



CASE STUDY | YELLOWKNIFE YOUTH REACH FOR THEIR DREAMS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND MENTORSHIP

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YELLOWKNIFE STORY

Setting the stage

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, elementary, middle, and high schools in Yellowknife switched to online learning to end the 2019-2020 school year. Since then, they have resumed in-person attendance for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, public spaces such as the public library were either closed or became difficult to access due to space restrictions. Youth in Yellowknife had limited educational support options, and the need for additional employment support for them was heightened.

For educational support during the pandemic, students were left to utilize online resources such as YouTube, Khan Academy, and other schooling websites. During the current school year, 2020-2021, students at St. Patrick High School are offered tutorials everyday during the workweek while students at Sir John Franklin High School are not provided any kind of extra help. According to a few students from Sir John Franklin, students cannot return to the building after their final class is over and are not allowed to enter the school before a specific time, making it difficult for them to ask teachers for extra help.

As for employment support, in-person services such as resume help, job searching, and interview prep, which a few organizations offered, became difficult to access during the pandemic. Due to COVID-19 related restrictions, limited in-person building capacities, or the closure of a space or program entirely highlighted the need for more accessible youth-focused employment support services.

Yellowknife Context

Yellowknife has a population of about 20,000 individuals and is home to about 2,600 young people ages 15 to 24 (StatsNWT, 2019). Yellowknife youth are diverse with many who are considered privileged (youth with basic needs met, access to technology or their own, access to the internet, and access to resources such as tutors and extra materials to help them advance their education) and others who are considered underprivileged (youth who don't have their basic needs met, have no access to technology, no access to internet and resources such as tutors and extra materials to help advance their education). The differences in race, cultural backgrounds, and privilege between youth is critical to note because every youth will experience their barriers differently. Youth in Yellowknife are full of potential with a range of skills and interests ranging from academics, entrepreneurship, athletics, trades, arts, and

culture. Yet, many youths face multiple challenges and barriers which impact their ability to lead full and satisfying lives.

In a 2018 point in time, homelessness count (City of Yellowknife, 2018) youth were highly represented, with 42% of those experiencing homelessness being youth (15 to 24 years old), and 104 of those were under 18 years of age. Additionally, in the Northwest Territories, just under 50% of youth aged 15 to 24 rated their mental health as being excellent or very good (GNWT-HSS, 2019). In terms of education and employment, Yellowknife has a high school graduation rate of about 72% (as of 2018) and a youth (ages 15-24) employment rate of 49% (as of 2019) (GNWT-ECE, 2018; StatsNWT, 2019). These education and employment numbers are lower in comparison to national averages, where Canada's on-time high-school graduation rate (as of 2016) is around 79%, and Canada's youth (ages 15-24) employment rate is about 55% (as of March 2021) (Statistics Canada, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2021).

Despite these challenges and barriers, Yellowknife does offer youth-focused support and services through multiple youth-serving organizations such as Sidedoor, Route51, the Rainbow Coalition, YWCA, Foster Family Coalition (FFC), and other agencies. Additionally, Yellowknife is home to individuals with a wealth of experience and knowledge who are privileged enough to support youth through volunteer work.

CBYF Yellowknife

Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) Yellowknife was also developing during the development stages of YK Prep Connect, which delayed launching the initiative. The CBYF Backbone team (which wasn't fully staffed until the end of August) was working on forming the CBYF Youth Council and planning for the Common Agenda workshops with Tamarack. Additionally, the team connected with other organizations such as the Rainbow Coalition, Foster Family Coalition (FFC), and Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce to assess how they could be involved in the CBYF project. These factors contributed to the delay in planning, finalizing application forms, and creating marketing materials for YK Prep Connect.

YK Prep Connect : The Design Phase

Prior to applying for the CBYF Community Innovation Fund (CIF), cold calls with local educators informed the project's early design. These calls included conversations with a high school principal, a few high school teachers, and a supervising teacher for an alternative high school learning program. Common themes regarding youth needs during the COVID-19 pandemic included access to the internet, access to computers, and additional support outside of school hours. One key informant suggested an internet cafe to support youth with access to the internet and computers outside of school hours to work on school assignments. They also suggested providing mobile internet sticks to support youth who didn't have access to the internet at home or did not have a home initially. This led to the conception of YK Prep Connect. On this platform, youth could access computers and the internet outside of school hours and access and connect with education and career preparation support through community volunteers, either in-person or virtually. This one-stop-shop type of service for youth would be the first of its kind in Yellowknife as there were no other services in the community that offered free tutoring and mentoring support through community volunteers or access to the internet and technology in one space. A high-level idea was submitted as a proposal for the CIF.

