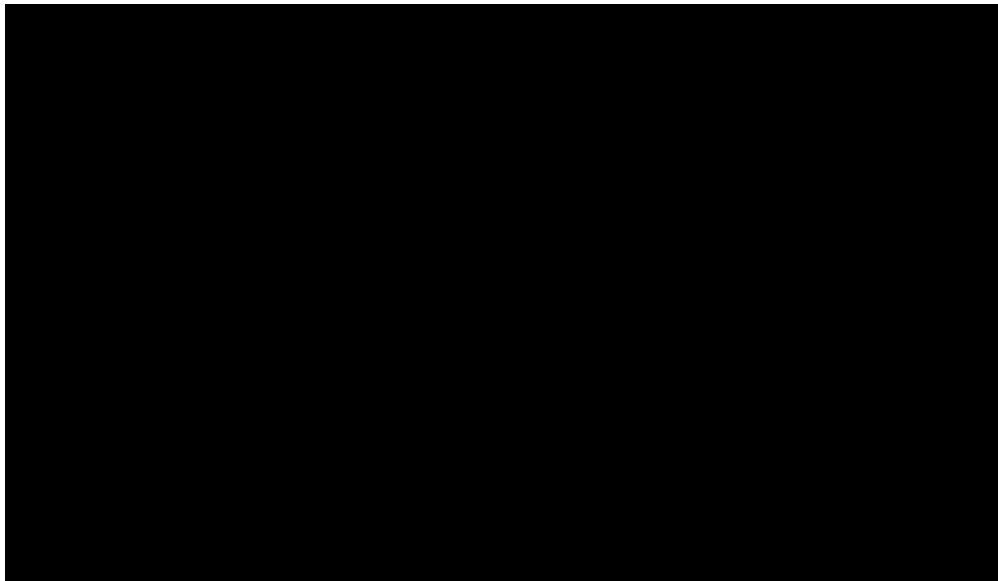
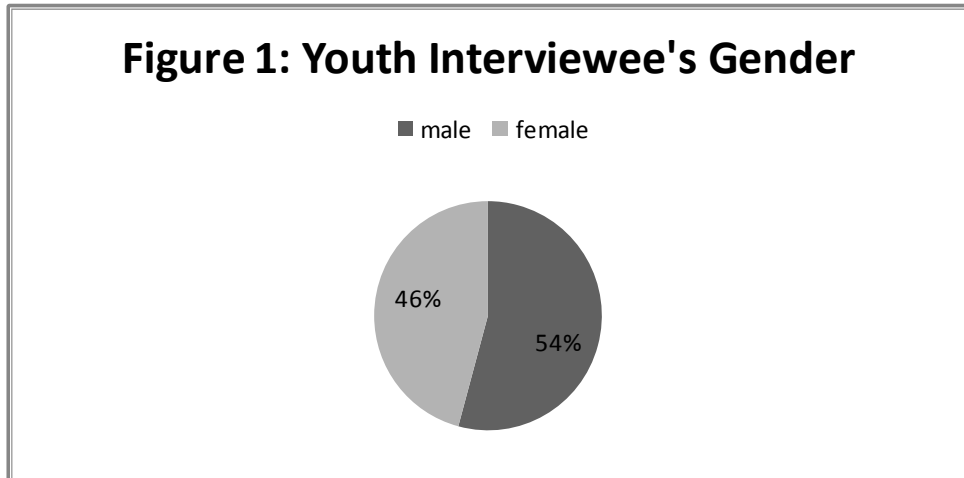
## **METHODS AND SAMPLE**

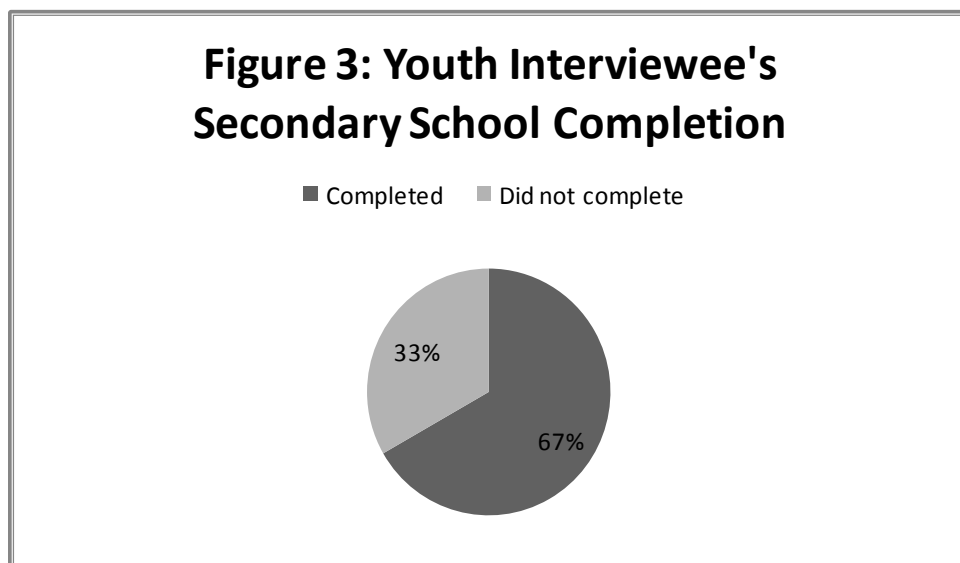
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The FTS project findings were based on interviews with both employers of youth (n=16) and youth (n=24) employed in their organizations. All organizations were in the Southern Ontario region surrounding the Greater Toronto Area. The interviews were arranged in collaboration with our research partners, the Toronto Training Board and the Ontario Association for Youth Employment Centres, and in collaboration with various youth employment centres and job developers working directly with the employers. The interviews were conducted at the workplace. Interviews typically lasted anywhere from 20-40 minutes and were carried out in a single session or distributed across several shorter interview sessions.<sup>2</sup> Follow up telephone conversations were conducted with a small number of these employers where further information or clarification was required. These follow up discussions allowed us to verify findings. Interviews with employers presented challenges because frequently, and especially in small workplaces, the interview took place while the employer was working, creating challenges to sustain the discussion. In these cases, it was not unusual for interviewers to follow the employer and conduct the interview as they carried out their work. Interviews with the youth themselves were, comparatively, easier to conduct, as well as more concentrated since all employers gave provided youth with time off from their duties to participate in the study. This too is a noteworthy, yet necessary, contribution to understanding the types of challenges encountered by youth facing barriers.

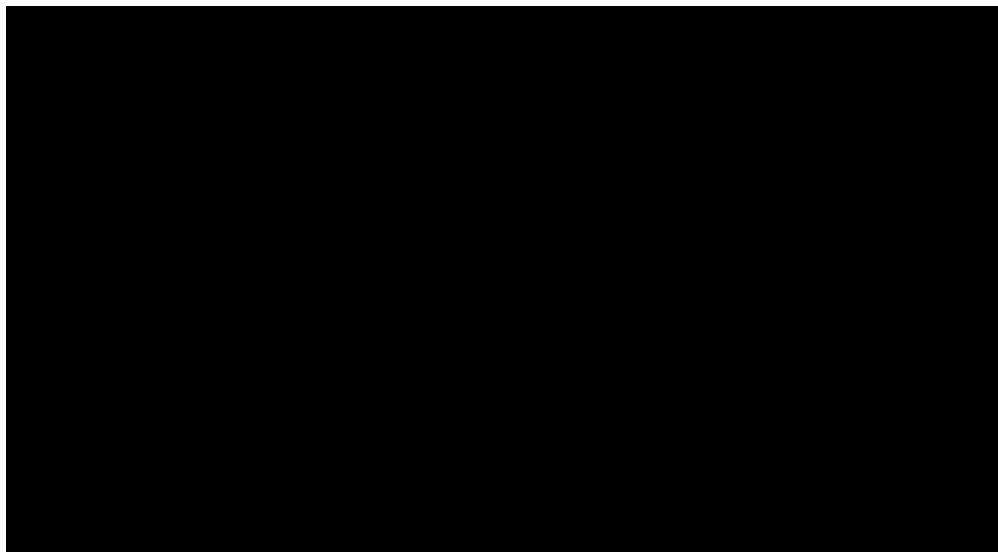
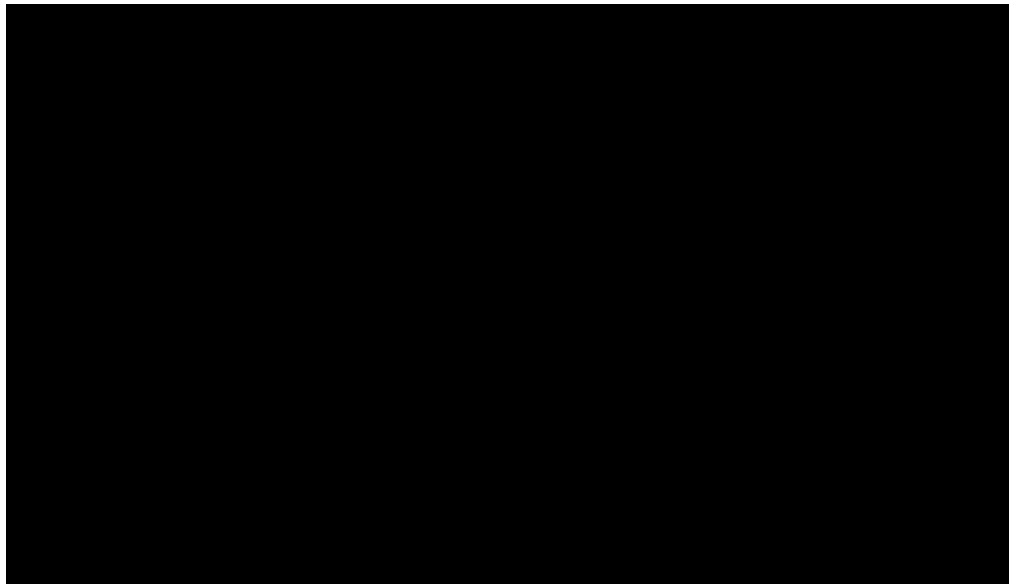
A total of 24 interviews were conducted with youth (see Appendix F for further information). The youth we interviewed ranged from 18 to 26 years old (average age = 20 years old). Fifty-four percent (54%) were male and 46% were female (see Figure 1). Seventy-one percent (71%) were Canadian-born and 29% were immigrant youth (Figure 2). Approximately two thirds of the youth interviewed had completed secondary education, sometimes with gaps in their studies as discussed in the report. Two youth interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs. Employers selected employees in consultation with FTS researchers based on indications of one or more factors of marginalization (see Appendix A). The final list of youth employees did not include representation of all the factors since such employees did not exist in the organizations

involved in the research. However several of the key marginalization factors (i.e., immigrant status, secondary school completion, gaps in educational career) established in the research literature as of central importance were included in our sample.





A total of 16 interviews were conducted with employers (see Appendix F for further information). In some cases, these were owner/managers of small firms (15 employees or less); in others these were directors, managers or assistant managers of medium (16-50 employees) or large (51 employees and beyond) sized organizations. Our research design had a goal of representing organizational settings of different sizes. In this regard, our employer interviews included approximately 44% large organizations, 31% medium sized organizations, and 25% small organizations (Figure 4). Appendix F lists the specific type of organization (e.g. manufacturing, auto repair, child care, ski resort and so on). Another design goal was to try to represent employment settings from the private, public and entrepreneurial sectors. In this regard (Figure 5) 78% were from the private sector, 11% from the public sector, and 11% from self-employed entrepreneurial sector. Finally, we were unable to conduct interviews from unionized workplaces.



***The Nature of the FTS Research Claims, Coding and Analysis***

The FTS research utilized a type of qualitative research which primarily depends on the systematic gathering of descriptive accounts of particular situations of interest, in this case (employer and employee) experiences of successful employment of youth facing some form of social marginalization. Qualitative research based on semi-structured interview analysis such as this establishes its claims by careful evaluation of the descriptions of various social realities to



which interviewee responses refer. That is, findings are established in this type of research in the first instance based on the depth of description provided by the interviewee, supported by the semi-structured, relatively open-ended format of the interview tool which allows extended statements, and further supported by interviewer probes and thirdly by secondary observation by the researchers and information gleaned by relevant materials about the setting such as company descriptions, policies, and so on. Importantly, these claims do not depend on the opinions, value judgments, or, in general, the interviewee's view of these descriptions per se. Equally important is the fact that qualitative research of this type does not necessarily rely on an accumulation of responses (e.g., as in quantitative research) although these can and do serve as additional resources to support the claims made. And finally, it may be useful to clarify the fact that non-experimental research designs such as this (e.g., in which samples are not established based on randomized selection, in which a discrete set of variables are controlled for in order to eliminate unwanted sources of variance, in which there is no control group established, and so on) do not allow conventional claims of cause and effect. There are no such claims made in this research. Moreover, the types of qualitative research claims that are made are obviously strongest when applied to the specific settings it analyzed (i.e., the specific workplace organizations, employers and employees). At the same time, quality data such as these do offer the possibility for extrapolation to similar settings (where this similarity can be established) and it is upon this presumption that the recommendations of the research are formed.

In terms of the specific coding and analysis approach utilized in the FTS research, all interviews were transcribed and coded in relation to themes that were reflected by the specific interview schedule items (see Appendix D and E) which in turn addressed the core research questions listed earlier in this report. Patterns of relationships were established within thematic areas and variation to these patterns have been noted and reported in the text that follows. In keeping with conventions regarding the reporting of qualitative research of this type, every response to each question is not reported. This would be neither practical nor helpful given the nature of how qualitative research claims are established. Rather, again in keeping with accepted conventions of this type of research, the report includes extended excerpts of relatively uninterrupted narrative, inclusive of interviewer questioning/probing/clarifications that provide

sufficient detail to demonstrate the nature of the pattern (or variation) identified. Following the initial analysis of the data in this way, the FTS research included additional interviews with subjects as well as more pointed follow-up discussions with interviewees as indicated earlier in this section in order to clarify information or verify claims where necessary.

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## FINDINGS

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### FINDINGS FROM EMPLOYERS

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In terms of the FTS project's findings, the analysis has reveals a variety of relevant information beyond what might be reasonably predicted from the existing research literature. In the closing section of our findings, the unique role that informal learning plays in the success of marginalized youth is discussed. First, however, it is important to summarize some more general observations, beginning with a focus on employers.

