


FORWARD TOGETHER

Investing in a Youth-Centered Recovery
for Newfoundland & Labrador





Choices for Youth is a non-profit charitable organization committed to building programs, systems, and opportunities that are focused on providing individualized support for young people, celebrating who they are, and working together to unlock their potential to build a brighter future.

We help youth and young families aged 16-29 secure stable housing and employment, while working towards family stability and better health. As an organization, Choices for Youth also invests time, energy, and resources to lend our experiences and expertise to important policy and systems change conversations.

We do this because we believe that everyone is better off when we design policies, services and systems to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details what we heard from youth, including the extent and significance of the challenges they are facing. The report also offers ideas and solutions that emerged from our dialogue as a resource to help individuals, agencies, governments, secondary and post-secondary institutions who are positioned to act on these findings. While the youth who we heard from had diverse experiences, five major themes emerged from this survey and consultation process:



Mental Health is a Top Concern and Accessing Support is a Challenge



Poverty is a Growing Concern



Youth are Experiencing Major Setbacks



Youth are Struggling to Access Education



Youth See Opportunities to Change Systems

In mid-March 2020, COVID-19 cases ramped up in Newfoundland and Labrador and the province braced itself for a shut-down. Within days we saw businesses close, people being laid off, and community agencies pivoting to meet the changing needs of more and more vulnerable people. Amidst an existing provincial economic downturn, it quickly became clear that the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would be unprecedented.

In the months that followed, we began to see the full effect of COVID-19 and the provincial public health emergency as it rapidly changed the face of work, education, commerce, home life and healthcare in our province. While many of the effects are the result of temporary measures, the reality is that so much about our lives cannot go back to normal. A number of businesses announced that they would not be reopening, and large industries have had to make significant changes in their projections and staffing levels; parents who were lucky enough to be able to work from home were forced to balance full time work and parenting; and residents young and old grappled with the mental health implications of isolation. Others faced food insecurity, poverty, and a lack of affordable housing while being unable to access government benefits. For youth who are graduating, entering the workforce, saving for school, or navigating life as a young parent, COVID-19 is making what is an uncertain stage of life even more turbulent.

Finally, while everyone in our province has been impacted by the pandemic, those who were already marginalized and facing challenges have been disproportionately affected. As an organization that works with over 1600 youth every year, we've seen firsthand the many ways this pandemic is negatively affecting the young people we serve. As we looked ahead at the broader impacts this would have on young people, we wanted to embark on an inclusive process to give youth across the province, to give youth across the province, including the young people that we work with at Choices for Youth (CFY), the opportunity to articulate how COVID-19 has changed their reality. From April 27 - July 7, 2020, CFY connected with 486 young people across Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) to understand how COVID-19 had impacted their education, employment, and future.



Mental Health is a Top Concern and Accessing Support is a Challenge

67% of youth surveyed indicated that their mental health has been impacted as a consequence of COVID-19. We heard that the abrupt disruption of routines such as attending school, seeing friends and family, accessing childcare, and being unable to pursue hobbies and activities, resulted in increased mental health concerns. While some of the young people surveyed are able to avail of online mental health resources, others are struggling to get the help they need during a time of heightened stress.



Poverty is a Growing Concern

This process demonstrated that some youth are now experiencing significant financial hardship. We heard a lot about young peoples' financial goals — saving to go back to school, trying to earn enough to pay for childcare, or working hard to maintain their lifestyle and support their families. While many were able to access the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), we heard from other young people who are unable to access benefits because they are international students or are ineligible due to participation in other government programs. We heard from young people who were forced to move further away from their support systems to be able to be able to afford housing, and we heard from those who were concerned about being able to afford food and other necessities. Most youth surveyed pointed to the long-term financial consequences of this pandemic, with 77% of youth surveyed stating that COVID-19 will negatively impact their earning potential for the next six months or more, while 79% of the youth surveyed said they feel worse about the NL economy than they did pre-pandemic.



Youth are Experiencing Major Setbacks

About half of the youth that we surveyed indicated that their employment goals or career aspirations have changed due to COVID-19. Youth point to the fact that they were supposed to spend the summer working to save money for post-secondary education, something they are now unable to do. Others are home with small children, unable to go back to school while being limited in employment options. Other young people are worried about what employment opportunities will look like in the coming months, especially for those who are graduating and looking to enter the workforce for the first time.



Youth are Struggling to Access Education

77% of the young people surveyed shared that they are uncertain or worried about their educational goals. While finances are part of this equation, so is access to education through online learning (specifically in rural, remote, and northern communities where access to broadband internet is a barrier). In addition, young people are attempting to access online-only education in crowded student apartments or family homes. They are finding themselves isolated from the services and supports provided through their high schools and post-secondary institutions and this in turn is affecting their mental health.



Youth See Opportunities to Change Systems

While the results from this survey and consultation process shine a light on the many challenges that youth face, not all is lost. Many of the young people who we consulted with also acknowledged the opportunities for broad systems change. Most frequently, the young people we spoke with shared what a basic income program would mean to them, and how it would help them get back on their feet and continue to pursue their goals when things go “back to normal”. Other young people shared the need for an affordable childcare program which would ensure that they didn’t have to choose between caring for their family or going back to school.

Our hope is that the results of this report will shine a light on the unique and emerging needs of youth in our province so that we (as community agencies, governments, and post-secondary institutions) can center young people in how we collectively build stronger organizations, institutions, and systems that empower young people to succeed during COVID-19 and beyond. Our goal is to provide key recommendations that can inform a more equitable path forward that prioritizes the needs of youth as a central component of NL’s COVID-19 recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Early in the pandemic, we began hearing that young people were afraid of being left behind as schools turned to online learning, volunteer opportunities dried up, and the future of youth employment became more and more uncertain.

Prior to COVID-19, youth were three times as likely to be unemployed compared to older adults (International Labour Organization, 13). How did COVID-19 exacerbate this? How are youth coping? What support do they need? These are just a few of the questions that this consultation process tried to answer.

Choices for Youth (CFY) launched an online survey on April 27, 2020. We circulated it widely across the province to community agencies, youth spaces, post-secondary institutions, and various levels of government who, in turn, shared it within their networks. We also relied on digital ads to further our reach to young people in regions across the province. To complement the online surveys, we created a shorthand paper survey for circulation to the youth already involved in CFY programming; this paper survey was shared during meal deliveries and could be completed individually or over the phone with assistance from staff. Furthermore, we invited specific groups of youth to engage in Zoom consulta-

tions, including regional Zoom sessions in Labrador and in Eastern, Central, and Western Newfoundland. 451 people engaged in the survey process, and 35 people participated in the virtual Zoom sessions.

What we heard was a clear indication of young peoples' concerns about their education and employment, but also concerns around their mental health, earning potential, and the ability to take care of their families. These concerns intersect. In conversations about online learning, mental health almost always came up as young people are struggling to succeed in less than optimal learning environments, and missing their peer support and on-campus services. When discussing lost employment opportunities, young people shared that in addition to the subsequent loss in savings, the inability to gain specific experiences will also negatively impact their progression through a given program or career path. It is difficult to discuss any one of these challenges in isolation. For a young person who has a disability or requires accommodations, the challenges are even more profound. We heard about the difficulty of engaging with online training and learning opportunities while having learning disabilities; we discussed the struggle of navigating daily life in the absence of disabilities accommodations; we heard about the struggle of managing chronic pain in less than ideal work from home set-ups. The intersection of these concerns must be considered when building youth-targeted solutions.

A Generation in Crisis

THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Economically, COVID-19 hit millennials and Generation Z the hardest. While older generations have been hardest hit medically by the virus, young people have been financially affected the most.

From February to April 2020, employment among youth declined by 34%. Of those who remained employed in April, 25% lost all or the majority of their usual hours of work. Furthermore, among students aged 15-24, the unemployment rate increased to 31.7%. (Statistics Canada, 2020)

Researchers suggest that these changes in income during an economic disruption such as COVID-19 will have lasting effects. New graduates attempting to start their careers in an economic downturn can expect to earn 5% less over their lifetimes than those who graduate during better economic times (Caranci and Marple, 2020). It takes more than a decade for those who are graduating into a recession to repair the damages to their income (2020).