After being informed that our community had received the CIF, we held Leadership Table meetings to flesh out the idea even further. During a Leadership Table call to discuss the project, one member offered to provide a space for the project after hours (5pm to 8pm), which included free access to Wi-Fi, computers, and breakout rooms. Side Door's Resource Centre would also provide a space (2pm to 5pm) for the project. One member of the Leadership Table also ran a drop-in learning center at a high school which ran until 8 pm on some days. It was also determined that the project would start from two days per week (2 pm-8 pm) and then increase in frequency as needed.

As for mentorship and tutoring, it depended on the youth. It was decided that through this project, youth could get mentorship in any area of their interest, such as music, cooking, life skills, digital design, etc. Additionally, youth could get tutoring support in any school subject of interest. Youth would then be paired with a community volunteer based on the youth's interests.

Currently, we have a youth participant who is successfully paired with a mentor who assists him in navigating life after high school by discussing post-secondary or alternative options. This mentorship has taught him how to apply to post-secondary, write an effective cover letter and resume, and find potential jobs. Furthermore, the same youth participant is also matched with a mentor that allows him to explore music production and learn how to create music tracks.

Another Leadership Table member recommended presenting YK Prep Connect at one of her organization's youth advisory council meetings to get some youth feedback. The youth advisory council liked the idea of receiving mentorship and tutoring and the ability to access free Wi-Fi and computers outside of school. Additionally, the youth felt that providing laptops and mobile internet sticks would help a lot as some youth shared their personal experiences of not having access to either outside of school.

Leveraging Community Resources

The plan for this project was to leverage existing community assets, including willing volunteers who have a wealth of knowledge and experiences and spaces that offer free internet access and computers.

Prior to the project's launch, there were a few logistical concerns about the mobile internet sticks, like the distribution of internet sticks, how to ensure that the sticks are returned for other youth to use, and how to avoid overcharges. During a Leadership Table meeting, a point was brought up that if youth have access to the internet via in-kind spaces until 8pm, many youths aren't likely to do school work past 8pm anyways. This ultimately led to removing mobile internet sticks from the project. Instead, those funds were re-allocated to purchase more laptop bundles and provide allowances (\$50 gift cards for mentoring/tutoring supplies including drinks and food) for volunteers.

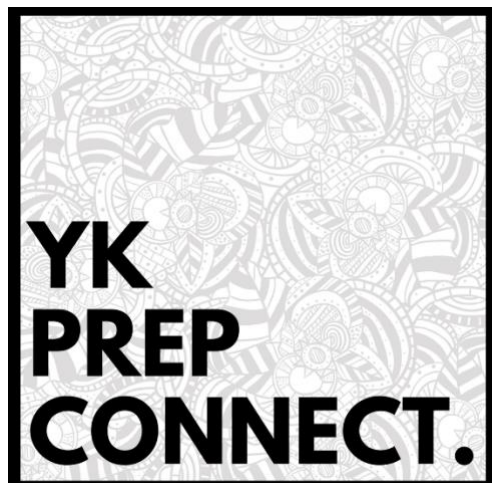


Figure 1. YK Prep Connect Logo

Recruiting Youth and Mentors

Despite receiving funding in June 2020, the project did not launch until the end of October 2020. Before the launch, the project needed to be advertised. Before the project could be advertised, logos and promotional materials were required to be made. Additionally, applications needed to be ready, and a volunteer orientation needed to be planned.

The design of the applications took longer than anticipated, but this was necessary to ensure participants knew what they were signing up for and the terms and conditions of the project. A lot of the content in the application forms was pulled from well-established tutoring and mentoring programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The logo of the project and its promotional materials (Figure 1.; Figure 2.) were designed and developed by a local youth volunteer who also did freelance work (<https://www.vincentretstudios.com/>). The drafting and reviewing process for the applications and advertisement materials took a few months as Leadership Table input was necessary before moving forward.