Our sample, as noted, attempted to look at successful employment of marginalized youth across a variety of organizations. Several employers indicated that their employment of marginalized youth was likely not going to lead to full-time employment with the company, such as in situations of seasonal work. In other cases, the employer simply did not believe that the person would end up staying due to lack of advancement opportunities, and ultimately the nature of the work itself. Such conditions did not necessarily damper the sense of a successful hiring and work experience (either from the perspective of employers or the youth).

There were, however, a number of exceptions to this pattern. In a number of these instances the employer had developed internal career ladders for youth employees. These employers often looked at the potential for the company in hiring young workers, as illustrated by the following excerpt from our interviews:

*We like to get young people when they're fresh, when they're sharp, and bestow our strengths and our work qualities on them, so that we can build this one strong team and give them all the knowledge and field experience that we've had. So it builds a better company.... A lot of the field staff we train them, it's hands-on experience; they're working with licensed plumbers, they're working with foremen, and Rick and myself too, that we're educating them on the processes that are involved -- not only the hands-on experience but we deal with a lot of customers going into homes. So there's customer*

*service skills where you have to be well mannered, smile, take off your shoes and be polite. So I think a lot of that is missing sometimes in these so-called young era... Eagerness; showing up on time; always willing to go the extra mile; working together. And I guess the main thing too is being a young company starting in 2006, we went from 3 people, from me doing part-time accounting and working through our homes, to a company of 15 employees in a span of just a couple of years. And that was with the help of the youth too, committed people. (EAK7 – owner/manager of a plumbing company)*

*I think that we welcome kids in; I think that they become part of our culture very quickly. Everybody here is very open to having new team members. I think we provide them with a lot of support. I think we give them a lot of opportunities to interplay with the team as opposed to giving them a role that's sort of marginal and that they don't really have a lot of opportunity. I think that we give them roles that are challenging. And we had a student here two summers ago that completely redesigned our website. It was a vision that we had; he had the inclination and skill-set to do it, and so when he pitched his idea and we liked what he had to offer us, we said "run with it", and to that end we have a completely redesigned website, which I think is phenomenal; and it's largely been the vision of two summer students that have been able to do it... I think the training would probably be largely informal training. I think we provide them obviously at the beginning with a lot of tools -- reading material, that kind of thing, and then we just invite them to be part of meetings, be part of our sort of day-to-day work-life, give them a little aside, saying "this is something you might want to think about in this kind of a situation". We just kind of give them that kind of personal mentoring... I think hands-down the most important piece that they bring is attitude. I've had a lot of kids who on paper looked excellent, and when I talked to them I thought "you don't bring that drive, that commitment that I'm looking for". I'm looking for someone... even if you don't get it right every time, I'm looking for someone who's going to keep trying, who still wants to learn, who's going to extend the outcomes here. (EAK4 – manager small manufacturing company)*

In Canada, the research literature reviewed above suggests that some employers use students as inexpensive (and occasional subsidized) labour assigned to low level tasks that do not help them build capacity to engage in the most effective pathways to good careers. The employers we interviewed clearly ranked the notion of obtaining inexpensive labour and wage subsidies as secondary to the primary goals of giving young workers facing barriers a chance: as one employer put it “we look to give kids an experience that they're going to take away feeling very positive” (EAK4). Others were explicit about wanting to give youth a chance as they themselves had been given by an employer growing up, and/or service to the community. For example,

*I basically believe we need to give young people a chance because... I came to Canada in 1974 as a youngster, 14 years old, and I had a hard time and there were people who would give me a chance. So now fortunately in my position I like give back, give to young people an opportunity because of race or status... if they are Canadian or immigrants, I like to give them an opportunity to try. At least that way they have a shot at it. Because it was not difficult back then in the 1970s as now. Mainly it was the notion that I wanted to help out. From a basic point of view, obviously they do subsidize a little bit, and that kind of give the company a little edge too. But it's not the first criteria, not the most important anyway. (EAK5 – owner/manager of a small auto repair garage)*

In fact, many employers went to enormous lengths to support these employees personally. Established connections to outside programs or centres appeared important to employers. Several employers remarked on the importance of wage subsidies, and according to employers descriptions these further supported their commitments to the developmental process for youth within their organization.

A good general introduction to the kinds of success stories our research sought to follow can be seen in this example from a large car dealership garage. Indeed, this level of organized and formal support for youth employees was a feature associated with the larger, but not the smaller employers in our interviews. The following employer describes the important support from the employment centre in this regard as well as the type of things this employer looks for in a young worker and what he hopes to achieve through his efforts.

*S<sup>3</sup>: [John] is a young man that had left high school and was sort of floundering in life a little bit and somehow he managed to find his way to the [youth employment centre] and to us, and they managed to get him on their program and spent some time with him and then at some point after that, I am not sure how many months he was with them prior to someone from the centre coming to me about him, because I suggested that I was looking for someone to start on the apprenticeship program and so she presented this gentleman to me and we struck a deal and when he first started with me he did not have his Grade 12 diploma, which is mandatory for him to start an apprenticeship program. But I did decide to take him on because I felt after interviewing him and listening to [the youth employment centre representative], that it probably would be not too long in the future before we could register him. He seemed committed to working on his Grade 12 and to working for us. We entered into a deal and I am proud to say that [John] finished his Grade 12 while he was employed by us and he has also been enrolled as an apprentice in the apprenticeship program and is now working through that and will be going to school in a couple of weeks for his first time in the apprenticeship program. So, he is, you know, also being trained through [the company] at the same time to we provide significant training in-house as well as Classroom training through [the company] which he is working on as well. So, I think that's one of my success stories, that is a current news because he is now starting to go to school for his apprenticeship... With [John], it didn't take very long before he could start working on his own, because along with training with a person, like a mentor beside them, they also have training available to them through the internet that they can sort of training and learning different things.*

*I: Given the situation what skills were crucial to learn for [John] when he started, and you can include general employability skills or anything specific that you thought were absolutely crucial for him to learn?*

*S: This sounds crazy, but maturity. People skills and time management.... They just have to be willing to be a team player and to not be afraid to keep training, because in this business you have to not be afraid of learn new things, because every day brings a new venue and you know you constantly have to be ready to educate yourself.... [Also] we pay for all this trainings; I'm a big believer in training. People should be compensated*

*for the level of training. I mean it's great if somebody does a good job, but they won't do a good job long term if they're not trained properly and they don't keep up with their training. (ESK1 – Owner/manager of a car dealership/garage)*

This employer went on to say how crucial a strong relationship and mutual information sharing between the youth employment centre and the company was.

*[The youth employment centre representative] gets a lot of different types of people in and she would walk up to me and say, 'Oh I have someone who might be a good person for you', and sometimes even when I'm not looking I may take the time to interview this person because sometime they don't come along all the time. She has sort of learnt what we are looking for and obviously we have a pretty good relationship with [this representative].... [And sometimes this representative] will, honestly, if I say to her, I think this guy needs a little prodding, she will pick up the phone, even if it's on her own time and find out what's going on. Maybe there's something going on in the road that is not quite bright outside of the work environment, she seems to be able to encourage them to somehow to continue on to do that. (ESK1 – Owner/manager of a car dealership/garage)*

While this is a good introduction to the dynamics of the success we are attempting to trace through this research, it may be just as relevant to hear from other employers on why exactly they have made the efforts they have in this regard.

*The purpose of hiring these youth is that I personally feel I want to help them out. I have two sons myself and I've seen them struggle to get jobs, and I want to see other kids getting good jobs. The YMCA gives a subsidy, so it's cheap for me to do this. It's no risk and I gain from it, so I decided to keep doing it. (EAK2 – Auto shop repair)*

I: *What was the purpose of getting involved in these programs from the point of view of your organization, and how would you define "success" for the program?*

- S: *It's two-fold. (1) is the subsidy; an (2) is the fact that most of the young age group needed some kind of a start somewhere in life. So the one that we have right now I think must have been his first job anyway. He didn't even have a driver's license when he started. I mean to work for a dealership without a driver's license! However we trained him and he got his license and he's an excellent driver. (EAK1 – Car dealership)*
- S: *Kids that don't have an education, disabilities, problem with youth, criminal charges, lot of home problems, I found they all sort of tie in together... [Our goals are] to give the youth in our community a chance for a job and to give back to the community, to try and help the community we live in as well."*
- I: *What barriers or challenges did you see that the program sought to address?*
- S: *I think it was addressing the youth with sort of three part things - most of them don't have a grade 12 education, most of them are first time job placements sort of thing, they haven't worked before so they don't have a sort of true work ethic, so you got to develop that in them and 3 – they are inexperienced, they don't know what they want to do, so you know, we are able to offer several different types of jobs within the company and they find for themselves whether they like a certain thing or not.... (ESK5 – owner commercial cleaning company)*

For several employers, though not all, recruitment of young employees was a problem. This tended to be the case where the organization was located further away from a main urban centre and/or where the work itself was perceived by employers to be challenging (e.g. physically difficult). In these cases, employers turned to different youth employment centres for help.

*Typically, we do a lot of hiring through the [youth employment centre]. We found it very successful, just for the fact that we're not committed to the young people, and we seem to go through quite a number of young people, before we get key people or people that are even interested in working, so that's basically our youth here ... A lot of cases we do get funding, but a lot of cases we don't get funding as well. We're usually for the funding as much as youth are hired. Very, very few people here that even apply for jobs, that's one*



*of the key reasons we went to [the youth employment centre] because they have a data base of people... It's just having the ability to get people. It's very strange out there that very few people even apply for work anymore, and we have a difficult time even getting applications. (ESK6 – owner/manager of a large construction company)*

Some of the strongest instances of success coincided with linkages to educational and training opportunities and other employment programs that seemed to create a rich texture of potential opportunities for marginalized youth. One such example is the case of a non-profit day care centre outlined below.

*We are a small not-for-profit organization that runs out of high school and what we've done over the years is that we've encouraged young women who are in high school and have a child in the child care centre to become involved in the program. The individuals who show any initiative and are interested in the field of early childhood education, we've often given them employment in the case of [Jane Doe], who you are going to be speaking with, she was involved in our program for two years, so she completed her high school diploma and she completed her final credit through a co-op with us, she managed very well and became a staff member in May and she is still employed with us and on Fridays we send her off to the apprenticeship program and Early Childhood Education studies at Royal College.... but I mean she's faced so many barriers, which included being a parent of a young child, and very young herself and she lacked experience, she had not been involved in employment before, and everything just fell into place.... Initially, from our point of view, its two fold – (i) we want these young women with young children to remain in school and so we want their children to remain in childcare, so they have to be involved in either work or educational studies right, and so when a young woman is looking for employment or to remain in school, we try to find the best option for her to do that and really again, women we find who are 16, 17 years of age with infants are afraid to leave the infants for long periods of time, so therefore we encourage them to take a half day course load at the high school and do co-op studies with us for*

*the remainder of the day and they receive credit for that as well. It's two fold – (i) its financial, basically they have their children here in care and we are getting subsidies to do that and (ii) we are also encouraging the women to be out of the home and in the work place, giving them the confidence as well to pursue other options in their life right.*

**(ESK4 – Manager of a non-profit day care)**

A major challenge for employers in recruiting and retaining youth is the nature of their workplaces and the structure of advancement. However, depending on the youth, even in the absence of an internal career ladder of some type, these jobs appeared to be successful in generating a more general foot-hold in the labour market, while career development opportunities lay elsewhere. That is, these situations can still be considered a relevant contribution to the success of many marginalized youth. Where there is room for career advancement in a sector or company, for the most part, marginalized youth, like all new employees, must take entry level positions and work their way up. Employers sometimes recognize this as an inherent difficulty for youth with little prior experience in the labour market. However, the impact of success can be limited when these entry level positions are constructed as particularly lowly, dirty and difficult. While the employer (and other workers) may see this as 'paying your dues', youth can sometimes 'vote with their feet' and leave. The FTS project's focus on success stories of course did not produce specific examples of this. Nevertheless, employers provided information regarding this situation generally. An example of this is a large demolition company which, not coincidentally, experiences some difficulty in employee retention (young and old). The matter of identifying a 'fit' here suggests that further improvements might be made with greater awareness of the barriers that youth face in relation to the workplace (i.e. not putting the onus strictly on the youth to 'fit in'). Likewise, there is a natural tension that tests the levels of commitment that youth develop toward their work. It is, in effect, a double-edge sword that is difficult to handle in which employers wish to evaluate the youth without making a firm commitment to them, while the youth experiencing a limited level of organizational commitment to them are sometimes tempted to return the favour in terms of equally low commitment to the employer. Nevertheless, where youth endure, they do seem to experience success.

- S: We had basically four positions out in the field, labourers, torchman, operators and a foreman, so labourers you know are at the bottom end of the totem-pole, most people start off as labourers and then you know if they seem to do well, they work their way up. So anyhow, this young man comes in for an interview... [H]e comes to work for us, it was in the summer, so we're always looking for people in the summer, so we figured if it didn't work out or whatever like that, it would be fine and he's still with us to this day... we hired him in January '07... and he's pretty much here to stay with us... [B]ut these young guys, not all of them are willing and able, and this one, [Frank] turned out to be a really great worker and somebody we hope to grow with the company for the next years to come. It worked out really well.... Sometimes in the circumstances of hiring through a program like [the youth employment centre] is, it might take you three or four people before you find a good one, somebody that's going to fit with us, not necessarily that people are bad but they won't fit with your organization, so we're not entitled to put somebody in the union until they're through this three months probation, it's good, because that way we can decide if they're happy and we're happy and what naught. So that was another thing that worked out with [Frank], because he's like, it could take 5 people to find him, he was a fluke almost, not a fluke I shouldn't say that. No really, like it's the first time we had hired somebody through that program in a very long time....*
- I: You profess that you have not really identified any barriers or challenges when the potential employee comes to you, but if you think of the larger program.*
- S: I feel that it gives us, from an employer stand point, it gives employers a chance to have people come in and try out at their organization, you know, and you can hire a university student with all the education in the world, and pay them a lot of money and after a couple of months realize that they are not the right fit. Not that they are delinquent or it's not that they've had a hard life or anything like that, it just doesn't work. This program, I think, it gives these people that maybe are having a hard time, that maybe don't have the background of education that can help them get in through some doors, give them that opportunity to meet with some employers, work with employers, employers don't have to pay through the nose to figure out if they're gonna work or not, and I think it works well*

*in both directions... .... What we call our informal training programs is putting somebody new with, and a lot of times, when a guy comes in, and he's new, whether he's young or old regardless of his age, they come in and they're put on a crew, and somebody will be informally assigned to that person. Like I said, the guy himself is gonna be given a jack hammer the first day and told go chip out the floor, will be say, ok your gonna go help this guy and a lot of guys, again young or old doesn't matter, are given the really like most unwanted jobs whether cleaning up after somebody, or flagging down a machine, or running a hose because of the dust, if they make it through that, for the first couple of weeks, then they get to move up into actually demonstrating some real hard core working. (ESK2 – Manager of a demolition company)*

This same employer goes on to indicate the strong levels of support given to the young worker who measures up whether this is through paying for equipment they need, or providing them with rides to work in the morning. Despite the challenges there is a strong commitment to giving youth who have experienced challenges gaining their first jobs a chance.

