The Role and Value of Short-term Paid or Unpaid Work Placements for Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Prepared for the BC Centre for Employment Excellence by MOSAIC
September 2014
This research has been prepared by MOSAIC for the BC Centre for Employment Excellence (a division of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation) as part of the research project, Understanding Current Employment Programming and Services for BC Youth. It has been undertaken independently and solely on the basis of information collected and analyzed by the researchers with reasonable care to ensure its reliability.

The opinions expressed herein are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the BC Centre for Employment Excellence, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, or the BC Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.

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About the Author

MOSAIC engaged Natasha Bailey, a Vancouver-based researcher and organizational development consultant, to undertake this study.

Her recent work has focused on outcomes evaluation, and quality standards and best practices frameworks for non-profit organizations.

She began her career developing and facilitating personal development and pre-employment programs targeting a range of specialized populations including single parents, newcomers and women facing multiple barriers.

Her most recent projects include: an extensive research report for MOSAIC on best practices for providing employment services to immigrants in one-stop shops of the Employment Program of BC; the development of a quality standards framework for organizations that want to enhance their work with and for single parents; a national evaluation in Ireland of the outcomes of a type of adult learning called community education, which aims to foster social justice and pre-employment skills; and work with colleagues to carry out research on the professional career aspirations of children in a marginalized neighbourhood in Dublin, Ireland called Stoneybatter.
Acknowledgements

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This project would not have been possible without the engagement and support of staff and clients from Agora Employment Essentials and its Kaleidoscope program; Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House and Drive Youth Employment Services; and MOSAIC’s Job Options, Free Running and PAWS (Paving a Way for Success) programs. Representatives of those organizations and programs provided feedback, insight and contacts that contributed immensely to the research.

Miu Chung Yan, a professor at the School of Social Work, University of British Columbia served as a research advisor for the project. We would like to thank him for his guidance and encouragement.

For leading the project, collecting the research and writing this report, our gratitude goes to Natasha Bailey. Her determination to fully capture and describe the impact of work placements on immigrant and refugee participants was inspiring to us all.

And, of course, our thanks go to the immigrant and refugee youth and the employers who invested their time to share with us their reflections on the work placement experience. We would like to acknowledge the participation of the following employers: BASES Family Thrift Store, Richmond Youth Service Agency, Sport Chek, Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST), QUEST Food Exchange, 24 Frames Digital Film, RONA Home and Garden, New Vista Society, Adecco and Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House.

MOSAIC hopes this document will be useful to all involved with designing, funding and delivering employment services to immigrant and refugee youth and will encourage the inclusion and development of work placements as a valuable service to assist in the integration of younger newcomers into the Canadian economy and society.

Joan Andersen
Director of Employment and Language Programs
MOSAIC
Introduction

Context

In response to the B.C. Centre for Employment Excellence's call for proposals for research exploring barriers to youth employment, MOSAIC convened a group of relevant internal staff, partners and an academic expert to reflect on a research project that would address research gaps and innovate employment service provision with immigrant and refugee youth.

As an organization working to empower refugees and immigrants to succeed in Canada, MOSAIC is well aware of the employment barriers that youth face. These barriers culminate in an unemployment rate for immigrant and refugee youth double that of the total labour force in Vancouver (16.8 per cent for those immigrants aged 15–24 or 6,790 individuals).\(^1\) This rate is also higher than the 2011 unemployment rate for non-immigrant youth of 15.1 per cent (n=18,145 unemployed non-immigrants aged 15–24 years).\(^2\)

Using a primarily qualitative approach, the exploratory research presented here responds to a documented dearth of research about the target group’s awareness and experience of employment services (Lauer et al., 2009). It validates the available literature about barriers to achieving employment outcomes with refugee and immigrant youth and how interventions address those barriers through work placements. The research involved interviews with young people and employers, both of which groups have participated in work placements, and a focus group with participating program staff. The emphasis on work placements in this research responds to a need identified in the literature review to understand the impact of specific components of employment programs for young people (Collura, 2010).

The research explores the role and value of short-term paid or unpaid work placements for a convenience sample of immigrant and refugee youth. These youth generally come to Canada as dependents of their parents under a range of immigration classes or programs or as refugees. The table below lists the immigrant programs.

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\(^1\) Taken from National Household Survey 2011 data table 99-012-X2011042. www12.statcan.gc.ca. Data is for Vancouver City.

\(^2\) Ibid. The 2011 data is the most up-to-date information that is publicly available comparing immigrant to non-immigrant youth. Available Labour Force Survey data related to immigrant status does not offer statistics for those aged 15-24.
The Role and Value of Short-term Paid or Unpaid Work Placements for Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and immigrant service providers see those individuals who came to Canada as “refugees” as a distinct group from those in the other programs, who are referred to as “immigrants.” CIC says, “A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee.”

The needs of those in the Refugee category are often described as different to those from other classes. For instance, Bauder (2005) asserts that refugees are not as likely as immigrants to have labour market information and an awareness of business norms. Since 11 of the 22 youth participants in this research came to Canada with their families as refugees, this research also highlights the distinct career development and job search experiences they have. Compared to young newcomers who came to Canada through other programs, such as the Skilled Worker or Family Sponsorship programs, refugee youth often have lower levels of English and already very disrupted educational journeys resulting in lower levels of education. They may be dealing with the effects of trauma due to the situations from which they have fled and they often need to learn basic skills that other youth might already have, such as how to shop for food or how to take public transportation. These factors often contribute to an increased intensity of employment barriers for these youth.