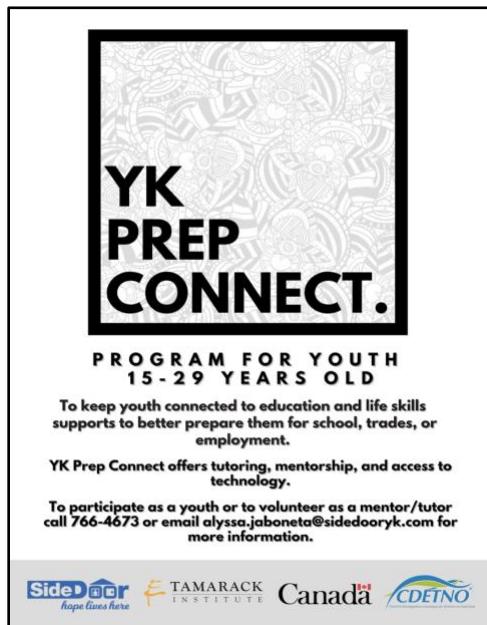


Figure 2. YK Prep Connect Logo

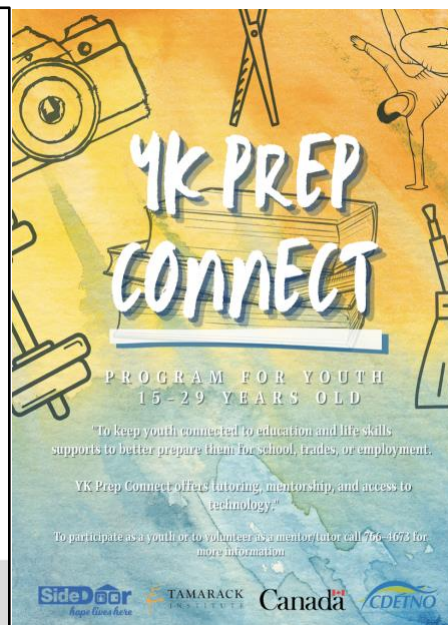


Figure 3. YK Prep Connect Posters

At the beginning of October 2020, physical and digital posters were developed and distributed throughout the community and through social media (Facebook and Instagram). Promotional videos ([Video 1](#), [Video 2](#), [Video 3](#)) were also released on social media. Physical copies of the application forms were distributed to youth-serving organizations and local high schools. Digital copies of the application forms were also provided online through social media.

After the project launched at the end of October, few youth or volunteers were applying. Youth who accessed Side Door's Resource Centre during YK Prep Connect hours did not sign-up for the program and were not interested when staff informed them about the project. However, youth application forms were being filled out by youth from one Leadership Table member's organization. Five youth from this organization signed up, and all five attended an information session to learn more about the project.

Unfortunately, we did not have any volunteers at the moment to pair with the youth. The result of not having volunteers led to fewer youth accessing the project.

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Form last updated: 2021-02-05

YK Prep Connect - Volunteer Application Form

Before you begin your journey as a volunteer, please review the following:

YK Prep Connect aims to keep youth **connected to education** and **life skills** preparation supports. This project will offer **tutoring** and **mentorship** support to youth **15-29** years of age. Additionally, this project will help youth get **access to technology**.

1. VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

MENTOR - Mentors will provide youth with positive role-modelling and aim to help them become more self-aware, learn new skills, build connections, and have a positive outlook on their future.

- **Location:** SideDoor's Resource Centre (4902 Franklin Ave); NWT Career Centre (5204-Franklin Ave). Mentors will meet with their mentees at these locations to provide one-on-one mentoring - other arrangements will need approval from the YK Prep Connect Team (See YK Prep Connect Rules and Guidelines attached at the end).
- **Requirements:** Resume and Criminal record check with vulnerable sector check. SideDoor will provide a letter for the RCMP office to waive the \$25 fee.
- **Screening & Orientation:** In-person interview and three references (any combination of professional and character) are required. Volunteers will receive an orientation package and will participate in an on-site orientation prior to their first shift.
- **Commitment:** Minimum of 4 hours a month until the end of June 2021.

TUTOR - Tutors will provide youth with positive role-modelling and academic support.