In general terms, employers' ideas of essential skills was, however, narrow: being personable, clean, punctual, a good listener, a hard worker, and above all having a good 'work ethic' are the prized attributes. Again, across our interviews with employers, if educational background was mentioned it was typically referenced only in terms of very basic literacy and numeracy.

*The most important factor is being in a retail business the person would have to be personable enough. So it's all personality. To some degree you have to be able to work with people and communicate well with people. (EAK1 – manager car dealership)*

A key barrier that employers regularly recognized was the basic challenge of poverty in the home (whether the youth lived alone or with parents).

*I've certainly seen some very challenging circumstances, and I feel very much for some of the employees I've had in the past with very difficult family backgrounds, and I've heard*

*some horrible stories that bring tears to your eyes almost. Again if they get the job done and they're motivated to do it -- but it certainly does make it a little more challenging if they don't have a home to go to or food to eat. (EAK6 – manager of a large garden centre)*

For the most part, however, employers understand matters of ‘marginalization’ not as a series of barriers but rather as individual traits that a young person either has or does not have. In this sense, a narrow understanding of the nature of barriers amongst employers, and in fact the multiple and interactive barriers facing youth, can be considered a barrier to successfully supporting youth in employment. Limits to the success experienced could be charted in many ways through which employers framed the goal of the employee as being able to simply ‘fit in’ to the existing workplace. Although success was seen in some cases, in fact, this goal of having youth learn to ‘fit in’ tends to place the onus on the youth who is typically facing several barriers at once in addition to the challenges of fitting into a new work environment. Other expressions of this, for example, were instances in which employers did not seem to problematize the matter of developing employment in which gender may pose a significant problem, as illustrated by the following quote:

*I: What about gender differences?*

*S: No, we don't have any women or young women in the trade. I think we've only had one person apply here... Unfortunately I think that would be a difficult process with men in the field, I think the push on bigger job sites are very crude, but I think that is the next area where... have to come from the women. (ESK6 - owner/manager of a large construction company)*

Another employer does not seem to draw a linkage between the diversity of his workplace (a high number of recent immigrants), and the nature of the work, the pay and so on.

*I: Is diversity something you strive to achieve in your business?*

*S: No, not exactly, but we have it.*

*I: Do you think it helps or hinders your organization?*

*S: It's a natural part of the organization. Reality is, virtually most people working there, for whatever reason are immigrants, some have been here long time. (ESK3 – Manager of a manufacturing company)*

Likely, the success we document here can be furthered by building greater awareness amongst employers of the nature of barriers that youth face; barriers that often remain hidden. That is, barriers are often not identified by either employers or youth, or they are purposely concealed by youth in order to hide perceived deficiencies. Although marginalized youth were hired and experienced some level of success in each of these workplaces, it also seems clear that the positive impact would be further expanded. This could be accomplished by the development of more considered outlook amongst employers with regard to the nature of the workplace and the workforce it tends to utilize.

Not all employers we interviewed viewed youth employment strictly through an 'individualized lens' however. The following employer frames the 'work ethic' as both an individual matter and an issue shaped by contextual factors. It seems that this level of recognition of barriers is associated in our research with positive work environments that empower marginalized youth and lead to their development.

*Work ethics is one of the toughest one. A lot of the youth coming through this program, do not come from a standard kind of working family environment, so they don't have a work ethic. We spend quite a bit of time in our company trying to develop that, and explain to them how it works, because a lot of the youth have the same issues, they come from broken homes or living on the street or they don't have an education, so you know, everything sort of gangs up on them together and I personally believe in, since I do for my two companies, of giving them every advantage and let them prove themselves. There is an awful lot of knowledge in them, street kids kind of thing, if you can harness it and direct it in a proper way. (ESK5 - owner commercial cleaning company)*

Similarly, another one of the employers we interviewed who had developed a very strong workplace environment for her employees also clearly articulated the role of barriers in work performance. While recognizing that positive outcomes do involve often very basic employment skills (e.g. confidence) and basic material constraints (e.g. travel difficulties), she advocates strong engagement with the youth that appears to characterize the strongest success stories we have explored in our research.

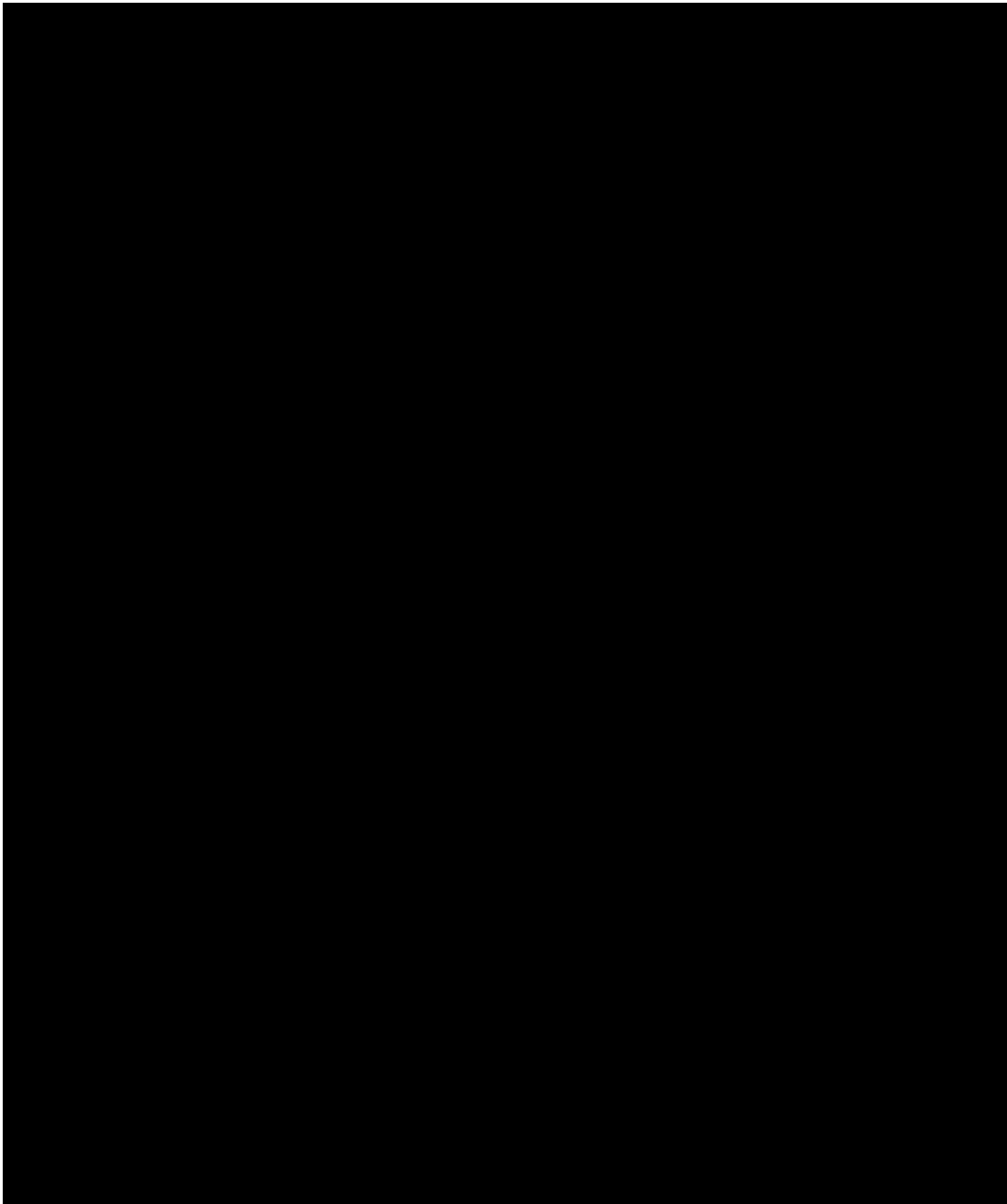
*I think the most important thing is recognizing that a lot of young people who are facing barriers are probably lacking a lot of confidence, (inaudible) a young parent as well as a young future employee right, and I think that as long as you are willing to take the time and listen and listen to where their concerns come in and what the barriers are that they may have to being successful in the jobs, you are willing to work around that, then you will be very successful and that is what that would be. [Jane Doe] for instance, she comes in on a later shift because it is very difficult, she takes a bus to get here, it's very difficult for her to get a 3-year old child and herself out the door, get on the bus and be at work at 7 am. We've recognized that barrier and so we work around it, and so we put her on the later shift, the 10 O'clock shift. It gives her adequate time to get up in the morning and get herself here and we've not had any reasons yet to arrive late, I mean she's been on time every single shift. (ESK4 – Manager of non-profit day care centre)*

Two of the questions on our interview schedule allowed us to gather information directly permitting aggregation of findings to further support the patterns identified through qualitative analysis. In one such question we sought to understand which barriers or specific challenges that faced marginalized youth attempting to succeed in their first job employers were thought to be most important (Figure 6). These interview questions (see Appendix D and E) did not simply ask whether an item was important or not. They also invited commentary that was intended to gather information about the general level of importance an interviewee placed on the item. In practice, interviewees were asked whether the item was 'important', 'somewhat important' or 'not important'. Our small sample size does not permit particularly strong claims in general terms but when combined with the qualitative analysis it does provide some useful information. The

figures below does provide indications about how many interviewees indicated a particular item as being ‘very important’ (the number of these responses for each item is in parentheses following the item labels), but the raw scores do not capture the trends very well. Thus for each item a tabulation of an overall importance score, expressed as a percentage based on a simple weighted sum of indications of importance (e.g., a score of 100% indicating that all 16 employers felt this was a ‘very important’ barrier that had to be overcome to create a successful result).

Several things stand out. Partly due the fact that youth are already employed, employers see little value in job-relevant networks for youth. This is despite the fact that research indicates that these networks are likely important resource in obtaining jobs, that marginalized youth typically lack such networks, and particularly given that such networks presumably would support any changes of job they might consider. What is particularly striking is that employers do not see educational background and job-specific experience or interest in the job or sector as a relevant barrier in hiring marginalized youth. While as the employers explained, all the skills and knowledge these young workers will need will be given to them by the employer, underlying this may be the fact that the entry level work assigned to these youth is often unskilled: a plus for youth who do not have prior experience and/or knowledge of the area, but in the end a matter that in certain situations that we explore below, can undermine commitment and support the appearance of the very kind of ‘poor work ethic’ about which so many employers are concerned overall.





As indicated earlier, the skills most employers in the FTS research thought most valuable were either obtained early in school (basic literacy), or else were related to matters of attitude and willingness to accept instruction, show up on time, and so on. Cultural, ethnic, racial and language differences were not seen as a barrier, nor were matters of gender although the aggregated average here hides some variation in employer responses. There are several

contextual explanations of this. One group of employers, the majority, were not concerned about building diversity in these terms at all, or operated in sectors (and offered wage-levels) that produced opportunities for minority and newly emigrated workers already. A minority of employers saw this as an important issue for their business and an important barrier for youth largely due to their interest in reflecting a diverse customer base. Finally, it is relevant to note that organizational culture of the workplace was recognized by employers to be a key factor in attracting and retaining youth. A poor workplace environment – one that was not friendly, was conflictual and which provided few opportunities for interesting work – was a key barrier for hiring youth, including marginalized youth. Successfully overcoming this barrier, according to employers, meant establishing a skilled and friendly supervisory culture, as well as (for some youth) engaging work and career development possibilities and (for others) an ‘easy-going’ atmosphere where lower rewards and relevancy could be balanced with relatively lowered effort and responsibility.

One additional matter still remains however. Virtually 100% of the employers referenced ‘work ethic’ as an important barrier facing marginalized youth, with 12 (see Figure 6) indicating it as ‘very important’. This has a common sense quality to it, yet may on closer examination hide a great deal of complexity. ‘Work ethic’, for the employers interviewed, was the sum of all intangible behaviours and capacities that they sought. A young workers with a strong work ethic were always ‘good listeners’, ‘attentive’, ‘energetic’, ‘showed initiative’, ‘reliable’ and ‘punctual’, and so on. According to these employers other attributes could be more or less easily acquired if a strong ‘work ethic’ was already in place.

However, the fact is that work ethic – while easily referenced and presumably easily assessed – is not simply a personal attribute, nor is it neutral to specific background of the youth, and nor is it divorced from the work environment. Rather, young workers arrive at the workplace with an orientation to work, its meaning and, in turn, its value. This research bears on these issues, and it is an issue that we will return to again in the following sub-section. However in first drawing on the employer interview data, we can see that, in many ways, the orientations of youth to employment can be broken down into two major types. The first type is what we refer to as an ‘occupational-orientation’ in which youth are specifically interested in the specific work type (e.g. garden care, child care services) or, in several cases, the trade (e.g. construction, auto

repair). The second broad orientation seen is what we call ‘general paid work orientation’ in which the youth may have some interest in the specific work but is more interested in obtaining paid work and becoming established in the labour market more generally. Though often only implicitly recognized by employers we interviewed, one employer summarizes this in her description of the two routes to success she has seen.

*I: How would you define success in your employment of youth? What would tell you that it's working when you're bringing in youth?*

*S: I guess two things. We've had students that have come in and have been part of the Job Connect so that they've worked with us for about 3 months and then gone on and taken their ECE. And then that would be I guess the most successful for other students just being able to hold down a job for two months and sort of seeing them come in very unconfident and sort of frightened at the world, and two months later know that this is the profession that they've been able to succeed and work as a team, and then they go off and do something else. So I would say that's success as well.... I would say that in 15 years it probably hasn't changed a lot, because I think there's students that we're getting are the ones that have struggled through the school process. So I would think that 15 years ago it was the same the deal. (EAK3 – manager of child care services facility)*

Thus in the first case the employer remarks how some success stories involve a youth choosing to return to school and obtain occupationally specific qualifications (e.g. Early Childhood Education certification) to further their engagement with the specific field. And, in the second case youth experience success by virtue of learning how to ‘hold down’ a job generally and increase their abilities to obtain/retain employment irrespective of the specific occupational field.

