

**OUR SHARED PURPOSE**

*In Chatham-Kent, local owner-operated businesses are the backbone of our economy and young adults are ready to be part of it. This project fixes the hiring system for SMBs to hire with less risk so young adult facing real barriers can get hired.*

**KEY DATA**

● Employer Surveys ● Young Adult Surveys ● Applicants

● **73%** of employers hire or have hired a young adult

● **48%** rely on referrals & word-of-mouth to hire

● **81%** of young adults feel ready for the workforce

● **39%** rarely find employers willing to hire without experience

● **71%** say networking is easier but they can't access it

● **100%** of 41 applicants named no callbacks as top frustration

**WHO WE'LL DO IT WITH**

- Small to Medium Size Employers
- Young adult (ages 18–29), including NEET
- Employment Ontario providers
- Chamber of Commerce and BIAs
- AI / Employment platform partners
- Schools & post-secondary institutions

**WHAT WE'LL DO — THE 5 LEVERS FOR CHANGE**

**1**

**Entering the Hiring Process**

*Transportation, Childcare, and the Hidden Costs of Getting to Work*

**WHY THIS LEVER**

35% of employers require transportation access as non-negotiable. 15% of applicants were parents with no childcare bridge. Structural gaps need structural solutions.

**SYSTEM SHIFT NEEDED**

*Shift from treating transportation and childcare as personal problems to addressing them as shared community infrastructure that requires coordinated solutions across employment, transit, and social service partners.*

**2**

**Showing Up in the Hiring Process**

*Workplace Expectations, Unwritten Rules, and the Confidence to Walk In*

**WHY THIS LEVER**

One of the main reasons new hires fail in SMB: attitude & reliability, not skill gaps. Young adults prepare for credentials, not workplace culture. Neither side knows what the other expects.

**SYSTEM SHIFT NEEDED**

*Shift from assuming young adults have the soft skills employers expect to actively closing that gap by practicing face-to-face communication, workplace norms, and professional behaviour in real settings alongside real employers.*

**3**

**Connecting in the Hiring Process**

*Networks, Referrals, and the Connections Young Adults Don't Have Yet*

**WHY THIS LEVER**

48% of employers hire via referrals. 71% of young adults know networking works but can't access it. Applicants who came through a trusted contact consistently showed up and engaged.

**SYSTEM SHIFT NEEDED**

*Shift from job boards as the primary pathway to investing in networks and structured relational bridges, such as warm referrals, trusted introductions, and navigators who vouch for young adults directly to employers.*

**4**

**Sharing the Burden During the Hiring Process**

*Experience, Evidence, and the Chance to Prove Yourself*

**WHY THIS LEVER**

39% of young adults rarely find employers willing to hire without experience. Applicants describe years of trying and resumes into silence. Employers want pre-screened candidates and job trials.

**SYSTEM SHIFT NEEDED**

*Shift from placing the full burden of proof on young adults when applying, to shared-risk mechanisms using trials, subsidies and placements that let young adult prove their value in real work settings.*

**5**

**Modernizing the Hiring Process**

*Algorithms, Access, and Making Technology Work for Young Adults*

**WHY THIS LEVER**

41% of CK businesses want AI. A centralized talent database was independently suggested by both young adults and employers. Applicants described needing a person alongside any system.

**SYSTEM SHIFT NEEDED**

*Shift from reactive to intentional use of AI and other employment platforms to reduce hiring risks for employers while increasing access for young adults.*

**HOW WE'LL KNOW**

↑ Foundational and essential soft skills as identified by employers

↓ Reliance of resume and interviews as the main method of hiring

↑ Employers offering job trials or paid placements to young adult

↑ CK employers using AI-enabled or platform-based hiring created with young adults

↓ Barriers identified by young adult respondents

✓ Young adult confidence in the hiring process

**THE MORE YOU KNOW**

● **17%** of employers are investing in AI to reduce the impact of staffing shortages

● **1 in 3** Employers identify entry level employees lack essential soft skills

● **38%** of young adults rank job trials as the most valuable support in their job search

● **54%** of young adults say they are frustrated with bloated application processes

*"I can't give up, because I need a job." — applicant, age 20*