- **Location:** SideDoor's Resource Centre; NWT Career Centre. Tutors will be present at these locations as support for academic work.
- **Requirements:** Resume and Criminal record check with vulnerable sector check. SideDoor will provide a letter for the RCMP office to waive the \$25 fee.
- **Screening & Orientation:** In-person interview and three references (any combination of professional and character) are required. Volunteers will receive an orientation package and will do an on-site orientation prior to their first shift.
- **Commitment:** Minimum of 4 hours a month until the end of June 2021.

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1

Figure 4. Page 1 of a YK Prep Connect volunteer application form

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Form last updated: 2021-02-09

YK Prep Connect - Youth Application Form

Thank you for your interest in YK Prep Connect. Please read the following information before filling out the application.

YK Prep Connect aims to keep youth **connected to education and life skills** preparation **supports**. This project will offer **tutoring** and **mentorship** support to youth **15-29** years of age. Additionally, this project will help youth get access to technology.

Tutorship vs. Mentorship

- **Tutors** will provide youth with positive role-modelling and academic support. Volunteer tutors will be present during drop-ins at either SideDoor's Resource Centre (4902 Franklin Ave) or the NWT Career Centre (4902 Franklin Ave).
- **Mentors** will provide youth with positive role-modelling and aim to help them increase their self-awareness, learn new skills, build connections, and have a positive outlook on their future. Volunteer mentors will work with youth and schedule mentorship times at either SideDoor's Resource Centre or the NWT Career Centre - *other arrangements will need approval from the YK Prep Connect Team (See YK Prep Connect Rules and Guidelines attached at the end).*

Access to Technology

- In addition to providing youth with a space where they have access to computers and the internet, there will also be an opportunity for youth to receive a laptop that they can keep.

Hours of Operation:

- Tuesdays and Thursdays
 - 2:00pm to 5:00pm at SideDoor's Resource Centre (Youth ages 15-24)

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Figure 5. Page 1 of a YK Prep Connect youth application form

Gaining Momentum

The process for recruiting youth and volunteers was initially difficult. Despite word of mouth, social media, and community posters, the project was not receiving many applications from youth or mentors. This changed once youth started to receive laptops. Due to some financial constraints on the host organization's side, laptop bundles were not purchased for stock; instead, they were purchased on an as-needed basis.

Once laptop bundles were purchased, youth who indicated they needed a laptop were given laptop bundles with a laptop, a case, and an adapter. With their consent, a photo of the youth with their laptops along with a quote of the laptop's impact on their life was posted on social media (Figure 6.). This gained traction heading into January 2021. When these social media posts were shared on Facebook and Instagram, more and more people inquired about the project.

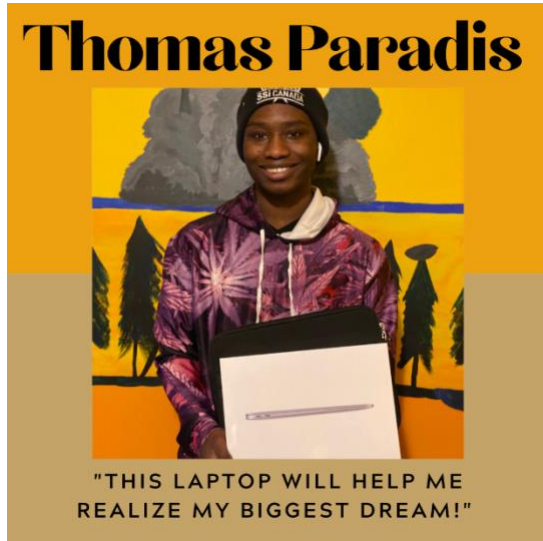


Figure 6. Example social media post of youth who received a laptop.

More volunteers started to receive their vulnerable sector checks and were paired with youth. As youth heard about the spaces available, some youth started to access the evening space as a homework space. As youth started to get paired with tutors and mentors, regular sessions were scheduled for these participants. To recruit more youth and volunteers, we created social media posts using photos of current volunteers and their areas of interest (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Example of social media post of volunteer.