Occupational-orientations amongst youth are unproblematic to employers we interviewed for a number of reasons. The youth is intensely interested in the job itself; money and sometimes even difficult working conditions are seldom a deterrent. Even still, what the research also reveals is that employers sometimes have difficulty consistently interpreting the behaviour of those youth with more of a ‘general paid work orientation’. This same employer continues,

*When I look at the students that haven't worked out, it's that they're putting in time and they really don't have an interest. So I would say to students, "Find something that they would be interested in rather than just doing it for the sake of doing it." So whether it's working with children or becoming a carpenter, find a passion, find something that excites you and then you'll be successful. (EAK3)*

A manager of a large garden centre sums up how many employers do find success in the context of youth with this type of a 'general paid work orientation':

*The #1 expectation for them is wage. A lot of them it comes down to, "I need to make money now", "I'm in this situation" or whatever. And so certainly money is a huge motivator for them... I think being very realistic with the expectations up-front. And as long as we set those expectations out clearly and reinforce them consistently as an employer, it works out well. If we sort of leave things in the grey a little bit and liberties are taken, it slides downhill very quickly; and unfortunately I can't have them compromising my service levels. (EAK6 – manager of a large garden centre)*

Beyond this basic classification of orientations, what also is suggested in our research is that work ethic and work orientations are not merely an artefact of past experiences and influences, but are actively learned in the workplace itself. As such, these orientations are subject to change, and it appears to be particularly subject to change whether or not the youth sees a connection between their current work and their possible futures. Roughly half of the success stories we followed featured youth who had entered the workplace with an understanding, or quickly learned within this workplace, that their work was at least potentially connected to a specific occupational career (ongoing, adult employment) of some type. As the comments from employers indicated, for this group, intense effort could be demanded – in some cases the acceptance of strict supervision, harsh, physical work – and yet still an acceptable effort/reward balance could be generated in both the minds of the employer and the youth. For the other half, though successful in their own right (and according to both employers and the youth

themselves), their job was understood as a transitional one distinct from any specific occupational development. In these cases the youth specifically indicated they either had different careers in mind, or alternatively did not have a particular career path envisioned at all. Employers who seemed to understand these distinctions best, like some of those quoted above, appeared to produce the greatest success. They understood that youth appreciated an ‘easy-going’ atmosphere, and, together with the employer, attenuated the effort/reward balance to achieve consistent, positive results. These descriptions, though subject to change, again, align roughly with the two orientations we identify above.

Yet what seemed clear from the interviews with employers, where there were difficulties filling positions, concerns about work ethic and ambiguity about youth work orientations were at their most intense which suggests that such things are also a function of the type of work employers have on offer, particularly so where youth (and sometimes employers) do not see a clear career passage forward to which the work directly or indirectly contributes.

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### ***FINDINGS ON MARGINALIZED YOUTH***

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The vast majority of youth we interviewed in our research had experienced ‘significant periods of low income’ in their family life growing up. Over a quarter of our youth interviewees were not born in Canada. A majority had parents who had not attained any post-secondary education. A third of our interviewees had not finished secondary school and only two had completed any post-secondary education. A majority of our youth interviewees had engaged in significant part-time work. This is a factor that the research literature has shown can, at certain levels, contribute to difficulties for school completion. Specifically, the research shows a negative correlation between part-time work over 20 hours per week on the one hand and educational attainment and employment success on the other. At the same time, when asked about their experience of part-time work during school, those who engaged in it (sometimes for more than 20 hours per week) were very positive about what they had gained through such experiences.

There were roughly equal numbers of youth interviewed who indicated an expressed interest in the particular sector or occupational field in which they were working, and those who

were simply interested in obtaining/retaining employment generally irrespective of the sector or occupational field. As the research literature would predict, our sample of youth were highly satisfied with their work, even if they expressed occasional concerns over the levels of pay, advancement opportunities and other conditions at the workplace. Such concerns, however, were disproportionately concentrated amongst youth who expressed a general paid work orientation discussed earlier in the report. Those with occupationally-specific orientations to work seldom expressed any concerns of this type. The youth interviewed were even more positive than their employers about the role of youth employment centres in their success. Some youth indicated having tried private employment agencies prior with poorer outcomes.

Their appreciation, awareness and/or ability to articulate the nature of barriers or factors of marginalization they themselves (or other youth) faced were very limited. In this way, the youth interviewees were similar to the employers. The types of barriers that these youth identified as having overcome – often with the help of the employer – were primarily associated with financial challenges expressed in terms of transportation to and from work, the purchase of safety equipment, and so on. Other barriers such as the impact of scheduling on young women with children were also mentioned:

*If it wasn't for my boyfriend -- thank God he works midnights and he sleeps during the day and he's able to go and get her. I'm still... once I'm able to get off work then we kind of do a little swop. So they're very understanding of my situation of having a young child at home, but that would definitely be a personal barrier. If she ever gets sick and I'm unable to come into work, that's definitely a personal barrier I would have to say. (YAK7)*

On the whole, however, most youth we interviewed understood barriers and the potential for marginalization in an individualized manner, i.e., as matters of personal difficulty in finding a job. However, in discussions of barriers, whereas employers frequently dwelled on matters of 'work ethic', 'attitude', and so on, these were not issues of concern for the youth themselves. Rather, the youth were much more likely to describe situations that highlighted the potential for de-motivation brought on by work environment rather than seeing a lack of motivation and/or limited employability skills as a barrier. Such findings suggest that perhaps additional support for

youth to better understand the nature of barriers might be helpful, if only to assist them in self-assessment, but also to more clearly voice their specific needs to employers who were actively trying to work with them on the job for mutually successful outcomes.

What is clear in our data is that certain marginalized youth experiencing some level of success in employment were attracted to the perception of increasing responsibility in their work. That their work seemed to matter in the workplace, for example, appeared to be deeply motivating. This effect appeared strongest amongst those with occupationally specific orientations to the workplace. Several of these interviewees explicitly contrasted prior employment that offered little in the way of responsibility, and how this produced disinterest (and likely poor performance). Other interviewees, however, were motivated by a different balance of effort, responsibility and reward that coincided with more modest, stable responsibilities (and more modest rewards and career trajectories). These youth tended to have a more generalized orientation to paid employment. Finally, in general terms, it seemed clear that across the majority of the youth interviewed, where there was a strong sense of employer commitment to the particular product or service and its inherent value, young workers appeared to respond very positively. This was in contrast to a small minority of cases in which youth – otherwise successfully retaining employment and performing well according to their employer – felt somewhat lower levels of motivation for their work when they perceived that the business concerns were more valued than the usefulness, importance and quality of the product or service.

Expanding on the introductory comments related to work orientation above, some youth were interested in the field of work while others were simply pleased and motivated by obtaining a job. The following few excerpts provide a sense of the latter:

*Actually at that point, I was looking for anything, it didn't matter what it was. (YSK3)*

*I: What were you looking for in the job?*

*S: Just a job.*

*I: In terms of a job generally, what did you want when you first started out?*

- S: Something to begin, just that. I don't know, just anything that a student would want, something easy going.*
- I: And when you started this, what about goals for your working life?*
- S: No plans right now. Maybe own my own business some day. Doing what....I don't know.*
- I: How did you come by this job?*
- S: Couldn't get anything that paid more than minimum wage. So I went to [the youth employment centre] and they helped me.*
- I: Were there any barriers that you had to overcome in either obtaining or keeping this job?*
- S: Just not being so shy and just doing what needed to be done, cooperating with others and the boss. I don't have high school, yet. Maybe that would be a problem with some jobs.*
- (YSK4)**

It was common in such situations to see that with the experience of some success, the youth begins to tentatively consider other options, as in the instance above when the youth indicates an emergent interest in possibly starting a business or later when there is the suggestion of possibly returning to complete high school. This excerpt also represents a more general orientation to paid work. In the excerpts below, we see that employment success in the context of youth with this type of orientation to work is often linked to positive interaction with youth employment services as well as a growing, if cautious, interest in returning to school.

- S: I went to the [youth employment centre] and they're really good there. I've worked with some of them -- like [the person there], I went and I told him "I need a job, a good job, I don't want to quit in two weeks, like I want to do what I'd like to do." And I love children, so [the employer] helped me and brought me in here, and I've been here for a while. Six months. So it's a good job for me. I actually kept up with it, and I know that's hard because keeping a job is difficult for me, really difficult. So this job is great. The manager is great.*
- I: And what are your goals generally in your working life?*



S: *Going back to school. I'd need to go back to school, because I want to do this for a while, a long time. (YAK3)*

*I think when I'm ready for school it will help me because I will have a lot of the skills more being hands-on rather than reading from a school book -- I'm a lot better hands-on than reading. So it definitely helped me for going to school. Even other employers have told me that "I'm now gaining the skills that I will gain in school" so I can hopefully be slightly ahead in school and be ready for it. (YAK4)*

As is well-known in the research literature, in this research we see that for many marginalized youth, simply establishing basic job search skills is a challenge, while supports (from workmates, from home, and from employment programs) proved to be essential resources for success, as illustrated by the excerpt below:

I: *Any personal challenges that you might have been having or economic challenges? Anything that you thought was getting in the way of you getting a job?*

S: *First of all, my resume, that was something I never had to make out before. Besides, I held a job at another plant for 27 years and back then we never had to have a resume. It was just a job application and you got a job.*

I: *What were some of the personal circumstances or challenges that you had that you overcame to succeed on this job? You can talk generally. You mentioned age before as a potential challenge. Was family supportive?*

S: *Yeah, plus I get a lot of support from my fellow-workers. (YSK3)*

*Originally, I was in a rough spot for a little bit there, I was having trouble finding a job and stuff. About last year then come February I seen the ad in the paper for the Education Employment Centre and I went through an interview process there and to see how much I wanted the job and if they thought I was good enough actually to go through for it and I got accepted for Education Employment. After that, I did the courses there*

*and once I got there I was lucky enough to get a job here I guess. Sherry Hudson was kind enough to give me a job here and I don't know I've just been working here since, I guess... I was looking for a full career out of that just to get my license and have a good life, good living, I guess, I don't know. (YSK2)*

In keeping with an earlier point, the interview data demonstrated that youth orientations to work undergo change. A good example of this is seen in the follow young woman's shift from a general paid work orientation to one much more focused on a specific occupational field (i.e. book-keeping):

*I pretty much lucked out actually with this job. Like I said, I think as we all came in with different expectations that maybe just answering the phones or doing a little bit of invoicing and stuff. And because the growth of the company, and I've been steady here, it's not like I just left over a year or done different things. So as far as obstacles I guess, learning new things is always a hurdle to kind of go over. But nothing really. They're a great company to work for. I can't complain about my bosses or anything at all. So very supportive... I started out and I was doing basic, and now I've upped to payroll, and I do certain things accounting wise. So now I've got a lot more responsibility I guess you can say; I know a lot more about the company...I'm always looking for ways to improve, or keep going because it's never wrong or bad to do that. So I always like to keep my foot in school because after you stop for a while it's hard to get back into it. So it's nice just to be able to keep a part-time class or something, keep going. Right now it's a little difficult as far as money-wise, because it's a lot. It's a lot more schooling and right now it's hard to work full time and then take on those extra courses. Because if I were to do one course a semester it would take me forever; so you may have to do part time -- work and part-time school. But right now this is good -- the pace is good; maybe later on when I'm more comfortable and stuff like that.... But that's the one good thing about accounting and bookkeeping and stuff, there's people who always need them; there's always demand for them, because the company won't run without it. So there's always employers looking for these kind of skills, so I think that it is a long term future. Let's say I didn't want to work*

*anymore or whatever or even personal aspects or starting your own business or maybe working as an independent bookkeeper and doing many different things. So it is a long term future -- job goals... ranges you can go. (YAK8)*

We see how initial motives shift when accompanied by suitable opportunities for the emergence of an occupational-orientation. It appeared that central to such shifts was initial success that in turn, depended upon a match between employer expectations, style, task scope and general working environment and the initial youth work orientation.

As indicated earlier, the FTS research analysis suggested two basic youth orientations to work: occupational-orientation and general paid work orientation. Those with general paid work orientations tended to appreciate an ‘easy-going’ environment where levels of responsibility are modest and more specifically where the effort/responsibility/reward balance were set somewhat lower, such as the young woman quoted here:

*I: And the last part of this question: has it been clear to you what the employer is looking for from you, in skills, behaviour and that kind of stuff?*

*S: It's an easy-going environment, so there's no real, if you make mistakes it is not life threatening or something like that, so that is pretty good....*

*I: Do you have any short term career goals?*

*S: About going to school and hopefully traveling and whatever I can get out of school.*

*I: Do you consider the pay satisfactory?*

*S: Yes, no, maybe.*

*I: Do you consider your job to be satisfying?*

*S: Yes.*

*I: What is the most satisfying thing about the job?*

*S: You just come in here and learn, it's a good environment... it's basic, and it makes you wanna come back. (YSK6)*

This woman is very satisfied with her work. It features what she feels is a fair and effective effort/responsibility/reward balance. The requirement for satisfaction appears to be an ‘easy-

going', friendly, 'good environment' even if the work does not show any particularly strong connection to career goals which in such cases remain preliminary. Responsibilities remain relatively well-contained. Such work environments may or may not have internal advancement opportunities.

Other youth showed clear occupational-orientations. Some, like these youths below, appear to intensely desire that their work matters – in contrast to the example above it is preferable to these youth that there be consequences to their work performance. These youth seem to crave a process of mastery, followed by increasing responsibility. This young man goes on to give us a concise example in this regard summing up several of the factors that appear to have motivated youth in this context.

*I: [Your employer] has identified you as a success here, and you've said it's been a success for you. What are the things that you've learned do you think that has made this a success?*

*S: The positions that I've held prior to this I've had a lot less responsibility. But when I came into here it's a lot more of a responsibility check; you've got to be in line because you're dealing with... like if you mess up something it's not just a little problem. You're not messing up a little \$2-3 burger, you're messing up a \$20-30,000 car. So there's a lot more responsibility in that.*

*I: What about the workplace that's good from your point of view? And conversely what would be a problem? What are the strengths of this place and what might be some weaknesses?*

*S: The strengths of this place -- I've been to a lot of other car dealerships and more or less a lot of the guys around the dealerships it's all "money-money-money". Whereas this place... and I'm not just saying this because I work here... but it's a lot more about the customers, because [the manager] is just a really good genuine guy. So more or less he treats the customers like they're his children or his family. Either way... he's not out there for the money, he's out there to please them. And just knowing that makes it a lot more easy to be able to work. (YAKI)*

In general terms however, the occupational-orientation led to very strong commitment in which a clear career 'horizon' comes into view.