Context matters, too. Young people are burdened with student debt, and are often working in temporary roles in lower-paying fields, including service and food sectors. Since the 1990s, average tuition fees in Canada (adjusted for inflation), have increased by 179%. The average student is carrying \$26,000 worth of debt, not including private debt (Policy Alternatives, 2014). Youth are over-represented in low-paying and precarious positions in the retail and food services industry, where 15-24 year olds represent 40% of those employed in service industries, and 27% of those employed in retail trade (Patterson et al., 2019).



COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting the service and retail sectors, which have an overrepresentation of young people. Across Canada, 15-24 year olds represent:

40%

of those employed in the service industry

27%

of those employed in retail trade

As debt rises among the youngest generations, so too does income disparity. The range of net worth between millennials in the bottom 25% of income earners and those in the top 25% (the interquartile range) is much larger compared to young Gen-Zers (Patterson et al, 10). Millennials in the top 25% had \$253,900 or more in median net worth, while those in the bottom 25% had \$9,500 or less (10). In comparison, the interquartile range when adjusted for inflation was between \$6,200 and \$126,900 for Generation Zers of a comparable age. High levels of income inequality are correlated with decreased levels of societal health and increases in social problems (OECD, 76).

High rates of income inequality make investment in education more difficult for those who are poor, and leads to lower levels of societal trust and higher levels of social unrest and volatility. Most importantly, in a society with high rates of income inequality, peoples' networks are often limited to their income group which is particularly challenging when entering the workforce for the first time (69).

Nationally, young people pre-COVID-19 were struggling to afford their mounting debt while starting their careers or navigating post-secondary education, and because of this, are particularly vulnerable in the face of this unprecedented economic downturn.

THE PROVINCIAL PICTURE

The Newfoundland and Labrador context is unique. With a declining population, especially among the youth demographic, it's critical to think about youth employment and education as key economic drivers within our province.


Youth are by far the lowest income earners in the province, making on average \$15,982 a year (Government of NL, 53). For those youth who are employed, they fall within the demographic most represented in retail, sales and service positions of which 35.3% are youth between the ages of 18 and 29 (Government of NL, 53). Young people in Newfoundland and Labrador also represent a significant component of the part-time work force. 40% of youth aged 18-29 in Newfoundland and Labrador are employed part-time, compared with 14.1% of the total workforce (Government of NL, 54). As is the case nationally, while many young people are earning very little, they are carrying large debt loads in taking on public and private student debt to pursue post-secondary studies. The average debt carried by a student who just completed their Bachelor's degree in Newfoundland and Labrador was \$28,000. The percentage of graduates with large debt (\$25,000 or more) at graduation was 38% (Statistics Canada, 2015).

The result is a population of highly-educated young people with large amounts of debt, low short-term earning potential, and high rates of unemployment in the province. Given the historical ramifications of economic downturn on youth, it is important to act now in ensuring that young people have the resources, support and services to pursue their goals despite rocky financial times, and without feeling the urge to migrate elsewhere.

Learning from the Past: NL'S RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC DISRUPTION

As a partnership between Choices for Youth, Mitacs and Memorial University, Matthew Cooper, candidate for the Masters of Business in Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, conducted a historical analysis of Newfoundland and Labrador's response to past economic disruptions. While the results of the full analysis will be released in the coming months, this research suggests that the Newfoundland and Labrador economy has a history of instability. These instabilities have historically affected young people through long periods of high unemployment resulting from a lack of opportunity and leading to pressures to leave home to find work. Economic inequality can be traced back to the early 19th century where economic divisions emerged between fishermen and the merchants they were indebted to (Ommer, 1989; Sinclair, 1985). Throughout this century the population grew as did the needs of residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. The fight for responsible government was lost in 1933, after the government accrued more than \$100 million in debt to pay for the railway while borrowing \$40 million and donating most of the mercantile fleet to support the war effort in 1914 (Hale, 2009).

Mid-century, when Newfoundland joined confederation, the province was forced to play catch-up; investing significant funds into upgrading infrastructure and social services to match those of other Atlantic provinces (Wright, 1998: 145). The research demonstrates that the combination of conforming to Canada's infrastructure standards after confederation, paired with new technological advancements, such as freezer trawlers and home refrigeration in the 1950s, took inshore fishermen away from their homes and their wives who traditionally worked alongside their husbands and children (Wright, 1998). Residents of Newfoundland experienced major change as resettlement saw 300 communities (30,000 people in total) resettled to larger municipalities (Pitt et al., 1997: 585). As advances in technology allowed for larger catches in



the fishery and smaller labour forces for fish processing, unemployment rose quickly until the cod moratorium effectively put an end to the industry in 1992. (Wright, 1998). This research also found that the push for equality in the workforce resulted in greater unemployment, creating tougher competition for fewer jobs (Higgins, 2007). Historically, the government has scrambled to create megaprojects to increase employment opportunities, however, the failure of projects such as the Stephenville mill, the Come By Chance oil refinery, and a phosphorus manufacturing plant in Long Harbour, has put the province into more debt (Higgins, 2007).

The cod moratorium had devastating economic effects on the identity of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, who saw their traditional way of life, their communities, and livelihoods continue to erode after 1992 (Jackson, et al., 2007: 78). A long-standing mentality of distrust of government and industry leaders sunk in during this time (O'Grady, 1996: 32). A review of educational literature on youth transition to the labour force illustrated the gap between skill sets and the labour force while the Royal Commission called for better funding, training, and infrastructure to allow youth to more easily transition into the labour market (House, 1986; Spain and Sharp, 1990). Despite this public pressure, the unemployment rate continued to rise (Spain and Sharp, 1990).

|| A study of the more recent literature suggests that systemic unemployment has led to youth feeling disenfranchised as they have been left with very few employment options (less if you're a woman, and even fewer if you live in a rural community." (Norman and Power, 205)

Historically, youth have left the province to seek opportunities elsewhere, leading to brain drain, or they stay and try to find opportunity, which is most commonly temporary, part-time and minimally paid work (Jackson, et al., 2007; Cooke and Petersen, 2019: 106-107). As we find ourselves in yet another economic downturn, there is an opportunity to consider historical challenges and to learn from them; creating a stronger economic future for this generation and those to come.

THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

In designing this consultation process, we wanted to ensure that we were able to capture the challenges that young people were experiencing, while also being able to reflect on what this means for Newfoundland and Labrador. Acknowledging that youth were already facing the realities of economic uncertainty prior to COVID-19, the goal was to ensure that solutions were considered in the context of a COVID-19 recovery while also addressing more systemic issues. As a result, this consultation process focused on three intended outcomes:

1. To gather qualitative data on the impact of COVID-19 on youth, ages 16-29 in Newfoundland and Labrador. The goal was to connect with at least 300 youth across Newfoundland and Labrador to have a large enough sample size to establish a comprehensive understanding on how COVID-19 has affected a broad demographic of young people in our province.

2. To create linkages between economic development and youth investment. What is the impact of effectively investing in young people? What does this do to economic development? Part of this work includes understanding some of the research on the value of investing in youth; strengthening the case for decision makers to adopt a youth-centered approach in future economic development policies.

3. To create strategic recommendations to governments, community agencies and public institutions to meet the needs of youth in Newfoundland and Labrador as we shift our focus to recovery and a post-COVID-19 world. Ultimately, we wanted this work to be meaningful and have concrete applicability, especially for decision makers. This meant asking young people in the consultations what they needed decision makers to know about what they're experiencing and the types of support they need.



CONSULTING YOUTH DURING COVID-19

Despite the constraints of COVID-19, we felt it was important to be as inclusive as possible in surveying young people. This meant using different mediums for surveying youth, but also being adaptive throughout the survey and consultation process, and responding to feedback from young people and youth-serving agencies as we went.

Surveys

Using Typeform, we created a digital survey which took on average 19:58 minutes to complete, and had a 29.6% completion rate. In addition to the long online survey, we responded to the feedback from CFY staff that the survey may be inaccessible for youth with barriers. This led to the creation of a shorter paper survey which was dispersed to young people in CFY programming. Staff either included the survey with a youth's meal delivery, and collected them during the next day's delivery, or they called youth and asked them the questions over the phone. Those young people with lived experience received a \$5.00 Tim Hortons gift card for their participation.

Consultations

In addition to understanding the challenges that youth face, we also wanted to understand the type of solutions that would help them reach their goals. To gather this type of information, we felt it was important to pair the surveys with digital consultations which would facilitate a conversation on what young people see as the path forward. Along with questions about how COVID-19 has impacted employment and education in the immediate and more medium-to-long term future, the consultations included a discussion on what young people need decision makers to know and the types of support that they require in the coming months and beyond.

