COMMUNITIES BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES

NATIONAL GATHERING
2021
MAY 6 - 7

Building the Bridge to Youth Success: Overcoming the Digital Divide:

Moderator

- Chris Duff, Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity

Panelists

- Andrew Reddin, NPower Canada

- Marsha Josephs, Pathways to Education

- Sarah Vickery, Opportunity For All Youth

- Véronique Church-Duplessis, Mentor Canada

- Nicole Matheis, CBYF Prince Albert & Nathalie Blanchet, Tamarack Institute

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

Introduction
Chris Duff, Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity

- 8 youth-focused organizations came together to collaborate and explore opportunities for collective innovation and knowledge sharing

- First focus area was on the heightened challenges of the digital divide for youth as an impact of COVID-19

- Through a series of essays, the collaborative is exploring solutions to bridge the digital divide as well as raising awareness of this important issue

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npower canada **Launching Underserved Young Adults into Tech Careers**

NPower Canada is a charitable organization that launches low-income youth into tech careers by providing no-cost technical and professional skills training, industry certification, job placement and post-hire supports.

NPower Canada convened a focus group of its program graduates to gain their insights on:

➢ Barriers faced by young adults from lower-income, diverse backgrounds to pursuing IT careers
➢ Systemic changes required to remove these barriers

Youth cited the following **challenges** to gaining IT skills and pursuing digital careers:
➢ Financial barriers: expensive computer hardware, data connectivity and software subscriptions; prohibitive cost of pursuing post-secondary education
➢ Lack of diversity in IT: participants have not seem themselves reflected in the technology sector
➢ Lack of IT/STEM awareness in schools: youth were not encouraged by their guidance counsellors to enroll in computer science courses nor were they informed of the diversity of IT career pathways available

Recommendations from youth:
➢ Partner with industry to make access to technology more affordable
➢ Reduce financial barriers to pursuing computer science education
➢ Partner with industry and educational institutions to train, hire and promote a more diverse and inclusive tech workforce, including mentorship for youth new to the IT field
➢ Introduce IT/STEM awareness and IT career exploration throughout primary and secondary school

Bridging the Digital Divide Through Skills and Competenices

- Providing access to devices and connectivity is only part of the solution.

- Youth in low-income communities struggle to meaningfully participate in remote learning and access resources online.

- 86 percent of Canadian employers are increasingly demanding employees have "soft skills".

- 68 percent of youth aged 15 to 17 who live in low-income households were among the most pessimistic about their future.

- Pathways to Education is helping youth remain engaged in their education by helping youth develop competenices needed to reach their full potential.
    - For example, Growth mindset, Self-regulation, Efficacy, Agency

- Young people living in low-income communities need access to resources and guidance to use technology to develop competencies, expand their social capital, and become lifelong learners.

Bridging the behavioural digital divide in the youth employment system starts with youth-led solutions.

- In the face of a **new digital revolution**, how might we reach and engage with youth most distant from employment in a digital landscape?

- The gap between how youth-serving organizations deliver digital programming and how youth engage with digital experiences—this is what we call a **behavioural digital divide**.

- **Positioning youth as User Experience (UX) experts -** Youth are uniquely positioned to support building back a better youth employment system in the digital space

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL YOUTH

OPPORTUNITÉS POUR TOUS LES JEUNES

Mentoring & the Digital Divide

- Young adults who were mentored during their childhood or adolescence report positive outcomes in the areas of mental health, education, career, and social capital.
  - Mentoring gap: 54% of young adults can recall a time when they did not have access to a mentor but wished they had one when they were growing up

- Large proportion of young people who participate in mentoring programs live in poverty, have mental health needs, and/or are academically at-risk.

- Virtual mentoring/E-mentoring is a promising approach for young people facing barriers such as
  - Chronic health issues / disability
  - Social anxiety
  - Geographical isolation
  - Unique interests not easily found in natural/local networks

- E-mentoring programs also has potential of increasing the number of adults who volunteer to mentor young people:
  - 2/3 of adults who would consider mentoring in the next 5 years said they would be more likely to do so if they could conduct at least part of their mentoring relationship virtually

MENTOR CANADA

Prince Albert Bridges the Digital Divide with Local Youth

- Case study shows how through our youth engagement approach, access to technology was provided for a youth through an unlikely venue

- Youth Engagement: Unrelenting outreach
    - Why we developed this intentional approach to engaging youth

- Learning how to offer responsive programming:
    - building relationships
    - youth-led program development

- Community Innovation Fund – the design and implementation helped us respond to youth requests

- Impact of Digital Divide on Education: Communities Building Youth Futures' response

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THANK YOU