*I: What are your goals overall as far as your career and your working life?*

*S: I hope to one day open my own shop.*

*I: You're going to stay in this field?*

*S: Yes... Over the year. I'm planning to, as time goes on... sooner or later... I'm using his tools right now, so sooner or later I'll have to buy my own stuff. So I'm planning to start buying some stuff slowly. Little bit here and a little bit there. So until I get all my tools.*

**(YAK5)**

Working in a manufacturing firm that produces environmental products we see another version of this orientation here:

*S: Over the next year, I'm pretty much moving on to... like I mentioned the more application side of things, which is getting to know the products more closely. So I'd like to just spend the year probably just focusing on that, and becoming really proficient at that, that's sort of my goal for the next year.*

*I: And do you want to be here for a long time with this organization?*

*S: That's the plan, that's the goal, yes. They'll literally tell you that you can be in the future like in a higher position. Like it's pretty clear in that sense. There's no road map maybe. Actually there is like a general road map, just learn the products and master one thing and then move on to the next, but there's not like set-set plan. But they have made it clear that, yes, of course there are opportunities to grow here... There's always a bit of a craving for fully defined roles, but that's not really applicable in this business because we're kind of small. But I mean everyone would like to have their job description 100% drawn out. **(YAK6)***

As noted, youth work orientations do not appear to define success as much as the match between these orientations and other factors such as work environment, supervisory style, task scope and responsibility levels. Building on comments from the employers, several of whom understood

that ‘success’ could take different forms (from simply doing well as something, to the possibility of returning to school, and occupational development and promotion), likewise the marginalized youth we interviewed expressed distinctive successful employment pathways as well.

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### ***A SPECIAL ROLE FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN SUCCESS***

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Alluded to tangentially in both of the previous sub-section above, project findings suggest that learning environment – and various aspects of the *informal learning environment* specifically – for both marginalized youth and employers appears to be one of the most important factors in success. It is much easier to identify and track the effects and practices of organized training programs in many ways. However, informal learning remains a challenging research variable to explore given that it is typically difficult to recall for interviewees and difficult to conceptualize for many researchers due to its fluid and dispersed nature.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, informal learning dynamics are significantly shaped by employer as well as youth orientation to the value of this otherwise taken-for-granted aspect of work life. The interviews seem to provide evidence that where success was the greatest, an awareness of the value of informal learning was likewise strong.

The employers that would seem to have developed the most expansive basis for success for marginalized youth expressed an engaged perspective on the work and lives of the youth they hired: “We are in an environment where we have some respect for whatever knowledge they have. They really enjoy that.” (ESK4 – Manager of a non-profit day care centre). While success was achieved in a variety of ways, what seems to be clear is that attention to learning (in different forms) was crucial.

In the FTS research, organized or formal learning/training continued to play a role in the success that marginalized youth experience in the workplace. However, a minority of employers indicated a strong, organized, explicit and ongoing training/learning approach. Some examples can be seen in the previous sub-section on employers. There we saw descriptions of such learning, mostly from employers in large organizations. Small and medium sized organizations

on the other hand tended to not have (or not has as extensive a program of) organized orientation and training. Another important example can be found here:

*S: We've got a set program and we just walk through the program with them; and then every morning we do a morning meeting with our staff, because we think communication is important.*

*I: Is this during the training period or every day?*

*S: Every day, year-round. And from the 'Passion program' there are 7 different main strategies that we address, and each morning of the week, or each week actually addresses a different strategy. And so we just keep it alive and keep following up with the staff.*

*I: On location kind of thing?*

*S: More or less. And then the other thing we have a very large cashier training program. And before they actually get on the floor they've probably undergone, I'm going to guess the minimum 4 and maximum 12 hours of training depending on the position, and that's for all staff, not just youth. I employ youth but I treat them the same way that I do everyone else -- same expectations. (EAK6 – manager of a large garden centre)*

Interestingly, however, employers are far more likely to estimate their role as valuable (and sometimes central) to integrating and achieving success with these new workers. The type of sector and size of the company (as well as whether or not the job entails significant health and safety risks and/or apprenticeship certification processes) plays a role in this as well. In the excerpt below we read from the owner of a construction company (specializing in electrical installation involving certified trade work) for example:

*Typically, before anybody starts with our company, its about 4 hours or 5 hours of orientation on safety. We do help them with safety policy, our 401 policy, we do a live work just to make sure that they are aware of the dangers of electricity and we do follow the rest, we do the full training required, we do it all in-house. I would say most of them are formal through, we have one of our people here that takes the safety course on and*

*it's the kids for training course, through safety courses, through construction safety association and WHIMIS, so I would say they are all formal. We put the packages together to suit our purpose, it's just the trade, it's all formal, it's the videos and afterwards it has the follow rest and so on. (ESK6 - owner/manager of a large construction company)*

By contrast, youth interviewed for the study consistently championed the value of informal learning over the organized training offered by employers, as central to the success they achieved.

*I: Sometimes young/new workers learn a great deal from their supervisors or managers informally in the course of doing the work. Have you had any of these types of learning experience? If so, can you describe them?*

*S: I have them every day. It's all about problem solving as a group. It's hands-on, and [the owner] doesn't teach us directly but gives me the tools to continue learning from other sources like the computer and manuals, so it really gives you a growing strength of your own. (YAK2)*

*I: Sometimes new workers like yourself learn a great deal more from experienced employees that they are working side-by-side with. Have you had any of those types of learning experiences?*

*S: Yes, that's learning the ins and outs of the business, through fellow-employees.*

*I: What about organized orientation, like a structured program where you come in and they have you sit in a room and do the training and very formal orientation program? Do you think that's important?*

*S: For myself, no. Not for me.... I feel better working hands-on.*

*I: Informal learning from co-workers?*

*S: Yeah. (YSK3)*



*I: Sometimes workers learn a great deal from their supervisors or bosses informally, have you had any of these kinds of learning experiences while you were here?*

*S: You pick up a lot, little things from everybody. (YSK4)*

*I: Was there anything that employer did that helped make the success... or that helped make this successful for you? Is there any specific stuff? And is there anything that he could have done any better?*

*S: I don't think there was anything he could have done better. They were really good with me because they knew that I knew nothing about the car business or anything; everyone was just really helpful around, and if I needed something I could just go and ask someone and they'd let me know, because I've never been involved in the car business before, so there's a lot of words and phrases, stuff like that, that I'm not going to understand. So everyone here was really good with helping me get familiarized with all the...*

*I: So your learning happened not just from your mentor, but you're saying it happened with everybody here, that there was a lot of people who helped you out?*

*S: There's also a lot of new people now, a lot of people that I started with are gone now. (YAKI)*

The valuing of informal learning among youths in fact often coincided strongly with youth orientations to work as well; specifically, occupational-orientations to work. In the following two excerpts, these youths – a young man working in an auto garage and a young woman working in a large garden centre respectively – find their informal learning (particular learning from a supervisor or manager) tightly integrated with their career goals. Indeed, the informal learning practices in the workplace appeared to directly contribute to the formation of these goals. In the first case we see a very directive, even ‘strict’, informal learning guidance provided, further supported by co-workers.

*I: Sometimes new workers learn a great deal from their supervisors or managers informally -- so while you're doing work, not formal training but in the act of going through the day you pick up stuff that you're not taught necessarily?*

S: Yes.

I: Have you had any of these types of learning experiences?

S: Yes. For example, [the manager] would like, say I'm doing a job, he would come and be like okay, "You're doing it right but this is the way it should be done." Like he gives you a better understanding of it so like why you're doing it actually. Stuff like that.

I: How about learning the way... I've been talking to him and he seems like a good guy, he seems like a strict guy... strict guy if you're not here on time he's going to, you know. So how do you learn what he's expecting? He's going to tell you but I'm sure there's also guys around who you little by little every week you understand this place better, but how do you learn about how to navigate this organization?

S: That's what I'm saying. Since we get along with everyone like a team, say like they're here before me, so they're giving me hints: e.g., certain jobs you should do it the way that he likes. Since you're new. And then when you start moving on, like you get more into the (...), more years in the thing, you get to know how to do it like we do it. But now he'll always say okay he wants it to be done this way. (YAK5)

In this second instance, we see a very intensive learning environment in which the youth not only is learning a great deal but is taking notes and actively seeking to deepen her knowledge of the products/industry on her own. Her work orientation produces an interest in expanding responsibilities and awareness of different tasks in the workplace, rather than a clearly contained set of responsibilities.

*Over the next year I'd like to... I've recently become the "seasonal plant supervisor" and I want to be more familiar with the plants. That's a thing I know certain plant materials but I don't know all, but I would like to be more familiar with what's coming in, at what time and what season. Like I started early spring and I haven't seen what happens here in the wintertime. And this being my first time around, it's a complete learning process, and I've learned that I must take notes every single day of what came in on this time, and what came in on that time. So take notes, keep copies of everything that comes in, and just put it away and then next year I can go back and be like, "Oh, so we've got this Bonsai tree for tropicals" or whatever the case might have been for the tropicals; and "what we were*

*doing for custom work in flower shop at this time of year", just all that type of information. (YAK7)*

One area of informal learning that employers specifically identified as important concerned supervisory practice. As one employer remarked, “[r]eceptiveness of your organization and particularly the supervisor will set the tone” (ESK3 – Manager of a manufacturing company). This issue of supervisor training and effort is unevenly addressed in the research literature but appears to be significant in our findings (both in employer and youth interviews). One of the most developed visions of the relevance of a strong learning environment in the FTS research was expressed by this owner of a commercial cleaning and property maintenance company:

*[We provide] a lot of teaching, we've done women's training, followers training, communication training. I made 'em feel part of the team, so they weren't on the outside when they started, good supervisors, good supervision, so when they're being picked on you know, I went and sat down among the staff and talked to them, worked with them not against them, understanding that they can't do anything, they don't have the experience so you gotta teach them, I spend the time teaching them so they have some reality of what life is, you don't have a perfect world where everyone agrees with you and life's just like that so.... We follow the instincts of our key people to see interested people are or trying to develop those interests into a career related thing, and I am totally for sending them off to be trained, sending them to night school, sending them to one-day courses, to see what their abilities are, give 'em the growth, give them opportunities, take care of them, and build a business with them, instead of I build a business and they are an employee.... When you hire the youth over hiring someone who is more mature, people who are mature understand that they might not like the job but they stay to it because they've got bills to pay, but the youth don't have that kind of crap that way, so they're more interested in doing what they want to do or they go back to school. They realize this is not what they want to do and they choose to go back to school to better their life. So,*

*turnover isn't a negative turn over, it's just there is some personal growth they find among themselves. (ESK5 – owner of a commercial cleaning company)*

This employer drew especially important linkages between the value of strong and supportive supervisory culture in a company and the positive effects on the experience of marginalized youth and the outcomes for employers that result. Expanding further on this notion:

*I: What are the keys to success in designing a workplace learning programs that you have for your young people?*

*S: I would say there is a success to building a program, I think the program, I have three excellent supervisors that take good direction from me, I have spent a lot of time training the supervisors, the courses or whatever, I think the biggest part is having someone knowledgeable they can go to, to get their questions answered properly and not just going to other staff members and getting their version of how it should be done, or how they do it without knowing the safety part of it, and that kind of thing. They get the full scope of how it should be done if they go to supervisors.... We're a somewhat smaller organization, where I am hands-on in the operation of it, and in that being I, in my previous careers spent quite a bit of time training people and then sending my staff that do training, that the supervisor training is to make sure, they're properly trained to do this as well. (ESK5 – owner of a commercial cleaning company)*

Other employers we interviewed concurred.

*Like I said, the biggest thing that I've learned out of it is the fragility of the front-line supervisors outside, you get the general manager resident to buy in who then walks away from the situation and isn't there anymore. If somebody senior, maybe or some senior executive is not involved in it so that when you hit snags, to remind people we are getting a training subsidy on this, so let's remember the training component of this. If they are not there and the supervisor is left on his own it very quickly reverts to the standard probationary period, well I've got a new employee and we got 3 months to sort out*

*whether it's gonna work out.... You got to get past that, which means you need a process right at the beginning, that reviews it at a higher level than the supervisor and says ok, how do we deal with this?... It's basically the decision of the supervisor himself. You need to sort of say let's step back, is there some other ways we can look at this. And that's really beyond the ability of the supervisor to make those decisions. (ESK3 – manger of a manufacturing company)*

Our interviews included not simply employers and employees but two youth entrepreneurs as well. Their comments are useful with regards to the role of learning in youth employment success. In fact, it is worth examining at length the comments of one of our most eloquent interviewees who was a 24-year-old entrepreneur trying to establish her own business. While obviously the context is very different, nevertheless we see that informal learning (in its many different manifestations) is central to her success.

*I: Before asking you some very specific questions about your story to get you to this point, can you tell me how you ended up starting your own business?*

*S: Well, I pretty much started beginning with the product I was making. I've always enjoyed making things and then I started developing that more, and making more and more and realizing that I could sell it, plus my mother's also an entrepreneur. So I've been doing craft shows with her since I was a little girl and selling things and kind of in the craft show market a little bit, so basically I was starting to develop the product and my mom said you could turn the product into a business.... I've always had stuff on the go, I've always made things and sold things basically, I've been doing craft shows since I was a teenager, since I was a little girl with my mom, but as soon as I was in high school I was making things and selling them. I was always trying to make my own money on the side and I've always been very crafty and my mom taught me at a young age that I can sell that, right.... (YESK1 – a young business jewellery business owner/entrepreneur)*

Another example of informal learning relates to building relationships, establishing a place within a social network – in this case supported by a youth employment service – specific to one's field of interest such as jewellery.

*...there's four stores that are carrying my stuff that I never would have known before they wouldn't have even seen my stuff you know. It's hard to walk in those stores, and say look at these cool things I made, do you want some. But when it happens like this to help you gain a repertoire and people come in and see your product and they take you more seriously than some hippie that comes in with some cool earrings from the street.*

***(YESKI – a young business jewellery business owner/entrepreneur)***

Yet another example is the informal learning that goes on amongst a set of other entrepreneurs.