Regional consultations were scheduled in Labrador and in Central and Western Newfoundland. In Eastern Newfoundland, consultations were scheduled with Memorial University students, CFY's Youth Leadership Council and with students connected with Memorial University's Internationalization Office. Finally, a consultation session was also hosted with the Premier's Youth Advisory Council. Youth who participated in these consultations received a \$15.00 Tim Hortons gift card.

Please refer to Appendix A, B and C to review our online survey questions, paper survey questions and virtual facilitation guide respectively.



WHO PARTICIPATED?

Between April 27 - June 7, 2020 we heard from 486 participants :

364 completed online surveys

87 completed paper surveys

35 engaged in online Zoom consultations

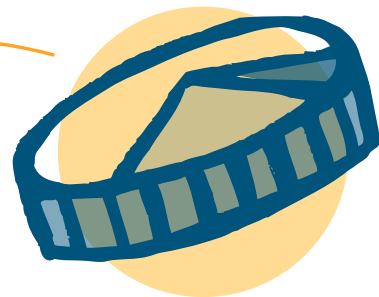


LOCATION OF YOUTH SURVEYED

Avalon: 67.5%
Central: 16%
Western: 12%
Labrador-Grenfell: 4.5%

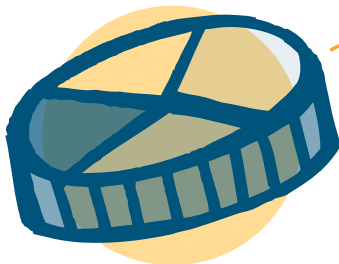
GENDER

Female: 66.5%
Male: 30.5%
Gender-fluid, Non-binary,
and/or Two-Spirited, and/or Other: 3%



AGE

16-18: 27.5%
19-21: 24%
22-24: 21.5%
25-29: 27%



WHO PARTICIPATED? (continued)



17%
have dependents



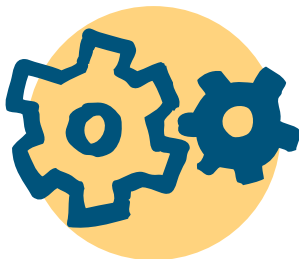
13.5%
self-identified as a
person with a disability



9.5% self-identified
as Indigenous

8% self-identified
as a new Canadian

6.5% self-identified as a
minority other than
Indigenous



61% of youth surveyed
were unemployed
at time of survey
completion

36% of youth surveyed
were underemployed
at time of survey
completion

What We Learned from the Process

While we were pleased with the results of this process, there are a few things that we learned that we could prioritize during future consultation and survey processes like this one:

- **Be flexible:** We started out with a long survey and quickly got the advice that while some youth would be inclined to stick with a long survey, many would not. We adapted and provided a shortened survey, specifically considering young people who are facing additional barriers.
- **Provide stipends when possible:** We have found that in an attempt to capture data from diverse populations, having a small incentive can go a long way. For those who participated in the shortened (paper) survey, we offered a \$5.00 gift card to Tim Hortons. Those who participated in a Zoom consultation received a \$15.00 gift card to Tim Hortons.
- **Online consultations both encourage and limit participation:** We heard from some young people that online consultations present an opportunity to engage without the barriers of having to physically go to a space to gather. For others, lack of broadband internet, along with lack of devices and quiet, private space meant that engaging in this way was difficult if not impossible. CFY has a strong network in regions outside of the Northeast Avalon, however we have historically relied on in-person connection and the ability to bring together a group of young people or service providers. Being limited to digital communications made this a challenge and participation in some of the sessions was limited as a consequence.
- **Networks matter:** The organizations and individuals that we were the most closely connected to were keen to help us spread the word (by connecting directly to the youth they serve and sharing the information on their social media, or their email lists). This continues to be a very effective way to engage with groups of young people, and in some regions young people noted that relying more on informal networks was more valuable for reaching them than through social media.

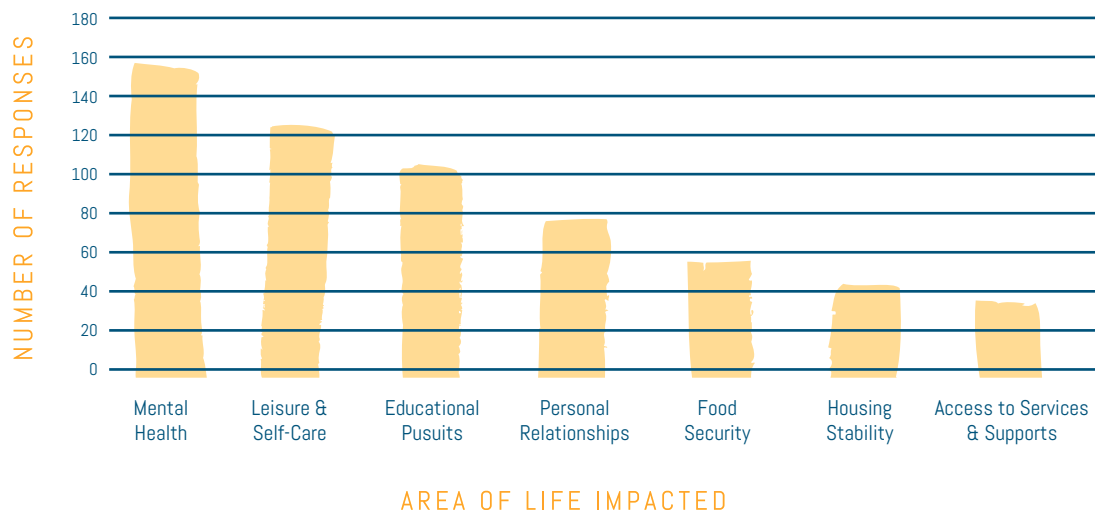
WHAT WE HEARD





Mental Health is a Top Concern and Accessing Support is a Challenge

Which of the following areas of your life have been impacted by this change in income?



67% of youth indicated that their mental health has been impacted as a consequence of a change of income during COVID-19. With a significant disruption to normal life, youth have been laid off, forced to move, and are missing the routines and systems that foster mental and physical wellness. Youth are experiencing elevated levels of stress while navigating a new reality and grappling with an uncertain future, and are feeling isolated as they follow public health regulations or are forced to move away from their support system.

Some youth shared that they are able to avail of online counselling and other mental health resources, while others are struggling to get the help that they need during a time of heightened stress and anxiety.

🚩 Before the outbreak, I was doing well treating my mental health but my inability to see friends, go to town (I live in a remote area) and do activities I used to do to help with mental health, self-esteem issues, etc, has caused my depression and anxiety to worsen to the point I fear my safety may be at risk." Youth Participant



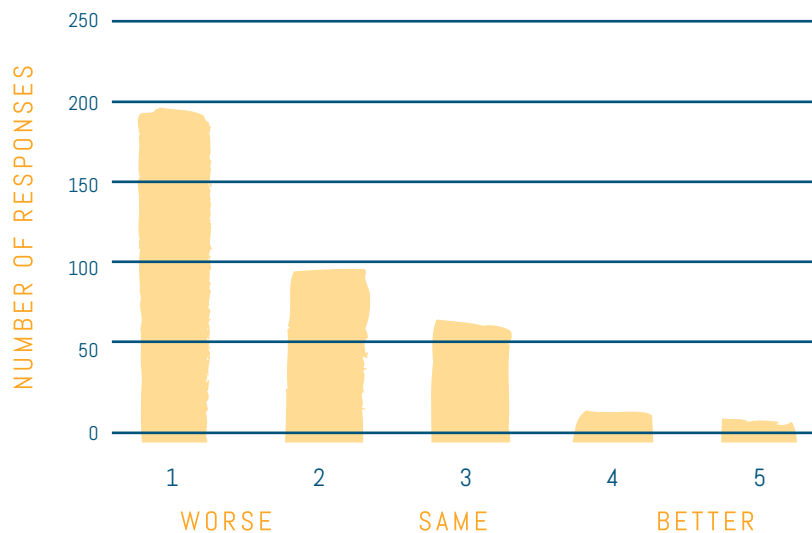
Poverty is a Growing Concern

While some youth are trying to survive after losing their income and not being eligible for CERB, others are desperately trying to save while missing income that they would be making over the spring/summer, which many planned to use to pay for their next semester of education. For many young parents this has also resulted in increased challenges to make ends meet and provide for their families. Students are forced to move into more precarious housing situations and choose between bills and pursuing their future.