Impact to date

- 15 youth have applied to date as of this month, April 2021.
 - 2 youth are connected to mentors who share the same area of interest and regularly meet.
 - 2 youth are connected with tutors who regularly help with homework.
 - 1 youth who regularly attends sessions with a mentor has gained help in applying for jobs and navigating life after high school.
 - 1 youth who received a laptop has used it to create a website for a business venture.
 - Receiving a laptop through the project has impacted 8 youth positively. Those youth have provided our team with quotes of how having a personal laptop will impact their lives. There is a plan to distribute at least 9 more laptops.
- Quotes from youth who received laptops:
 - "This laptop will help me realize my biggest dream."

- "It would help me work-wise to get a new job, and I plan on going to school in the next two years, so it would help with that too."
- "I have never owned a laptop before, so this is going to make a difference for me. It will especially make schooling so much easier."
- "I've never owned a laptop in my life, only a cell phone. It will be a game-changer. It will help me with schooling and following my dreams of becoming an entrepreneur. It will help me build what I want to build."
- "It would change my life. I would love it. It would help with my typing, to type faster, and to find a job that requires computer skills. It also helps with writing notes and accessing documents."
- "I've never owned a laptop before. It will help me find the perfect high school and help me finish high school."
- "I think it's really going to help me in school, complete assignments and have more access to my work. I think it's really going to change my schooling."
- "As a mother of 2 daycare aged children, having a laptop will make my goals of pursuing a social work or a nursing degree so much more attainable. As daycare expenses are most of my annual income, this is assisting me in a huge way to further my education. I am so grateful for this opportunity."
- 4 out of the 6 registered volunteers are youth.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

If a community is interested in building a youth mentorship or tutoring program, listed below are some lessons we have learned as well as some recommendations:

- Engage youth early. We recommend that you engage youth two months prior to the launch date in order for them to assist with either co-designing or to provide feedback on your project idea. This is important to ensure that any challenges or barriers relevant for youth are identified as well as what would work well for them.
- Make time for the planning and design phase. This phase took our team about 3-4 months because it takes time to create a service map, contacting youth-serving organizations, advertising, and preparing volunteers for the program. Advertising can be ongoing, but designing and finalizing materials like posters, videos, and social media posts takes about 2-4 weeks to complete. Additionally, paid promotion on social media posts will allow posts to reach more people and potentially increase inquiries about the project.
- Community collaboration is vital for acquiring in-kind resources like spaces and spreading the word.
- If you are going to provide technology that youth can keep, purchase them all at once to have plenty in stock.

- Giving out a limited number of laptops can be tricky. Be clear about who is eligible and how laptops are prioritized.
- Criminal record checks with vulnerable sector checks may take two weeks to return to volunteers, so be sure to add this into the work plan before the launch date.
- Consider transportation to and from the project space. Our project operates until 8 pm, and buses are no longer in operation at that time in Yellowknife. Our team is currently working on getting cab vouchers for youth.

Moving Forward

From now until June 30th, our team will continue developing and eventually finalizing an evaluation plan to assess the impacts, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement of YK Prep Connect. Once the plan has been developed, we will implement the evaluation activities such as surveys and one-on-one interviews with the youth participants, volunteers, and staff.

With funding ending after June 30th, 2021, our team will need to make the project more sustainable as future funding would mainly support staff who could coordinate youth and volunteers. Furthermore, this project doesn't necessarily need funding for volunteer allowances or honorariums. Despite the impact of providing youth with laptops, this project doesn't necessarily need to give out laptops either as it is not sustainable to implement without funding in Yellowknife or other communities. There exists other free tutoring and mentoring programs in the community that were not initially discovered during the initial scan of services last year. Perhaps if further funding is not provided, our team could partner with these organizations, who have an existing infrastructure, and support them with the transfer of our volunteer pool.

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter 'a'.The logo for Tamarack Institute, featuring a stylized yellow 'T' icon to the left of the text "TAMARACK INSTITUTE" in a serif font.

Initial funding for YK Prep Connect was provided as a Community Innovation Fund grant to [Yellowknife Community Building Youth Futures](#). The aim of [Community Innovation Fund](#) grants is to pilot and scale innovative projects to support better outcomes for youth.

[Communities Building Youth Futures](#) (CBYF) is a five-year, pan-Canadian project to develop Collective Impact, system-wide solutions for youth as they build and act upon plans for their future. CBYF is funded by the [Government of Canada's Goal Getters Program](#) and delivered by the [Tamarack Institute](#).

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada

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