*I: What about the other entrepreneurs? Is there learning that happens?*

*S: We're all so geared out to help each other out I think and that's one of the biggest things as well we do for each other, like we're all, there's no competition whatsoever between any of us, we all just want to help each other, we all work together, we all get ideas for each other, you know, if Jordon goes out and finds some clothes she'll grab something that I like and bring it back to me, ok, I thought you might like this for your display or if I hear of a craft show that I think would be beneficial probably well, ok, why don't we go sell our stuff together. We're trying to find out what's good for us to sell our things, where people that are talking about like, we all talk to each other about stuff but I think we're all excited about each other's products. So we work together very well I think personally. ***(YESKI – a young business jewellery business owner/entrepreneur)****

Comparing this with her perspective on mentoring on other programs we see that she is less sure of the value for her of either mentoring or other support programs:

*S: I think [mentoring] is for some people more than others because right now because of the stage my business is at, I don't know how helpful it would be for me. It would be helpful*

*in terms of may be a little bit guidance but my business isn't big enough yet that I need help with finance problems, or with you know with, I don't know. It might be good just for guidance or whatever, but it's still fairly early stages of everything, so I'm not sure how much that would benefit me specifically but I'm sure it's very beneficial for certain people or if I was at a different level or living out of the store or another store, it would be very good for somebody to run things by and to give you advise.*

*I: Right, and... did you tap into any other agency or program that helped or hindered you to get to this point to start your own business?*

*S: No...*

*I: Right... Do you know of any programs or practices here that help young people like yourself to get business off the ground?*

*S: Not really like, I know there is the Futures program or such for younger youth, they have like a Futures program, they have like a Back-on-track program, but that's more for teenagers though, that are trying to figure what they want to do with their life more than getting a business idea off the ground. Other than this program, I am not that familiar with anything else that is... that doesn't mean there isn't. **(YESKI – a young business jewellery business owner/entrepreneur)***

When asked explicitly about the value of organized/formal learning and its value to her she remarks this way:

*I: We know that learning happens formally or informally in the work place, so in your opinion, I'm going to read a list of kinds of training that a lot of places put into effect from, 1 being really, really important to number 3 being not important. I'm going to read them off and you can tell me what you think... Organized, structured orientation?*

*S: I would say to you no, because like just even from a store, it's not a super organized structure, like it is, we have our time but what we do in that frame, it leaves a lot more room for growth when there's no pressure to be ... I wouldn't say it was that important.*

*I: Informal learning from mentors?*

S: *I would say maybe. I guess it depends on who it is. I don't really learn very well formally at all unless someone is stuffy or someone who makes me uncomfortable. I can't take anything they say seriously because I can't relate to them. So I don't take it seriously.... I just automatically in my mind kind of shut people out if they talk to me in a way of knowing more than I do or better than I do, because they don't know more, just a little different and might have different experiences than what I have but doesn't necessarily make them more valid, you know, so. Not that I don't take advice from people but it really depends on how you approach youth, I think with what you talk to them about, being able to relate to them on a way of them as a person. (YESKI – a young business jewellery business owner/entrepreneur)*

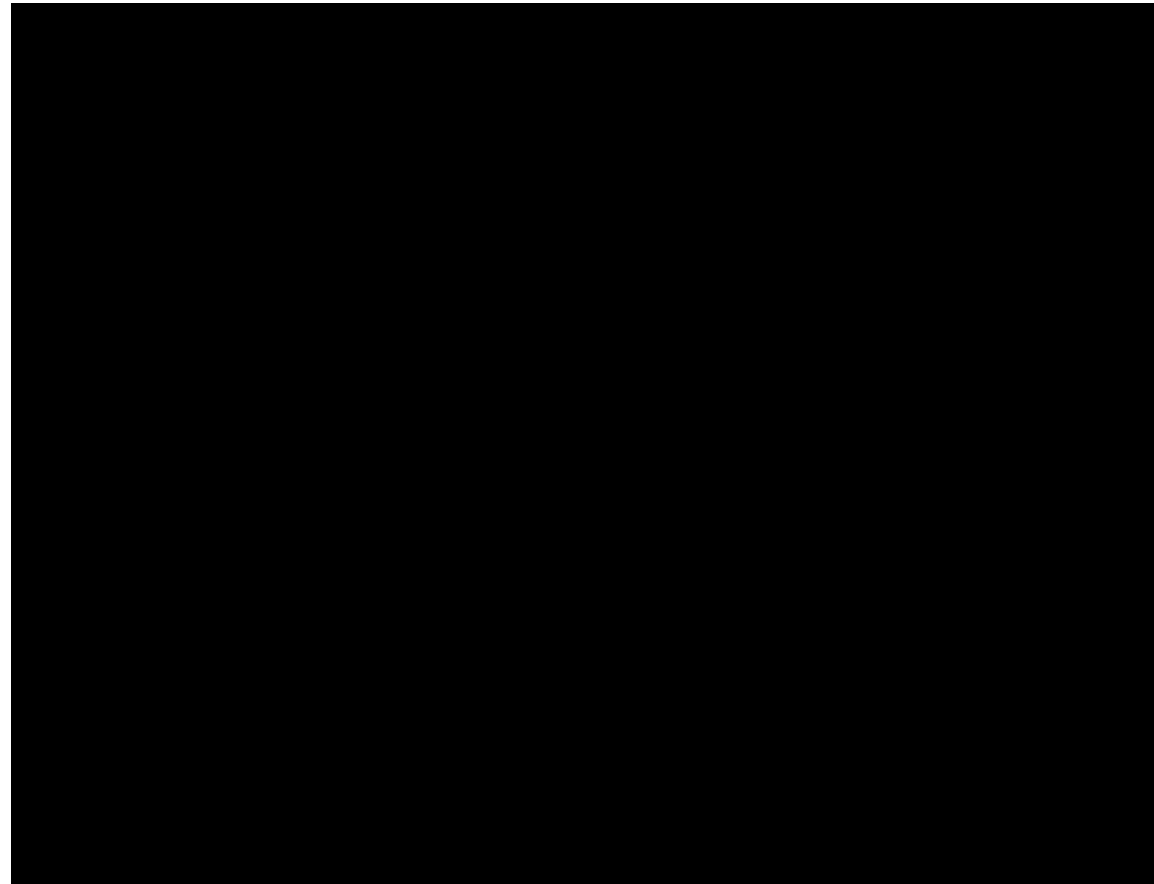
Our analysis of the aggregation of the responses to the question concerning the most important sources of learning for youth in the workplace is seen in Figure 7 below. We explicitly asked about the importance of five sources of learning: i) organized training/orientation, ii) informal learning from a supervisor/manager, iii) informal learning from more experienced co-workers, iv) informal learning from other new co-workers, and v) training support provided by an outside agency. Similar to what was done in Figure 6 earlier, here we make use of commentary provided by interviewees (both employers and youth) to gather information about the general level of importance interviewees ascribed to an item. In practice, interviewees were invited to provide indications whether a particular source of learning was important, somewhat important or not important. As with the previous comparison in Figure 6, again our small sample size does not permit particularly strong claims regarding aggregate trends, but when combined with the qualitative analysis it does provide some further useful information. The raw number of interviewees indicating a source of learning as being 'very important' is also provided (the raw number of these responses, first those of employers and then employees, for each item is indicated in parentheses following the item labels), but as with Figure 6, such raw scores do not express the trends very well on their own. Thus for each item a tabulation of an overall importance score, expressed as a percentage based on a simple weighted sum of indications of



importance (e.g., a score of 100% indicating that all interviewees felt this was a ‘very important’ sources of learning) is provided.

What we see is that there are different visions of what is and is not perceived as an important source of learning in the workplace when we compare the views of employers and youth. Importantly, and in connection with earlier points mentioned regarding the valuable role of strong and effective supervisory relationships, we see that both employers and youth rank this source of learning as most important overall. The most marked examples of a discrepancy on the other hand are seen in the area of the importance of organized training. Employers tend to rank this as very important and youth much less so. Less interesting but still pronounced are the differences in the area of informal learning from more experienced (non-supervisory) co-workers and other new co-workers. Youth tend to rate the importance of learning from these sources higher than employers in both cases.

What exactly can be interpreted from these findings beyond the importance of supervisory learning culture in an organization? First, it may be the case that the data express an over-reliance on, or at the very least an over-estimation of the value of, formal training by employers. In this context, it is possible there may in fact be misplaced faith amongst employers regarding the effectiveness of such approaches given the suggestion that youth employees place lesser importance on it, would likely pay less attention to it and so on, though our data does not allow any firm conclusions on its own.



Rightly or wrongly, young workers appear to pay the most attention to their informal learning. Whether this is a valid indicator of learning effectiveness is not clear. Moreover, it is not clear that this is a major problem in itself. If, however, learning environment is seen to be a key indicator of success by both employers and youth and if greater success in attracting, retaining and developing young workers is a concern, then it would seem that this finding suggests two possible approaches for moving forward. Either, the employer can return to their formal training efforts and review them to explore how they can be made more attractive for young workers. Or, employers could simply recognize that there could be benefits from greater attention to the forms of informal learning that go on in the workplace and, where there are concerns about learning outcomes, address challenges through this avenue. These two approaches are, of course, not mutually exclusive. In this context we might wish to better understand what it is that youth find so attractive and engaging about the informal versus the formal learning environments.

This sub-section of the FTS project findings related to learning can be summarized overall in this way: The data suggest that a) informal learning is perceived to be a highly important means by which strong on-the-job performance is developed in conjunction with related forms of organizational and broader cultural learning that, in turn, shape (employee *and* employer) understandings of expectations, and b) inclusive forms of informal learning in the workplace appear to be the prime means by which marginalized youth in particular form career development networks in relation to both internal and external labour markets. In general terms, analyses suggest that rich, inclusive informal learning environments within organizations are characterized by a number of factors: a) an awareness that the development of inclusion, which counters potentially exclusionary experiences based on key forms of social differences, require informal learning and open forms of participation at work; b) with some exceptions involving regulatory requirements (e.g. related to health and safety, or related to union hall hiring) there seems to be little evidence that explicit/formalized organizational policies are contributing to the generation of rich, inclusive informal learning environments; c) organizations located in small to medium sized communities (which also tend to be small-medium sized organizations) appear to be most effective at generating rich, inclusive informal learning environments. Where larger organizations are considered more carefully (e.g. the large ski resort franchise in our sample), the experiences of marginalized youth employees suggest that supervisory culture (not executive managerial, policy or work design) are a focal point in defining success.

The analysis of experiences from marginalized youth interviews in the research suggests no lack of willingness on the part of these youth to participate as fully as is permitted (formally or informally) in organizational life. Unanimously, there is an expressed feeling that they feel “lucky that somebody took a chance” on them which underlines an implicit rather than an explicit and detailed awareness of the barriers that they face. Moreover, such findings emphasize that challenges to success are likely not strictly a matter of the attributes of these marginalized youth (i.e. a ‘supply-side’ problem) but rather are a function of the relationship between individual attributes and context. As a result, for example, matching things like youth work orientation on the one hand and work environment and related contextual factors on the other likely leads to success. Moreover, this research suggests that common statements in our

interviews with marginalized youth such as “employers respect where I’m at”, “not talking down to me” may belie some additional, significant complexities as well as a potential for positive change vis-à-vis the character of informal learning environments in the workplace.

More specifically in relation to work environments and youth orientations to work and learning, it can be said that the informal learning environment plays a central role. Occupational-orientations amongst youth produce the greatest success in conditions of greater responsibility, growing exposure to related tasks, along with expectations that are expansive and possibly a more directive, informal learning assignments. By contrast, general paid work orientations amongst youth tend to produce the greatest success in conditions of more limited work requirements that are not continually expanding but rather encourage comfort and confidence in well defined tasks guided by less directive, flexible supervisory styles that respect the broader life interest and needs of youth.

Based on employer interviews, there are several relevant findings to report. It is important to note, for example, that for employers it is not unusual to see an awareness of the value of informal learning tightly interwoven with understandings of “good management” (owner/manager, roofing company) as well as discussions of the development of a “strong work ethic” (virtually every employer mentioned this): these are, above all, learning processes. Among the instances of success, we see that even relatively narrow employer understandings of ‘marginalization’ and ‘barriers’ appear to have powerful positive effects. For example, employers tended to recognize issues of “economic background”, “difficulties in school” and in a minority of cases difficulties associated with gendered access to specific occupations (e.g. trade apprenticeship). This is a far cry from the enormous range of variables cited in research literature that have been demonstrated to weigh heavily on youth employment outcomes: mostly notably with regards to how cultural, first language, visible minority and Aboriginal status, disability, participation in the criminal justice system or even rural/urban upbringing or parental status bear on marginality and marginalization processes. Despite successful youth employment, it is not uncommon to find employers indicating, for example, that if youth of colour, immigrant youth, disabled youth or if either males or females (depending on the type of work) are not present, then

there are no barriers in place. This is a problem that may be addressed by employer education for example.

More positively, the findings seem to suggest that there may be a significant ‘social pressure effect’ that shapes employment relationships in small-medium sized communities: employers interviewed specifically noted both a substantial awareness of youth backgrounds and felt a commitment to serving the local community by making efforts to serving marginalized youth.

It seems that those who have the broader recognition of barriers are also those who have a stronger (formal or informal) learning environment on the whole. This makes sense in that those who are most engaged in the development of young employees get to know and understand these employee’s lives in a broader way. As indicated, employers largely feel their organized orientations and training are highly important to the young hires, yet the young hires themselves often have mixed reviews and/or are often unaware of such programs. The fact appears to be that youth tend to speak less highly of organized training and initiatives by a company, with only some small exceptions. When youth do not see the relevance of this organized/formalized learning and, as several commented, there is a strong chance that they feel people are talking down to them. For the employees, it is often supervisor culture/practice that is most important. Interestingly, significant numbers of employers we interviewed did not necessarily want young workers learning from or together with other new or non-designated employees.

## **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The FTS project's objective was to identify, analyze and share promising employer practices that provide the basis for forms of workplace learning that successfully engage youth facing various barriers that tend to produce social and economic exclusion. The focus was on apparent instances of success which tend to be less well document in the prior literature. These successes involved potentially marginalized youth obtaining first-time, entry-level jobs. Given our focus on workplace experiences and learning, we inquired specifically into formal and informal workplace learning in this initial period of employment through the use in-depth analysis across a variety of cases to understand better what works in what circumstances, and why.