🚩 Worrying about making rent when CERB runs out and I am still not able to return to work. Likewise for food security." Youth Participant

78.5% of youth surveyed feel worse about the NL economy than they did pre-COVID-19 , and 77% of youth feel COVID-19 will impact their earning potential in the next 6 months .

How do you feel about the NL economy now, compared to before the pandemic?



“ I moved in with my friend once bubbles were allowed because I could no longer afford to live on my own due to COVID. I have placed my educational goals on standby due to financial reasons & my mental health has been all over the place due to stress and fear.” Youth Participant



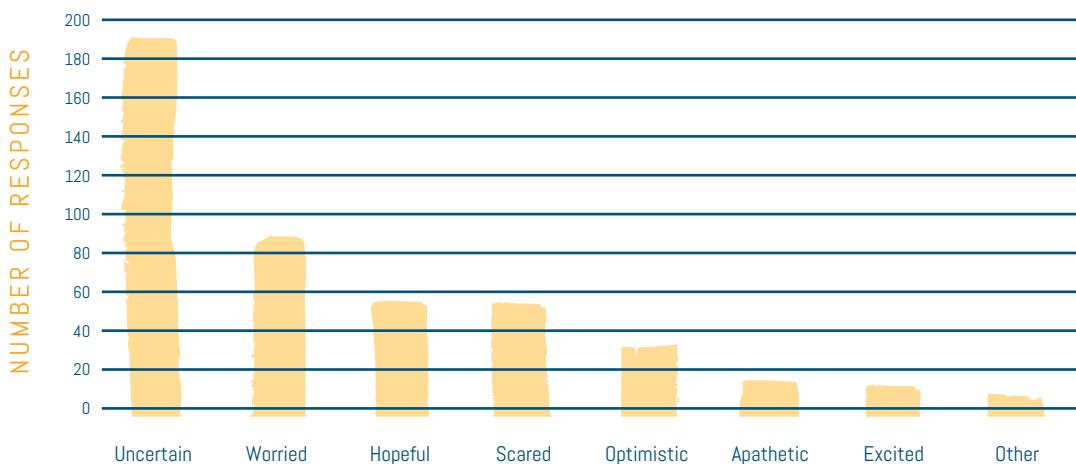
Youth are Experiencing Major Setbacks

For youth who were getting back on their feet prior to COVID-19 — having experienced battles with mental health or addictions, working multiple jobs to save for school, or balancing work and childcare responsibilities — COVID-19 presented a significant setback.

53% of youth surveyed shared that their employment goals or career aspirations have changed because of COVID-19, while **50% have experienced a change in their education goals.**

Youth have goals of advancing in their career, caring for their family, purchasing a home, and getting an education. Many cited the effect that COVID-19 has had on all of this. Youth are finding themselves reliant on parents and those who don't have support are struggling to get by.

Which of the following words best describe how you currently feel about your employment goals or career aspirations?



🚩 Due to Covid 19 I have lost my job and only source of income. As a single parent this is especially stressful as I have a home to run and a car to pay for and keep on the road. I was planning on attending post secondary in the fall, however I'm not sure if that will still be happening as I'm unable to enroll my child in daycare or have any semblance of normal at the moment. I'm stressed, anxious, and very tired. My child is overwhelmed and is no longer patient with our current situation. Tension is at an all time high." Youth Participant

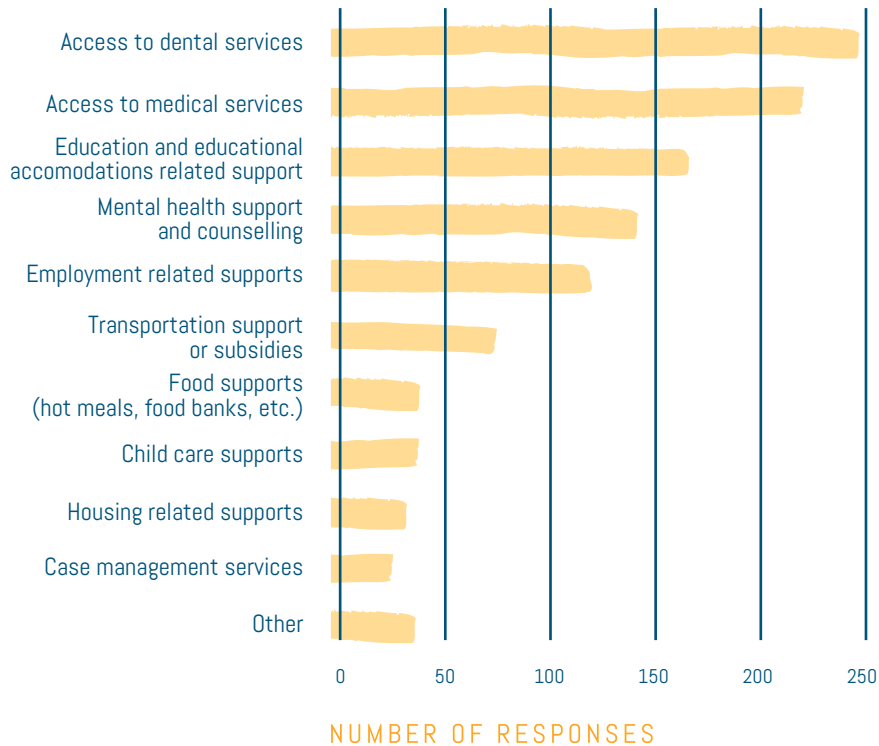


Youth are Struggling to Access Education

We heard a lot through this process about online education at the high school and post-secondary levels. While some students are happy to have the option to pursue their education online while saving money by moving back home, others are lacking the tools to succeed — including reliable wifi, devices, and quiet space to work. Youth shared that their grades are slipping and they're questioning whether they should continue or pause their education.

77% of youth surveyed shared that they are uncertain or worried about their education goals.

Have you experienced a loss or reduction in any of the following support services that are important to you, as a result of COVID-19?



if covid is still going on and come september we can not be in the classroom then i will be taking a year off until i can attend a classroom again which puts me back at least a year." Youth Participant

I was in my last year of studies with projects to complete and they were switched online, which I believe resulted in lower overall marks." Youth Participant



Youth See Opportunities to Change Systems

We heard over and over again that there's a need for a more equal path forward, and youth have suggestions for what that could look like. Young people who are on income support are stuck in a cycle of poverty, while young parents are struggling to achieve their career and academic goals in the absence of affordable childcare.

Despite this, youth spoke to the opportunity to change systems, noting that governments have stepped in to support people who are struggling while individuals have stepped up to support local small businesses. Respondents would like to see this support continue and grow to include those not currently eligible for CERB, or who are in a wider range of work arrangements.

Suggestions for sustained support including a basic income and living wage program were heard loud and clear — seen as a way to allow youth to build a future without having to take on massive debt and delay the ability to reach their goals.

“ CERB versus income support is showing a degree of privilege and priority. People on income support are stereotyped and devalued and that’s why we get a lot less money. When I was on income support I got \$160-\$280, every two weeks depending on whether I was on youth services or AESL. That wasn’t enough for me, so I did sex work. Other people sell drugs and did art, and when we do that... I didn’t pay taxes on sex work, people who sell drugs don’t pay taxes... ”

Youth Participant

The background is a vibrant blue with scattered orange and teal geometric shapes, including lines, circles, and dots. The text 'YOUTH-CENTRED SOLUTIONS' is centered on the left side, overlaid on a teal brushstroke-like shape.

YOUTH-
CENTRED
SOLUTIONS

The insights and expertise of youth who participated in this process paint a clear picture of what's needed for a youth-centered recovery from the effects of COVID-19 and for the future prosperity of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The recommendations in this report offer a path forward for decision-makers, governments, institutions and community agencies as they consider new investments and imagine new systems. As readers reflect on these ideas, it is crucial to consider the ways that these challenges have disproportionately affected some more than others, and the ways in which these struggles emphasize systemic problems that many young people face. In building a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador, it is important to uphold the principles of equity, sustainability, and youth empowerment in the development and implementation of youth-centered solutions:

- **Youth are active agents in their own futures.** Youth are active members of the community, and are able to determine their own futures. Youth must be an active partner in the solutions that aim to support them as we move through COVID-19. Solutions must acknowledge the diverse experience of young people, and provide youth with diverse options and opportunities to choose from.
- **Prioritize marginalized youth.** Crisis affects those who are disproportionately marginalized the most. In acknowledging this, recovery efforts must focus on youth who are living in poverty, facing homelessness, and dealing with trauma. We must center our attention on youth who are navigating this crisis without adequate support systems; those who are precariously housed; young parents who are unable to afford childcare; youth struggling to enter the labour-market; young mothers who are forced to take on the job of full-time childcarer while navigating other goals; and international students who aren't able to avail of government systems.
- **Root solutions in equity and inclusion.** Young people who are new Canadians, those who are Indigenous, and youth who live with a disability may

face additional challenges in entering or reentering the workforce, including increased barriers in studying or working remotely, and ultimately may be unable to receive the support they need within the current systems. Solutions must prioritize principles of equity and inclusion, while acknowledging the needs of minority groups and those who face increased levels of discrimination.

- **Create economic opportunities for community gain.** With an opportunity for increased investments in economic development, there must be a lens on these investments to maximize community benefits. Young people need valuable employment opportunities, and opportunities to develop and refine skills to succeed in the 21st century. This principle includes creating opportunities for youth to succeed where they are, regardless of their location in the province. A key component of this is prioritizing access to broadband internet access and employment opportunities. Rural, remote and Northern communities must be prioritized as much as more urban centres in recovery efforts.
- **Systems-level change is needed.** Solutions must focus on changing the systems that hold back the most vulnerable, while embracing an intersectional approach that prioritizes the principles of Truth and Reconciliation, anti-racism, inclusion, diversity, and gender-based policy.



RECOMMENDATIONS SNAPSHOT



Broaden Access to Youth Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- Invest in virtual mental health care that integrates with community-based services
- Create regional mental health hubs across the province
- Create a Universal Basic Income pilot project to complement existing support and income services



Reduce Barriers to Youth Labour Market Attachment

- Invest in the provincial social enterprise ecosystem
- Pilot a more progressive and transitional focused Income Support
- Rethink employment training



Invest in Community and Family Wellbeing

- Improve access to affordable childcare
- Provide incentives for local and social purchasing and hiring
- Increase the supply of affordable housing



Invest in Youth Learning and Development

- Create a Learn and Work at Home subsidy
- Invest in 21st Century Learning and Curriculum
- Improve access to high-speed internet service in rural, remote, and northern communities



Broaden Access to Youth Mental Health and Wellness Resources

We heard loud and clear that mental health was one of the most significant barriers that youth were facing due to COVID-19. This aligns with national survey data that suggests that there are roughly 11,000 post-secondary students who are experiencing depression in Newfoundland and Labrador, and 4,500 students who have been treated for anxiety (National College Health Association, 2016 and Choices for Youth — Thinking Well , 2019). In exploring solutions, there's lots that's already happening, however we heard from youth that access and integration are challenges.

For youth without healthcare insurance, accessing counselling services can be unaffordable, and this is exacerbated in more rural and remote regions where physical access is a barrier, too. In 2018, Choices for Youth surveyed over 600 post-secondary students on the importance of various forms of support, and on a scale of 1 (least important), to 5 (most important), students saw in-person counselling as being one of the most important types of support (rating it 4.6/5). Affordable access to counselling services with a virtual care component would help young people who are struggling with mental health concerns, and would be inclusive of the needs of youth in rural, remote, and northern communities.

It is important to note that mental health support extends beyond counselling. In recent months, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has seen a considerable increase in the number of people using Bridge the gApp, an online resource center for youth struggling with mental health and addictions.

Many of the youth that we spoke with also drew a line between their mental health concerns and financial stability. CFY's Thinking Well report (available at

<https://www.choicesforyouth.ca/thinkingwell>), found that 63% of the province's post-secondary youth population rated their mental health as "fair or poor." At the same time, more than half of young Canadians worry their job could disappear (World Vision Canada, 2020). Young people are often in an environment of constant change, and COVID-19 exacerbates this. In the survey and consultation process leading to this report, a number of youth shared that they were constantly stressed out, not knowing when they would be able to go back to school, if they could afford their next semester of education, or if their job would even be there when things opened up again. Providing financial certainty to young people would equip them with the tools to navigate other uncertainties without the sustained stress of not knowing how to pay the next bill.

A Universal Basic Income as a replacement of CERB was raised by a number of youth as the single policy intervention that would do the most to make a difference in the financial lives of young people with diverse needs in our province. The Basic Income Canada Network advocates for \$22,000/year (\$31,113 for a couple), which would be available to 18-64 year olds based on household income. The result would be that families at the lowest income level would see their disposable income increase by more than 350%, and poverty, under this model, would be almost eliminated (Pasma and Regehr, 2019).

Recommendations

1. Invest in virtual mental health care that integrates with community-based services

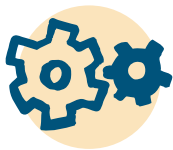
Work with community agencies, healthcare providers, and within the K-12 education system across the province to integrate Bridge the gApp into youth-centered programming. Invest in consultations with these youth, families and stakeholders to understand the gaps in online mental health support, and invest in additional online platforms and counselling supports as required.

2. Create regional mental health hubs across the province

Where there are gaps in mental health support, establish hubs where young people can access a wide range of integrated services. Through a single point of entry, this would offer young people opportunities to engage in counselling (including peer counselling), mental health and addictions support services, benefit from online care option and access wrap-around supports as they chart a personal path forward. In many cases, this could include increasing support and resources to existing youth-oriented services to expand partnerships, and outfitting them with the capacity to reach youth from nearby communities (e.g. through video calls, pop-up locations, etc.)

3. Create a Universal Basic Income pilot project to complement existing support and income services

We heard from many young people about the need to provide a Universal Basic Income (UBI) to those under an income cut-off to jumpstart the economy and get young people back on their feet. Starting with a pilot project in Newfoundland and Labrador as a replacement to CERB offers an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of such a program on our province to capture key learnings for establishing a long-term UBI strategy.



Reduce Barriers to Youth Labour Market Attachment

Youth are hardest hit during tough economic times, as they are often in the most precarious employment situations; working in the gig economy, in part-time contract work, and in low-paying employment. Furthermore, youth have a weaker attachment to the labour market. A Statistics Canada study indicated that 44.6% of youth aged 15-24 did not have a connection to a current or recent job (2020). Attachment to a recent job is one of the key factors which ensure that workers are able to reintegrate into the

labour market. Of the youth who we surveyed for this report, 44.8% were most recently employed in hourly part-time work, while another 25% were engaged in hourly full-time work. It's important to note that labour market disruptions affect demographics of youth differently. Youth with less education struggle more than those with post-secondary education, and statistically Indigenous youth struggle more than other non-marginalized groups (Statistics Canada, 2017).

In the current employment landscape, most programs also fail to meet the needs of youth with complex needs and of marginalized communities. A holistic and person-centered view of addressing employment barriers must take into account the factors such as housing, health, language, culture, ability, literacy and education levels, mental health, access to transportation, incarceration history and levels of poverty. As Newfoundland and Labrador faces a variety of factors challenging labour market attachment, youth spoke about the need for creative solutions that strengthen both economic and social outcomes, while adding value to our local communities.

Recommendations

1. Invest in the provincial social enterprise ecosystem

Investing in and scaling existing social enterprises in this province offers valuable employment opportunities for young people while prioritizing community development. More broadly, investing in our province's social enterprise ecosystem requires establishing social enterprise specific training and leadership opportunities, financing options, start-up incentives, and procurement opportunities. Social enterprises such as CFY's Impact Construction provides youth with valuable training and employment opportunities, and offers opportunities to scale (e.g. by completing affordable housing retrofits and renovations for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation).

2. Pilot a more progressive and transitional focused Income Support

For a significant portion of our youth population, Income Support is often the only means of consistent income, providing access to necessities such as food, drug coverage, and shelter. While Income Support is the backbone to supporting the most marginalized individuals in our communities, it can also serve as the cornerstone on which to build a future. To ensure that youth are supported in part-time skill-building employment opportunities, we recommend piloting a more progressive Income Support model with an increased wage exemption. This would allow for additional participation in the labour market, while ensuring that there is no loss of health and housing benefits in the process of gaining increased employment.