The FTS project makes extremely limited claims to representativeness and caution must be used in interpreting results. The project does however provide relevant information in terms of the five research questions listed at the outset of this report. In terms of our first research question that focused on the nature of success and social barriers in general terms. The FTS project documented types of barriers and the means of achieving success in general terms. The study confirmed a variety of observations available in the literature while noting some limits to the types of barriers being actively addressed. Our second research question focused on identifying the different types of learning processes involved when marginalized youth experience some level of success in their initial employment. Different forms of learning appeared to be emphasized in distinct ways across different organizations. Our third research question inquired further into the conditions of effective learning environments. Awareness of informal learning amongst both employers and employees, often combined with personal mentoring, appeared to be particularly relevant to achieving success, as was employer recognition of differing (and sometimes shifting) youth orientations to work. In fact, the research suggested that success seemed to accompany instances when such things as expectations and scope of assigned task were matched to youth work orientations and learning experiences. The fourth research question of the FTS project involved the degree to which employers and youth employees differed in their perspectives on success, barriers and the most relevant sources of learning. As indicated above, we saw several instances of similarity as well as some possible

differences. The above discussion of employer perceptions of the importance of different types of barriers may be of particular interest in this regard. Several of these findings would likely benefit from future investigation. And finally, our fifth research question asked whether organizational type or the types of barriers that youth face, affect the answers to the research questions above. While it seemed clear that some aspects of organizational type (e.g. size) or location (i.e. size of surrounding community) may have been sources of variation in the findings. Findings on the affects of specific sector (e.g. public or private sector) were less clear. Similarly, there was little basis to conclude that any specific, individual barrier typed was a source of variance to the findings. However, in terms of this lattermost point, it was clear that by virtue of our research method (that began with instance of success) that the types of barriers represented in our research sample of marginalized youth proved somewhat narrow (cf. the factors listed in Appendix A).

In sum, the key findings of this research demonstrate that since there is often considerable motivation for marginalized youth to obtain employment, the success we have tried to document depends a good deal on employer efforts, alongside those of youth and employment services. Employers we spoke to were typically oriented to the inherent social value of giving individuals a chance and/or contributing to and effectively serving their surrounding community. At the same time, employers/youth efforts are not always supported by any formalized, proactive policies, and both employers' and youth's understandings of the barriers being faced are somewhat limited. Further support in this area would likely produce additional positive effects.

This research shed light on youth's orientations to work, as well as employers' understanding in dealing with these orientations. While occupational-orientations created energetic success, youth's orientations revolving around paid work obtainment more generally occasionally could be a source of difficulty, though in cases of success, this challenge was being well handled. Moreover, as we saw in several instances these orientations regularly shifted and developed over time into cases of successful employment, whether this was a matter of emerging occupational-orientation, or a case of work fuelling a more general interest in other careers (and often a return to school). Despite the view held by a majority of employers that organized training and orientations were central to positive developments of this kind, the commentary

provided by the youth themselves would appear to be slightly more persuasive in making the case that, in fact, the work environment more generally inclusive of management/supervisory style and, in particular, the informal learning culture, were likely more predictive of positive outcomes.

In relation to the existing research literature several points stand out. Overall, the analysis suggests a more complex relationship between the existence (or not) of any type of formal organizational policy related to supporting youth in their initial employment experience. The research also suggests that in terms of success in establishing effective work experiences and career pathways, formal policy, as understood by employers and young employees, may be a less strong predictor of success than many (particularly European) research predicts. In other ways, the findings of this research confirm what prior research has reported. For example, finding and maintaining employment amongst marginalized youth is a challenge that is rarely effectively dealt with individually. In our research, without the mutual efforts of the employers and the youth there would likely be little ‘success to follow’. The literature is equally clear that employers tend to fixate on ‘work ethic’, and it likewise has identified different orientations to work by youth on which success seems to hinge. Exactly how success is accomplished and even more so, the role of learning environments in the workplace is less well understood in the existing research literature, and hence the findings of projects such as this one likely have particular relevance

The most relevant general recommendations emerging from this research begin with the need for greater recognition and understanding of the topics listed immediately below amongst both marginalized youth and employers. In the case of youth employment services, it is likely that such resources would simplify their job by supporting a greater understanding amongst both youth and employers of matters with which youth employment workers are undoubtedly already familiar. These key topic areas are as follows:

- Different forms/sources of learning
- Work orientations



- Supervisory styles
- Barriers
- Formalized, proactive recruitment and orientation policy

It is recommended that these key topics areas can form the bases of developing resources ranging from pamphlets, newsletters, personal testimony, speaker series, videos, interactive websites and beyond. Such resources are likely most effective when targeted to specific audiences which we recommend to include, beyond employers, youth employees and youth employment services, organized labour, as well as provincial, regional, municipal/city economic development agencies.

These general recommendations, in turn, give rise to three specific recommendations based on a variety of specific research findings. These are as follows:

1. The FTS research has documented a relative lack of awareness of the multiple barriers and the interactive nature of the barriers facing marginalized youth (amongst both employers and youth). In this sense, it seems likely that the full range of barriers identified in the substantial body of prior research go unaddressed. In the context of the FTS research method, in many ways the barriers to employment of marginalized youth were expressed by either the relative or complete absence of youth facing certain barriers. No employer registered a significant concern over employing youth in work that was not typical of their gender for example. In only one case each was disability or immigrant status or first language issues mentioned. It may be the case that a limited awareness of barriers and, in turn, strategies concerning how best to respond to them has resulted in a reliance on enormous personal energies of individual employers, managers and supervisors to generate success, frequently through personal mentoring, in what often is seen to be an ad hoc manner. ***In this context, the first recommendation of the FTS project is for wide dissemination of these findings to create greater awareness of the current limits and future possibilities of addressing the full range of barriers facing youth as well as the attempts that have succeeded thus far in creating conditions of success in initial employment experiences.***

2. Beyond the practices discussed amongst large organizations in this research, the FTS research documented the relative lack of explicit or formal policies for recruitment, orientation, retention, and, in particular, ongoing development/learning of youth employees who face different forms of barriers. These activities take place but more often than not in a relatively ad hoc way. Specifically, for small and medium sized organizations, the use of youth employment services is often based on ad hoc personal relationships rather than through the use of explicitly planned organizational goals or policy. Such policies would likely entail the listing of available governmental and non-governmental support agencies contacts and other resources (e.g. guides) – all of which are widely available, yet in our research were seldom gathered together in small to medium sized organizations. Such policies would include statements of human resource goals with a focus on tapping previously untapped youth labour markets in the local area, and such policies would include the listing of strategies, contacts and resources for effectively recruiting marginalized youth who, according to prior research, may not have the benefit of word-of-mouth networks. Though the FTS research focused on workplace learning experiences and barriers primarily, what is clear from the literature is that ad hoc approaches, dependency on idiosyncratic relationships and word-of-mouth recruitment tend to reproduce existing workforces rather than alter them in some way thus affecting the opportunities available for marginalized youth. Related to these matters, when asked about the most important barriers to employment success for marginalized youth explicitly, employer responses tended to cluster around individualized notions of youth work ethic, ranking as much less important other factors that shape success that would in principle be more open to policy intervention. A dominant solution offered by employers was that youth had to do a better job at ‘fitting in’ the existing workplace. As noted in the analysis, this solution tends to put the onus on the youth rather than viewing employment success as shared responsibility, again deflecting attention away from organizational responses. ***Thus, the second recommendation of the FTS research project is for the development of additional materials to support more explicit organizational planning and where relevant formal policy with particular attention to supporting the recruitment, orientation and development of marginalized youth in relation to small***

***and medium sized organizations. In this regard, additional training support for youth employment services personnel on how best to support small and medium sized employers in these terms would also be valuable.***

3. A substantial portion of the FTS report has documented the learning experiences of youth in the workplace. Findings suggested that there may be a mis-match between how employers and youth employees perceive different sources of (formal and informal) learning. While these perceptions of importance do not likely have a direct relationship with effectiveness of learning, it is just as likely that some relationship between them does exist. An employer or a youth employee that does not perceive a learning experience as important is unlikely to either display commitment to it or invest much energy into it thus decreasing effectiveness. Moreover, in the cases of youth with what the FTS research referred to as a strong ‘occupational orientation’ to work combined with employers who supported strong, informal learning environments, we saw remarkable investments of both commitment and energy for example. In general, documented that employers who most clearly expressed an understanding of how work orientations affect learning at work seemed to produce particularly success youth employment experiences. ***In light of such findings, the third recommendation of the FTS research is that educational materials be developed and disseminated to facilitate the creation of positive informal learning environments in the workplace to serve the mutual needs of employers and marginalized youth inclusive of how such environments function best in relation to distinctive youth work orientations.***

Each of these, understood in relation to the challenges facing marginalized youth in the broadest terms as specified in existing research, would likely make a powerful contribution to both reproducing and even going beyond the types of success stories we have tried to document here.

***Additional Resources Currently Available from the Following the Success Project***

- Sawchuk, Peter H. (2008). “Following the Success: Understanding Labour Market Experiences of Marginalized Youth in Ontario”, Proceedings of Work and Learning Network Conference, University of Alberta, Canada (October).
- Employer booklet entitled “Building Success in Youth Employment: Notes and Recommendations from Research” (February 2009)
- Social Service Agency booklet entitled “Building Success in Youth Employment: Notes and Recommendations from Research” (February 2009)
- Union booklet entitled “Building Success in Youth Employment: Notes and Recommendations from Research” (February 2009)

## ENDNOTES

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1. This project would not have been possible with the assistance of Susan Kachmar and Arlo Kempf who carried out the interviews and contributed insights into the data analysis. In addition, co-leadership of the project and expert guidance were provided by Karen Charnow Lior (Toronto Training Board), James Radner (Boreal Institute for Civil Society), Matt Wood (Ontario Association for Youth Employment Centres).
2. See Appendix A (selection criteria of youth employment situations/barriers), B (employer profile sheet used in the research), C (the description of the study and consent form used in the research), D (interview schedule for employers) and E (interview schedule for employed youth).
3. For the remaining portion of the paper, when drawing on excerpts from our interviews “S” refers to the interview subject (whether employer or youth) and “I” refers to the interviewer.
4. See Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003) as well as Sawchuk (2008) for further discussion of the definition and measurement difficulties regarding informal learning.

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## **APPENDICES**

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**APPENDIX A**

**CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA**

**FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS: FOLLOWING WORKPLACE LEARNING PRACTICES FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

**Employer Identification Information:**

Employers selected for inclusion in this research project have:	Meets the criteria
<p>Hired at risk-youth who meet two of the following criteria (please check the following that apply):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> high school non-completion;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> person with a disability;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal origin;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> visible or ethnic minority;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> health, drug and/or alcohol-related problems;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> residing in a rural or remote location;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> single parent;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> low levels of literacy and numeracy;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> language barriers;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> street involvement;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> contact with justice, child welfare or social assistance systems;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> lack of social supports (family, friends or community supports);</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> poor self-and/or behaviour-management abilities</li> </ul>	
Retained the at-risk youth more than 1 (one) year	

Hired the identified "at-risk" youth into a permanent job that reflects their principal activity to earn an income or career choice (six months continuous employment prior to work shortage)	
Maintain the perspective and confidence that they are "doing a good job" in supporting the employment success of the at-risk youth	
Offer second year plus apprenticeship opportunities (if appropriate)	

APPENDIX B



FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS: CASE STUDY

Employer Profile Information

Name of Company:	
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Contact Information	

No. of Employees	
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Type of Business	
Business Type	
Contact Name and Position	

Date of Interview:	

Employees' name (for interview purposes) Position and Department	


**Brief description of company:**

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Profit/Nonprofit		Union/Non-union	

<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
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## APPENDIX C

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### Interview Consent Form

**Title of the study:** Following the Success: Promising Workplace Learning Practices in Marginalized Youth Employment

**Researcher:** Dr. Peter H. Sawchuk  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
of the University of Toronto  
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M4K 1J1, Canada  
email: [psawchuk@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:psawchuk@oise.utoronto.ca)  
tel: 01-416-416-978-0570  
fax: 01-416-926-4751

You are invited to participate in the aforementioned research study conducted by Peter Sawchuk

The purpose of this study is to identify, analyze, and share promising practices that effectively engage youth facing multiple forms of social and economic exclusion in relation to first-time employment. The project focuses on the formal and informal workplace learning that take place across processes of employee recruitment, orientation, and ongoing support within organizations.

**Participation:** Your participation in this study will consist of a 30-40 minute interview during which you will be asked questions about your recent experiences with learning, and employment processes. The interview will be recorded (audio only) and will be scheduled at your convenience, and will take place at the University of Toronto, or at a location of your choosing. You can choose at any time to have the researcher turn off the audio recorder. The transcript of the interview will be sent to you if you so choose. You understand that you may contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office if you have questions about your rights as a participant at email: [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or tel: 01-416-946-3273.



**Risks:** Your participation in this study will involve volunteering information about your work, your workplace learning and processes of job acquisition. If this causes you to feel uncomfortable, you may communicate with the researcher, and/or refuse to answer any questions. You have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize this risk, such as allowing you time to gather your thoughts.

**Benefits:** By participating in this study you will have the opportunity to consider and reflect upon your learning and work practices, and will be contributing to the advancement of knowledge about youth employment in conditions of social and economic exclusion. You will also be entitled to read a copy of the interview, as the principal investigator will send you one if you so choose.

**Compensation:** You will not be compensated for your time.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

The information you share will remain strictly confidential. You understand that the contents will be used only for this study, and your confidentiality will be protected by not revealing your name in any step of the study or resulting publication. The results will be presented in aggregated terms, and pseudonyms will be used when referring to specific statements from participants.

**Dissemination of Results:**

You understand that the data collected will be part of the “Following the Success: Promising Workplace Learning Practices in Marginalized Youth Employment project” and that dissemination of results in various forms of publication is to be expected.

**Conservation of data:**

The data collected (recordings of interviews, transcripts, notes, etc.) will be kept in a locked office at the University of Toronto, and will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

**Voluntary Participation:**

You are under no obligation to participate. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions and can say “stop” at anytime and the researcher will stop recording immediately. If you choose to withdraw, any data incomplete at the time of withdrawal will not be considered in the research.

**Acceptance:** I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research study for the “Following the Success: Promising Workplace Learning Practices in Marginalized Youth Employment project.”

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher at the numbers and/or e-mail address mentioned above.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is yours to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date

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## APPENDIX D

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### ***'Following the Success' Project***

#### ***Employer Interview Schedule***

#### **Interviewer Instructions**

1. **obtained signed letter of consent carefully reviewing the conditions of consent as listed on this letter**
2. **tape record all interviews**
3. **announce clearly on tape which question and sub-question is being addressed**
4. **tick boxes where indicated**
5. **Obtain an explanatory comment on questions where applicable**
6. **Do your best to avoid asking questions from Section 2 when the information has already been provided by the respondent in Section 1.**

#### **1. Your Organization's Success Story**

Before asking you about some specific issues, I would like to ask you to begin by simply telling us the success story of your organization in terms an initiative or program to employ young people who have faced some form of barrier to obtaining their first job. **[Provide interviewee with chance to fully tell the story and describe how they achieved success.]**

- i. What was the purpose of the program from the point of view of your organization? How would you define success for the program? (Prompts: Low turnover, good productivity, promotion?)
- ii. What 'barriers' or challenges did the program seek to address?
- iii. How did you go about finding and/or recruiting young people?
- iv. How did the organization provide workplace learning for the young people (organized training; informal learning)?
- v. What skills were crucial to learn, including general employability skills and job-specific skills?