3. Rethink employment training

As youth move in and out of the workforce, and are faced with uncertain and challenging prospects due to COVID-19 and a rapidly changing labour market — paid opportunities to maintain employment readiness, gain experiences and develop new skills is absolutely critical. To achieve this, we recommend the development of a multi-format, provincial youth employment readiness program to ensure youth can earn income while engaging in 21st century skill development opportunities and employment readiness training.



Invest in Community and Family Wellbeing

All roads lead back to financial stability. For some, it means stable housing and feeling confident that going (back) to school is more than a pipe dream and is actually attainable, and for others, it's a question of how to pursue employment

and educational goals in the absence of affordable childcare. Ultimately, we received strong feedback from young people about the need to expand CERB to include those on Income Support, and to extend federal benefits like these for low-income earners.

As the world shifts online, many young people struggle to create an effective work environment within their home, and are challenged with how to succeed without the support and services that the K-12 or post-secondary systems offer them. Others, however, are feeling that online learning or in-person employment is leaving them with no choice but to decide between childcare and pursuing their goals. Between the difficulties of operating childcare facilities at full capacity, the financial challenges that young people are facing coming out of COVID-19, and the uncertainties surrounding the back to school plan, many young parents are left feeling stressed and uncertain. When paired with the implications associated with a second wave of COVID-19, many young parents (specifically young mothers) are left with little choice but to stay at home and focus on parenting.

The data is clear that an affordable childcare model pays off in the long run — for every dollar invested in child care and early childhood education, there is an economic output of \$6.00 (Conference Board of Canada, 2017). In the short term, an immediate investment to provide a child care subsidy would allow more families to avail of childcare services and result in more people (primarily women) entering (back) into the labour market. This ensures that folks who are middle income are able to continue to pursue their training or employment objectives even in the wake of economic uncertainty. Furthermore, boosting the disposable income of NL families will help boost the economy.

We also heard from a number of young people who had both a concern for, and a desire to live and work in their home communities. Thriving communities across our province require a healthy circulation of value aided by successful local businesses, social

enterprises and entrepreneurs. These establishments help create employment opportunities, improve access to products and services, and can be important anchors for youth and families who want to stay in their home communities.

Recommendations

1. Improve access to affordable childcare

Provide an immediate investment in the current child care subsidy program to allow more families to avail of this support (and in turn, allow more women to enter the labour market). The current subsidy should be opened up to families that are currently accessing non-regulated childcare providers, and should be expanded to include those who do not currently fall within the income threshold. This could be facilitated by expanding the subsidy's income threshold while working with the federal government towards a universal non-profit daycare model. This will help ensure that more parents (particularly women) can re-enter the workforce. Further investment should include the establishment of a non-profit daycare model in Newfoundland and Labrador, ensuring that children across the province receive the same opportunity for educational opportunities through high-quality early childhood education.

2. Provide incentives for local purchasing and hiring

By creating incentives for businesses to buy and hire locally — paired with investments in social enterprises and modernized social procurement legislation — enterprises can have a disproportionately positive impact, contributing not only to vibrant local economies but also to the social determinants of health that will sustain community wellbeing and the much needed local workforce, particularly in rural and remote locations.

3. Increase the supply of affordable housing

Access to stable, affordable and adequate housing is a need that is felt across every community in this province. To ensure adequate supply and a high degree of affordability, investments must be made across the housing spectrum. In particular, there are opportunities to transform underused buildings and land into affordable housing, integrate housing based supports into youth and community hubs, and work with the federal government towards the progressive realization of housing as a Human Right as laid out in the National Housing Act. As a more traditional infrastructure investment, this is a proven economic stimulus that provides a foundation for diverse local neighbourhoods where youth and young families can thrive.



Invest in Youth Learning and Development

Several ideas emerged around youth training and learning. The first focused on access to the types of technologies and infrastructure necessary to connect youth to online training and education. In rural and remote regions, this conversation was centered around broadband internet access. In more urban regions, the conversation was centered around access to devices and the space to work remotely (a challenge was in a cramped family home or an apartment with several tenants). The second theme centered around training, re-training, and up-skilling. Many young people are questioning whether or not they will continue (or start) post-secondary education in an online-only learning environment, while we heard from others that COVID-19 has made them realize that their chosen career may not make sense in an increasingly digital world.

This presents an opportunity for the province and post-secondary institutions to invest in a more diverse set of industries that have sustainability and economic returns within Newfoundland and Labrador. It is estimated that 14% of the global labour force may need to change jobs as technology transforms the nature of work in Canada (Illanes et al., 2018). This percentage will only increase with the global ramifications of COVID-19. While companies such as Amazon and Microsoft already have upskilling programs, the best approach to upskilling is seen to be one that includes both government and industry (Cukier, 2020). The pay-off is predicted to be significant for those companies and governments who commit — for example, a 38% revenue boost is estimated over the next five years for those fully committing to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and investing in human-machine collaboration (Shoot and Knicrehm, 3). The consumer goods industry (one of NL's top industries) has been predicted to have a 51% increase in revenue and a 9% increase in employment if there were sufficient investment in AI and human-machine collaboration (Shoot and Knicrehm, 6).

Investment in technology and related skills is part, but not all, of the equation. For youth who are struggling to gain access to the labour market, there is an opportunity for post-secondary institutions and government to invest in equipping these youth with the skills that are necessary for success. The skills that have been demonstrated to be in increasing demand as we navigate the changing face of work. Often called 21st century competencies, these include skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, civic skills, computing technology, and career learning (Government of Ontario, 2016). These are the most in-demand skills, and by providing opportunities for young people to build these competencies, we will strengthen their ability to succeed within the labour market.

What are 21st Century Competencies?

It has been long acknowledged that the ability to communicate effectively, engage in problem solving, and thinking creatively is central to earning and employability. What's emerging is the call for education and training systems to center these core competencies in training development and educational curriculums at all levels of learning. A strong foundation in these core competencies ensures that students have the capacity to address the unique and complex problems that we are encountering in the 21st Century (Government of Ontario, 3). These competencies help equip students to deal with the unknown — the global phenomena, crises, and economic challenges that we are expecting to encounter in our ever-changing world. There are several frameworks for understanding what is included in this list of core competencies. The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) project compared a number of international competency frameworks (Government of Ontario, 22). This is a summary of the core competencies that emerged:

Ways of Thinking

1. Creativity and Innovation
2. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making
3. Learning to Learn, Metacognition

Ways of Working

4. Communication
5. Collaboration (teamwork)

Tools for Working

6. Information Literacy
7. Information and Communications Technology Literacy

Living in the World

8. Citizenship — local and global
9. Life and Career (including adapting to change; managing goals and time; being a self-directed learner; managing projects, etc.)
10. Person and Social Responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence)

Recommendations

1. Create a Learn and Work at Home Subsidy

The future of education cannot simply reside online. Not all learners are able to thrive in an online learning environment; in-person teaching, role modeling, mentoring and coaching are all important ways to connect, motivate, and inspire learners. We heard that an online-only approach to future education would leave a lot of people out. However, in the short term, online learning will be a core component of educational plans. To ensure that young people have the chance to succeed in their education and training from home into the fall semester and beyond, we recommend the creation of a “Work/Learn at Home Subsidy Program”, be available to young people who are pursuing high school, post-secondary education, or online training from home and require the appropriate devices, wireless, or office set-up to do so. This would help youth overcome some of the many barriers of a work from home or learn from home set-up.

2. Invest in 21st Century learning and curriculum

Invest in 21st Century competency development at every level of education; including within the K-12 curriculum, and offered through online training for older youth or those disengaged from the education system. These competencies have tremendous psychological benefits for students across a broad spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. From college-bound high-school students, to those youth with fewer economic advantages, these competencies can greatly enhance future academic success and employment prospects. Where possible, provide subsidies for young people who engage in this type of online learning to ensure it is accessible to all.

3. Improve access to high-speed internet service in rural, remote and northern communities

The digital divide in Newfoundland and Labrador was highlighted through our consultation and survey results. Economic development in rural, remote, and northern communities is contingent on access to reliable, high-speed internet yet there are whole communities who have limited access. We recommend that the provincial government, in partnership with business, municipalities and the federal government, address this issue. This is particularly urgent as online learning, work and public health information is positioned as increasingly critical in the midst of COVID-19 and an inclusive recovery.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Many young people between the ages of 16 and 29 are on the edge of vulnerability. Making just enough money to pay for life's necessities, relying on part-time or summer employment to pay for tuition and housing, or working hard with limited support to provide for their young families. When crisis hits, youth are struck the hardest, and the systems that are designed to support sometimes fail to catch the youth who need them the most. Many of the young people we spoke to shared their profound sense of worry and uncertainty for the future, and their strong feelings of anxiety about how the pandemic would affect so many dimensions of their future.