- vi. What have been the results?
  - (a) For your organization – has the program met your goals?
  - (b) For the young people – has it met their goals?Explain.  
[If not already volunteers, PROMPT TO FIND OUT OVER HOW MANY YEARS PROGRAM HAS BEEN RUNNING, HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN PROGRAM OVERALL, HOW LONG EACH PERSON STAYS IN PROGRAM (ON AVERAGE, AND WITH WHAT RANGE).
- vii. What was distinctive about the program that led to success?
- viii. Any other lessons from the program regarding what works and what doesn't, how to successfully engage and train youth facing barriers?

## **2. Some More General Questions About your Organization and Youth Employment**

Now I would like to ask you some more general questions about your organization and youth employment.

- a. What would you say is the single most important factor for new, young hires (especially those facing social or economic barriers) to achieve success in your organization?
- b. What is the most important learning that young people facing barriers must achieve in the first six months of entry-level employment, in order for them to succeed in your organization?
- c. What makes that learning possible? What are the keys to success in designing a workplace learning program for young people?
- d. Beyond the success story you already described, what programs do you have in place to train entry-level employees, including formal and informal workplace learning? How well do these work in for young people facing “barriers”?
- e. Please rank the importance of the following types of learning (1 indicating the most important) for your successful retention of youth facing barriers.

- organized orientation and/or training provided by the organization
- informal learning from supervisors/managers
- informal learning from co-workers
- informal learning from other young/new workers
- training and support from agencies or organizations external to the workplace
- other \_\_\_\_\_.

- f. Indicate what keys to success that employers can apply for the top two rated forms of learning above.
- g. How would you describe the priorities and point of view of young employees facing “barriers”? How does their viewpoint affect their prospects?
- h. What organizational policies or arrangements are available in your company or firm for workers to ensure they have positive experiences and access to or career development opportunities?
- i. Do young people facing barriers respond well to these arrangements? Why or why not?
- j. Does your organization have plans for increasing or decreasing employment for young workers at entry level? What has to work (in terms of turnover, productivity or whatever measure you use) for you to expand employment of young people facing barriers?
- k. How often do young entry-level employees obtain permanent employment in your organization?
  - i. Is there a ‘probationary period’?

- ii. Is there a high turnover of young/new employees? Is turnover noticeably different among those facing barriers? Comments?
  - iii. Is there a collective agreement that shapes the hiring of young/new employees in some way?
- I. Does your organization or some other representative organization (e.g. employer association) have any direct link to the education/training system? If so, can you describe them briefly? How are these links helpful to your organization?
- m. Do additional agencies or other organizations or programs (e.g. a government program, an employment agency, a school-based internship or cooperative program, a labour union, etc.) supplement your recruitment, hiring or training process?
- n. Is diversity something that you strive to achieve in your business? Why?
- o. How does hiring youth help ensure diversity in some way?

### **3. General Perspectives on Barriers for Youth**

- a. Do you think there are some specific challenges that young workers from marginalized neighbourhoods face in succeeding on their first job? [tick all that apply; each time one applies, ask for comments on how workplace learning can help?]
- i.  Educational background of youth? Comments?
  - ii.  Lack of on-the job support and programs for entry level youth? Comments?
  - iii. Employability skills – general knowledge of workplace requirements? Comments?
  - iv.  Organizational culture of the organization? Comments?
  - v.  Lack of job-specific experience of youth? Comments?

- vi. \_\_\_ Work ethic of youth? Comments?
- vii. \_\_\_ Cultural and/or language differences between youth and organization? Comments?
- viii. \_\_\_ Gender differences?
- ix. \_\_\_ Barriers due to available resources of youth? Comments?
- x. \_\_\_ Lack of job-relevant social networks among youth? Comments?
- xi. \_\_\_ Lack of family support for youth? Comments?
- xii. \_\_\_ Lack of relevant role models for youth? Comments?
- xiii. \_\_\_ Lack of sufficient interest in the job/sector? Comments?
- xiv. \_\_\_ Lack of awareness of a range of potential career pathways in the sector? Comments?
- xv. Others?

***Thank you for your time and insights.***

***A report on the research will be mailed to you if you wish.***

***(if yes, obtain address for mailing purposes)***

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## APPENDIX E

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### ***'Following the Success' Project***

#### ***Youth Interview Schedule***

#### **Interviewer Instructions**

- 7. obtained signed letter of consent carefully reviewing the conditions of consent as listed on this letter**
- 8. tape record all interviews**
- 9. announce clearly on tape which question and sub-question is being addressed (e.g. 2c, 4e, and so on)**
- 10. tick boxes where indicated**

#### **4. Your Success Story**

Before asking you about some specific issues, I would like to ask you to begin by simply telling us your success story in terms of your job.

- i. What were you looking for in this job? What are your goals in your working life?
- ii. How did you come to have this job?
- iii. What barriers did you feel had to be overcome in obtaining and keeping this job?
- iv. Was there a training or learning program during the first six months on the job? If so, please describe, and tell us whether you thought it was a good program, and why?
- v. Overall, what have you learned on this job, and how has that been important to success?
- vi. How successful has your work experience been from your point of view? Why?
- vii. How long have you been on the job? Have you had any promotions or raises? Are you hoping to work here for a long time? What would you like to have happen at work over the next year?



- viii. Was there anything the employer did that helped make this successful for you? Anything they could have done better?
- ix. Has it been clear to you what the employer is looking for from you? Has that worked out?

## **5. Experiences Working in Your Organization**

- a. What were the barriers such as personal circumstance, family, school, employer-based, etc. that you had to overcome to succeed on your job?
- b. Do you know of any organizational policies, programs and/or practices in your workplace that help young workers succeed on their first job? If so, are they effective?
- c. What about the workplace is good from your point of view? What is a problem?
- d. Do you have any short-term or long term career plans?
- e. Are there any organizational policies or arrangements available to you to support your career development?
- f. How diverse is the workforce in your organization?
- g. In your view, how diverse have the new/young hires in your organization been over the last while?
- h. Do you feel that diversity and/or different life experiences that you might bring to your organization helpful?

- i. Do you feel that diversity and/or different life experience that you might bring to your organization hinder your development in your job and/or your career advancement?
- j. Does your organization have any policies, programs or practices to actively encourage your career development (e.g. orientation, evaluation, mentoring, additional training, etc.)? If so, could you describe these?
- k. Do you consider your pay satisfactory? Comments?
- l. Do you consider your job to be satisfying overall? Comments?
- m. Sometimes young/new workers learn a great deal from their supervisors or managers informally (in the course of doing your work). Have you had any of these types of learning experience? If so, can you describe them?
- n. Sometimes young/new workers learn a great deal from other more experienced employees who are not their supervisor/manager. Have you had any of these types of learning experiences? If so, can you describe them?
- o. Sometimes young/new workers learn a great deal from other young/new employees like themselves. Have you had any of these types of learning experiences? If so, can you describe them?
- p. Please rank the importance of the following types of learning (1 indicating the most important) for your overall learning and career development. (after ranking, please explain each ranking) Might want to recall the examples above.

\_\_\_ organized orientation and/or training provided by the  
organization

\_\_\_ informal learning from supervisors/managers

\_\_\_ informal learning from co-workers

- \_\_\_ informal learning from other young/new workers
- \_\_\_ training and support from agencies or organizations external to the workplace
- \_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_.

## **6. Personal Background Questions**

- a. What is your current age?
- b. Were you Canadian-born? (If not where were you born and what year did your family emigrate?)
- c. Are you a male or female?
- d. Do have any form of disability?
- e. In your view, did you experience any periods of low-income in your family household growing up?
- f. Do either of your parents hold a university degree?
- g. Do you currently live with your parents?
- h. What is your current education/training background? (list all education completed or partially completed including graduation/discontinuation year)
- i. During your education/training, did the institution you attend have any linkages to employers or sectors?

- j. Have ever held a part-time (under 20hrs/week) and/or full-time job prior to this one? Did any of this employment take place while you were enrolled in an education or training program of any kind?
  
- k. Do you feel this employment helped or hindered or did not affect your current employment success?
  
- l. Have you ever experienced a 'gap' in your studies?
  - i. During this/these gaps were you employed?
  - ii. Do you feel this 'gap' helped or hindered or did not affect your employment success?

***Thank you for your time and insights.***

***A report on the research will be mailed to you if you wish.***

***(if yes, obtain address for mailing purposes)***

## APPENDIX F

## Interviewee Profiles

Legend: Interviewee codes beginning with an 'E' indicates employer; those beginning with a 'Y' indicates youth employee.

Interviewee Code	Description
EAK1	Owner/manager of a large <b>car dealership</b> with customer service and auto service. (large)
EAK2	Owner/manager of <b>auto repair</b> shop. (medium)
EAK3	Director of a <b>childcare centre</b> . (medium)
EAK4	Manager <b>small manufacturing firm</b> . (small)
EAK5	Owner/manager of <b>small auto repair</b> shop. (small)
EAK6	Manager <b>large garden centre</b> . (large)
EAK7	Co-owner of <b>small plumbing services</b> business. (small)
EAK8	Owner/manager of <b>small manufacturing</b> business. (small)
ESK1	Owner/manager of a <b>large sub-urban car dealership</b> franchise which includes customer service and auto service. (large)
ESK2	Manager of a <b>large property demolition</b> company. (large)
ESK3	Manager of <b>medium sized manufacturing</b> company. (medium)
ESK4	Manager of a <b>non-profit day care centre</b> . (medium)
ESK5	Owner/manager of a <b>commercial and residential cleaning and property maintenance</b> company. (large)

ESK6	Owner/manager of a large <b>commercial construction and design</b> company specializing in electrical work. (large)
ESK7	Human Resource manager for a <b>large recreational resort</b> . (large)
ESK8	Owner/manager of a <b>small beauty salon</b> . (small)
YAK1	<b>Garage technician</b> ; currently undertaking auto mechanics apprenticeship; 20 years old; male; immigrant; significant periods of low income growing up; parents do not have post-secondary education; recently returned to high school to graduate; worked a great deal during his teens.
YAK2	<b>Garage technician</b> ; currently undertaking auto mechanics apprenticeship; 20 years old; male; Canadian-born; immigrant; significant periods of low income growing up; mother has post-secondary education; experienced a gap in his school/work record; worked a great deal during his teens.
YAK3	<b>Child care worker</b> ; female; 25 years old; completed secondary school; Canadian-born; significant periods of low income growing up; sick parent to take care of; neither parents with post-secondary education; worked extensively while growing up; experience gap in secondary schooling due to pregnancy.
YAK4	<b>Child care worker</b> ; 20 years old; female; Canadian-born; one parent with post-secondary education; lives with parents; completed secondary school; worked some part-time during secondary school; also a gap in secondary schooling during which they worked part-time.
YAK5	<b>Garage technician</b> ; male; 19 years old; immigrant; completed secondary school; just beginning auto mechanics apprenticeship; no period of low-income; neither parent has a post-secondary education; currently lives with parents; worked extensively during secondary school.

YAK6	<b>Engineering assistant</b> ; 23 years old; male; immigrant; experienced low-income in household growing up; both parents have post-secondary education; currently lives with parents; completed university; did not work during secondary school; experienced a gap in schooling/employment between secondary and university schooling.
YAK7	<b>Garden centre worker</b> ; 23 years old; Canadian-born; female; periods of low-income in household growing up; neither parent have post-secondary education; did not complete secondary education; worked a great deal during secondary schooling; experienced significant gaps in studies in order to work; pregnant during secondary education.
YAK8	<b>Bookkeeping/Administration worker</b> ; 22 years old; completed secondary schooling; dropped out of university and started college part-time; female; Canadian-born; neither parents have post-secondary education; experienced low-income growing up; currently lives with mother.
YAK9	<b>Child care worker</b> ; 19 years old; female; Canadian-born; completed secondary school; dropped out of college; neither parents with post-secondary education; experienced low income growing up.
YAK10	<b>Manufacturing worker</b> ; 22 years old; male; immigrant; completed secondary education; one parent with post-secondary education; experience low-income growing up; worked a great deal during secondary education.
YAK11	<b>Heating services worker</b> ; 20 years old; male; Canadian-born; did not complete secondary education; neither parents have post-secondary education; worked a great deal during secondary education.
YAK12	<b>Manufacturing worker</b> ; 23 years old; female; completed secondary education; immigrant; one parent with post-secondary education; lives with parent.
YAK13	<b>Office administration</b> ; 20 years old; female; Canadian-born; completed secondary education; periods of low-income growing up.

YAK14	<b>Manufacturing worker</b> , 19 years old; male; Immigrant; completed secondary education.
YESK1	<b>Youth entrepreneur</b> , 24 years old; female; Canadian-born; significant periods of low-income while growing up; left home at 14 years old; mother returned to school later in life to complete post-secondary education; did not complete high school.
YESK2	<b>Youth entrepreneur</b> ; 20s; female; Canadian-born; did not complete secondary school.
YSK2	<b>Garage technician</b> ; currently undertaking auto mechanics apprenticeship; 21 years old; male; Canadian-born; significant periods of low income growing up; completed secondary school; parents do not have post-secondary; worked a great deal while in high school; significant gaps in education program during high school.
YSK3	<b>Manufacturing assembler</b> , recently promoted to supervisor; 26 years old; male; Canadian-born; diagnosed with mental disability; graduated high school; parents did not complete high school; never held p/t jobs during school)
YSK4	<b>Commercial cleaning staff</b> ; 21 years old; female; did not complete high school; Canadian-born; significant periods of low income growing up; neither parents with post-secondary; worked p/t during school)
YSK5	<b>Hairdresser in a salon</b> ; 18 years old; female; Canadian-born; completed secondary school; neither parents have post-secondary education; held a series of p/t jobs during school.
YSK6	<b>Ski resort worker</b> , 19 years old; male; Canadian-born; both parents have post-secondary education; currently in university; never worked during school.
YSK7	<b>Construction worker/electrician apprentice</b> ; male; 18 years old; Immigrant; completed high school; neither parents have post-secondary education; worked part-time during high school.
YSK8	<b>Building demolition worker</b> , 21 years old; male; Canadian-born; completed secondary education; periods



	of low-income growing up.
YSK9	<b>Construction worker</b> ; 20 years old; male; Canadian-born; completed secondary education; neither parents have post-secondary education; worked a great deal during secondary school.