While youth have profound concerns, they also have insightful solutions. The young people who we spoke to are innovative — they see the cracks in the system and they know what needs to happen to create change. We know that community agencies, governments, and post-secondary institutions see these cracks too and there is already an incredible amount of work being done to provide financial support to young people, support those who are facing food insecurity, and provide aid to those who are struggling with online learning.

The past few months have forced us to focus on immediate needs, and wrap our arms around the most vulnerable. The purpose of this report is to shine a light on where youth need us to go from here.

Youth want to stay here and they can envision a stronger future for Newfoundland and Labrador; where supports and services reach every corner of the province, where they have the capacity to work and study in the communities that they can call home, where they are encouraged and empowered to pursue their goals, and they are equipped with the financial support to do so. As we work towards recovery, we must continue to center the diverse and complex experiences of young people in how we build solutions to our complex problems.

Youth have a strong vision for our province, and we hope that this report can spark the conversations, partnerships, and next steps that bring that vision to life.

Choices for Youth is so grateful for the generosity of hundreds of youth who took the time to share their perspectives throughout the past few months. Thank you to the CFY staff who saw the benefit of this work and championed it within their programs, capturing the valuable experience of the youth that they work with. Finally, thanks to the many community organizations, post-secondary institutions, and government partners who shared the survey, coordinated focus groups, and helped us ensure that we captured the lived experiences of diverse youth across the province.

This is just the beginning of this conversation, and we hope that we can continue to work together in developing innovative solutions that meet the needs of young people.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Online Survey Questions

With so much change taking place so quickly, Choices for Youth is interested in understanding how the pandemic is affecting your educational and employment goals. Within the current context of the COVID-19 public health crisis, many youth in our province are facing disruptions in their education, being laid off or underemployed, all while grappling with the longer term consequences of our reality.

If you are a youth, ages 16-29, we want to hear from you! Please take 7-10 minutes to complete this survey.

This first set of questions will generate some general demographic information.

1. Town/City where you are living at the time of survey completion

2. Region where you are living at the time of survey completion

- a. Avalon
- b. Central
- c. Western
- d. Labrador-Grenfell

3. Age

- a. 16-18
- b. 19-21
- c. 22-24
- d. 25-29

4. Gender

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Gender-fluid, Non-binary, and/or two-spirit
- d. I prefer not to answer

5. Do you identify as Indigenous?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

6. Do you identify as a person with a disability?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

7. Do you identify as a member of a visible minority other than Indigenous?

- a. Yes
- b. No (Direct to question 9)
- c. I prefer not to answer

8. (If yes) Please select the options that you identify with

- a. Arab
- b. Black
- c. Chinese
- d. Filipino
- e. Japanese
- f. Koren
- g. Latin American
- h. South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
- i. Southeast Asian (e.g. Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.)
- j. West Asian (Iranian, Afghan, etc.)

9. Are you a new Canadian?

Have you moved to Canada within the last 5 years?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

10. Do you have any dependents?

- a. Yes
- b. No

The next set of questions will ask you how COVID-19 has impacted your employment

11. Which of the following describes your current (or most recent) work arrangements?

- a. Salaried, full time
- b. Salaried, part time
- c. Hourly, full time
- d. Hourly, part time
- e. Contract work
- f. Self-employed

12. What industry do/did you work in?

Accommodations/Food Services

- a. Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services
- b. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting
- c. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
- d. Construction
- e. Educational Services
- f. Finance and Insurance
- g. Health Care and Social Assistance
- h. Information and Cultural Industries
- i. Management of Companies and Enterprises
- j. Manufacturing
- k. Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction
- l. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- m. Public Administration
- n. Real Estate and Rental and Leasing
- o. Retail Trade
- p. Transportation and Warehousing
- q. Utilities
- r. Wholesale Trade
- s. Other

13. Are you currently employed?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 15)

14. (If yes) Are you currently underemployed?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Are you currently unemployed or underemployed primarily due to COVID-19?

- a. Yes (direct to question 17)
- b. No

16. (If no) What would you say is the primary reason for your unemployment?

17. Have you been able to access a government benefit as a result of your unemployment (other than CERB & CESB)?

CERB: the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, and CESB: the Canada Emergency Student Benefit

- a. Yes
- b. No (directs to question 19)

18. (If yes) Has access to a government benefit (other than CERB & CESB) allowed you to pursue your personal, education, or career goals?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Somewhat

19. Have you been able to access CERB?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 21)

20. (If yes) Has access to CERB allowed you to pursue your personal, educational, or career goals?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Somewhat

21. Have you been able to access (or are you eligible for) the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB)?

- a. Yes
- b. No (If no, direct to question 23)

22. (If yes) Will CESB allow you to pursue your personal, education, or career goals?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Somewhat
- d. Unsure

23. In what way has CERB, CESB, EI, or another government benefit helped you to continue to pursue your personal, educational, or career goals?

24. In what way has CERB, CESB, EI, or another government benefit NOT helped you to continue to pursue your personal, educational, or career goals?

25. Are you working for the same employer as before COVID-19, or have you changed jobs as a result of COVID-19?

- a. N/A - I'm not working (direct to question 20)
- b. Same employer
- c. New employer
- d. Same employer but I have taken on an additional job since COVID-19

26. (If b,c, or d) What did your employer do, or what are they currently doing to assist you with changes caused by COVID-19 (safety measures, adjusting shifts, etc.)?

27. In what way(s) has your work changed for the better?

28. In what way(s) has your work changed for the worse?

29. Are you a worker in the gig economy?

Gig economy: work defined largely by short-term contracts or freelance work

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 31)

30. (If yes) Has being a member of the gig economy influenced your ability to access government benefits?

- a. Yes
- b. No

31. Has your level of income changed as a result of COVID-19?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 37)

32. (If yes) Did you experience an increase or decrease in income as a result of COVID-19?

- a. Increase in pay
- b. Decrease in pay

33. What caused this change in income?

- a. Laid off
- b. Change in wage/salary
- c. Change in hours of work/available shifts
- d. Change in my ability to work due to health reasons
- e. Change in my ability to work due to needs of dependants, or health of dependants
- f. Job start date delayed
- g. Change in duties at work
- h. Change in level of benefits (e.g. income support, medical support, child care subsidy, etc.)

34. Are there any other factors that have contributed to your change in income?

35. Which of the following areas of your life have been impacted by this change in income?

- a. Housing stability
- b. Food security
- c. Leisure and self-care
- d. Personal relationships
- e. Mental health
- f. Access to services and supports
- g. Educational pursuits

36. Please share any details you'd like to provide on how these areas of your life have been impacted. Please note that anything shared here will remain anonymous. It may be used to inform our understanding of the situation or be used as a quote without attribution to future publications.

37. Has COVID-19 changed your employment goals or career aspirations in any way?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 39)

38. (If yes) Please briefly share how your plans have changed

39. When you think about your employment goals or career aspirations, how would you describe how you feel right now compared to how you felt before the pandemic?

- a. Worse than before
- b. Same as before
- c. Better than before

40. Which of the following words best describe how you currently feel about your employment goals or career aspirations?

- a. Hopeful
- b. Uncertain
- c. Scared
- d. Excited
- e. Apathetic
- f. Worried
- g. Optimistic

41. Do you believe that COVID-19 has affected your earning potential in some way?

- a. Yes
- b. No (Direct to next section)

42. (If yes) As a result of COVID-19, I feel that my earning potential will be impacted for the next

Please select one

- a. 6 months
- b. 12 months
- c. 18 months
- d. 2 years
- e. 2-5 years

The next set of questions will ask you about how COVID-19 has impacted your education

43. Are you an international student?

- a. Yes
- b. No

44. Which of the following best describes your situation?

- a. Currently in high school
- b. Completed some high school, but not currently enrolled
- c. Completed high school, GED, or ABE
- d. Planning to attend a post-secondary institution
- e. Currently attending a post-secondary institution
- f. Completed some post-secondary but not currently enrolled
- g. Completed post-secondary education (bachelor's degree)
- h. Completed post-secondary education (college degree)
- i. Completed post-secondary education (masters degree or higher)
- j. Planning to completed additional post-secondary or graduate level education

45. If you are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution, what is your academic discipline?

- a. Not applicable (not currently enrolled)
- b. Education
- c. Visual & Performing Arts
- d. Communications technologies
- e. Humanities

- f. Social and behavioural sciences
- g. Law
- h. Business, management, and publish administration
- i. Physical & life sciences and technologies
- j. Mathematics, computer, and information sciences
- k. Architecture, engineering and related technologies
- l. Agriculture, natural resources and conservation
- m. Health and related fields
- n. Personal, protective and transportation services
- o. Other

46. If you were previously enrolled in a post-secondary institution, but are not currently enrolled, what was your academic discipline?

If you have completed more than one degree/certificate/diploma, please select the discipline of the most recent educational accolade.

- a. Not applicable
- b. Education
- c. Visual & Performing Arts
- d. Communications technologies
- e. Humanities
- f. Social and behavioural sciences
- g. Law
- h. Business, management, and publish administration
- i. Physical & life sciences and technologies
- j. Mathematics, computer, and information sciences
- k. Architecture, engineering and related technologies
- l. Agriculture, natural resources and conservation
- m. Health and related fields
- n. Personal, protective and transportation services
- o. Other

47. If you are currently completing high school or attending a post-secondary institution, how has your educational experience changed for the better?

48. If you are currently completing high school or attending a post-secondary institution, how has your educational experience changed for the worse?

49. Thinking about your educational goals, has COVID-19 changed your plans in any way?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 51)

50. (If yes) Please briefly share how your plans have changed

51. Are there any changes to the education system that you would like to see maintained once this is all over?

52. When you think about your educational goals, how do you feel right now compared to how you felt before the pandemic?

- a. Worse
- b. About the Same
- c. Better

53. Which of the following words best describe how you currently feel about your education goals?

- a. Hopeful
- b. Uncertain
- c. Scared
- d. Excited
- e. Apathetic
- f. Worried
- g. Optimistic

This final set of questions will help us better understand how COVID-19 is impacting your day-to-day life.

54. In your opinion, what has been the biggest disruption to your "normal" routine?

55. Are any of your peers or friends experiencing job or income loss as a result of COVID-19?

- a. No, none of my friends
- b. Yes, some of my friends
- c. Yes, all of my friends

56. Are any of your peers or friends having to adjust their career or educational plans?

- a. No, none of my friends
- b. Yes, some of my friends
- c. Yes, all of my friends

57. Have you moved to a different community as a result of COVID-19?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 60)

58. (If yes) Have you moved to a different house within the same community as a result of COVID-19?

- a. Yes
- b. No (direct to question 60)

59. (If yes) Would you characterize this as a positive or negative change, and why?

60. Have you experienced a loss or reduction in any of the following support services that are important to you, as a result of COVID-19?

- a. Mental health support/counselling
- b. Access to medical services
- c. Access to dental services
- d. Transportation support/subsidies
- e. Case management services
- f. Child care supports
- g. Housing related supports
- h. Food supports (hot meals, food banks, etc.)

- i. Employment related supports
- j. Education and educational accommodations related support

61. Looking ahead, what makes you hopeful right now?

62. How do you feel about the Newfoundland and Labrador economy now compared to before the pandemic?

- a. Worse than before
- b. Same as before
- c. Better than before

63. What about the Newfoundland and Labrador economy makes you hopeful right now?

64. What about the Newfoundland and Labrador economy makes you fearful right now?

65. Do you have regular access to the internet at home?

- a. Yes
- b. No

66. Would you be interested in online employment training opportunities if they were made available to you?

- a. Yes
- b. No (directed to thank you screen)

67. (If yes) Please provide your email address for follow-up on potential training opportunities.

68. Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix II Paper Survey Questions

With so much change taking place so quickly, Choices for Youth is interested in understanding how the pandemic is affecting youth educational and employment goals. Within the current context of the COVID-19 public health crisis, many youth in our province are facing disruptions to their education, or have been laid off or underemployed, all while grappling with the longer term consequences of our reality. To understand how COVID-19 is impacting youth 16-29, we want to hear from youth who are engaged in Choices for Youth programming! The results of this survey will help Choices for Youth understand, develop, and deliver the types of support and training that youth with need while adjusting to our new reality.

1. Town/City where you are living at the time of survey completion

2. Region where you are living at the time of survey completion (please circle one)

- a. Avalon
- b. Central
- c. Western
- d. Labrador-Grenfell

3. Gender (please circle one)

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Gender-fluid, non-binary, and/or two-spirit
- d. I prefer not to answer

4. Do you identify as Indigenous? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

5. Do you identify as a person with a disability? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

6. Do you identify as a member of a visible minority other than Indigenous? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No (skip question 7, go to question 8)
- c. I prefer not to answer

7. (If yes) Please select the options that you identify with (please circle as many as apply)

- a. Arab
- b. Black
- c. Chinese
- d. Filipino
- e. Japanese
- f. Koren
- g. Latin American
- f. South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
- g. Southeast Asian (e.g. Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.)
- h. West Asian (Iranian, Afghan, etc.)

8. Are you a new Canadian? (please circle one)

Have you moved to Canada within the last 5 years?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I prefer not to answer

9. Do you have any dependents? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No

10. Are you currently employed? (please circle one)

- a. Yes (skip question 11, go to question 12)
- b. No

11. (If no) Are you currently unemployed due to COVID-19 or due to other reasons? (please circle one)

- a. COVID-19
- b. Other reasons
- c. Both

12. Has COVID-19 changed your employment goals or career aspirations in any way? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No (skip question 13, go to question 14)

13. Please briefly share how your plans have changed

14. When you think about your employment goals or career aspirations, how would you describe how you feel right now compared to how you felt before the pandemic? (please circle one)

- a. Worse than before
- b. Same as before
- c. Better than before

15. Which of the following words best describe how you currently feel about your employment goals or career aspirations? (please circle one)

- a. Hopeful
- b. Uncertain
- c. Scared
- d. Excited
- e. Apathetic
- f. Worried
- g. Optimistic

16. Thinking about your educational goals, has COVID-19 changed your plans in any way? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No (skip question 17, go to question 18)

17. (If yes) Please briefly share how your education plans have changed

18. In your opinion, what has been the biggest overall disruption to your "normal" routine due to COVID-19?

19. Have you experienced a loss or reduction in any of the following support services that are important to you, as a result of COVID-19? (please circle as many as apply)

- a. Mental health support/counselling
- b. Access to medical services
- c. Access to dental services
- d. Transportation support/subsidies
- e. Case management services
- f. Child care supports
- g. Housing related supports
- h. Food supports (hot meals, food banks, etc.)
- i. Employment related supports
- j. Education and educational accommodations related support

20. Would you be interested in online employment training opportunities if they were made available to you? (please circle one)

- a. Yes
- b. No (go to question 22, skip question 21)

21. (If yes) Please provide your email address for follow-up on potential training opportunities.

22. Please collect the youth's name. A \$5.00 Tim Hortons gift card will be provided to them.

Appendix III Consultation Questions

1. Introduction

- a. Facilitator Introduces themselves

- b. Introduce the process — why are we doing this? Why do we want to hear from you now? What kind of services does Choices offer when it comes to employment and training? How might this evolve as a response to the COVID-19 crisis?

2. Survey

- a. Take 5-7 mins to complete the survey (if you haven't already)

3. Present: experiencing change from COVID-19

- a. How are you experiencing change as a consequence of COVID-19 (consider: employment, housing, place)?

- b. What dimensions of this change are concerning/challenging? What dimensions are positive?

4. Future: what is the ripple effect of these changes?

What does the future look like?

- a. Considering your education and employment goals — has anything changed as a consequence of COVID-19? Additional prompts: Has it made you rethink the ways that you might gain experience (e.g. if you have missed out on learning/work opportunities)? Has it given you a new perspective on work? Has it made you rethink your career plan, or educational goals?

- b. What dimensions of this future are concerning/challenging? What dimensions are positive/optimistic?

5. Moving Forward: Shaping your present & future

- a. Considering your employment and educational situation and goals — what do you need to succeed within this new reality? Is there additional training that you need? Are there different opportunities that you would like to experience digitally?

- b. What are the little things and big things that you're worried about when thinking about your education and employment? (e.g. graduating a year later, social life aspects of education, can't go to post-secondary anymore because I need to work right away after this to help with family finances, etc.)

6. Wrap Up: final thoughts



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