The research also explored whether or not the role and value of work placements for in-school immigrant and refugee youth were different to those out of school. Seven participants were still in school and did unpaid placements in the context of the credits required for the Graduation Transitions program in high school. The placements were sourced and youth were prepared for them by targeted in-school employment services. The rest of the participants were out-of-school and did placements as part of employability and life skills programs generally available through Skills Link or immigrant serving organizations (see below). The majority of the out-of-school youth were paid during their placement through a wage subsidy.

The results of this research are not representative of all immigrant and refugee youth. However, for the youth sampled in this research, the role of work placements, paid or unpaid, is as an intermediate step towards longer-term career goals. Work placements play a role in developing transferable and basic skills that are specific to Canadian workplaces. Placements foster integration to Canada, and, for out-of-school youth, secure employment that can help them to pursue longer-term goals.

Table 1  Canadian Immigration Classes³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Skilled Workers</th>
<th>Self-employed Persons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Skilled Trades</td>
<td>Family Sponsorship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quebec-Selected Skilled Workers</td>
<td>Provincial Nominees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canadian Experience Class</td>
<td>Live-in Caregivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-up Visa</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
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³ www.cic.gc.ca

4 Temporary Foreign Workers and International Students are not defined as immigrants from a policy and research perspective.

5 Ibid.
The value of work placements for the youth sample in this research is in supporting the career preparation of immigrant and refugee youth who have missed out on opportunities for this preparation as a result of issues related to immigration and settlement. The key issues identified include: interrupted educational journeys; lack of bridging capital; language barriers and confidence, and being recent immigrants.

A Note on Work Placements

A Canadian Council on Learning Report (2009) notes that it is difficult to isolate operational definitions of the different types of experiential career learning. For the purposes of this research, the typology below differentiates experiential career learning opportunities.

**Table 2  Typology Experiential Career Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Work Placements/ Work</td>
<td>A short-term, planned workplace learning opportunity for those in or out of school. In this research, they can range from one week to three months and can be paid or unpaid. They can offer the opportunity for youth to apply transferable skills and sample different careers to inform career development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Job Shadowing</td>
<td>Work experience option that facilitates one-on-one observation of a worker in a workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Apprenticeships</td>
<td>Paid, work-based training combined with education with the majority of time spent learning on the job and the rest of the time in the classroom. Programs last from three to five years and require a completion exam for certification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Co-operative Education</td>
<td>Combines work experience placement with coursework to integrate classroom theory with planned learning experiences in the community. Involves partnership between education and business, industry or the community. It generally takes place during an educational program and can happen more than once during a program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Internship</td>
<td>An on-the-job training opportunity, usually for an undergraduate or graduate student to practice skills learned in an educational program upon completion of the program. It is the transition from study to work. An internship can be paid or unpaid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the terms above are used interchangeably both by programs and researchers. However, this research explores the role and value of work placements that meet the operational definition set out for the first item in the table above. In this research, paid placements are generally synonymous with those done through programs by out-of-school youth who received a wage subsidy during placement. The programs for these youth have targets for labour market attachment, so work placements should help to achieve this outcome. Unpaid placements were those done by in-school youth and focused on future employment, except for two out-of-school participants. In-school work placements were also shorter (one to three weeks) than the out-of-school placements (five weeks to three months).

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6 CCL, 2009 was used as a foundation for the definitions in the table.
Aim and Objectives

The aim for this research was: to explore the role and value of paid or unpaid short-term work placements for refugee and immigrant youth aged 15—29 participating in five employment programs in Vancouver, and the impact of findings on policy and service provision.

The objectives were to:

- Identify refugee and immigrant youth’s expectations for and experience of work placements.
- Discover the outcomes experienced and valued by refugee and immigrant youth as a result of work placements, including sustainable labour market attachment, successful school-to-work transition, and development of generic skills.
- Consider the extent to which culturally specific variables impact on the perceived role and value of work placements for the target group, such as language barriers and parental value.
- Investigate if and/or how work placements feature in the future career plans of refugee and immigrant youth.
- Identify the necessary employer and program supports required by refugee and immigrant youth pre-, during and post-work placement.
- Name the support needs of employers when providing placements to the target group, as well as their experience of doing so.
- Make recommendations to service providers about how to enhance work placement outcomes for refugee and immigrant youth, including appropriate delivery of information, preparation about this key element of employment programs, and follow-up.

Key Features of the Project

The key features of this research project are:

- Exploratory, qualitative research.
- The use of participatory learning and action methods to democratize the research process and engage program staff and young people.
- Use of in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 22 young people who had done a work placement, as well as semi-structured interviews with 11 employers.
- A focus group with five program staff.
- Tracking of key outputs and outcomes for youth as a result of engaging in work placement through a “benefits” checklist.
Youth Employment Policy and Immigrant and Refugee Youth

This section contains a brief review of employment policy as it relates to immigrant and refugee youth.

Youth Employment Strategy

The Canadian Youth Employment Strategy has three streams: Career Focus, Skills Link and Summer Work Experience. Relevant to this research, the Skills Link stream funds targeted interventions from “employers and organizations to help youth facing barriers to employment develop the broad range of skills and knowledge needed to participate in the current and future labour market. It also promotes education and skills as being key to labour market participation.” Recent immigrant youth are a named target group for this stream. Outcomes for this stream include employment and return to education.

Many of the youth interviewed for this research had participated in Skills Link programs, which included work placements (N=9). The most recent evaluation of the Youth Employment Strategy found that this stream was meeting its intended outcomes with positive net impacts more likely to be found for those who were male, those with post-secondary education and older youth. Amongst other key needs, this evaluation found that Skills Links addressed a necessity for recent immigrant youth to learn about labour rights and the Canadian economy. The evaluation also found that most youth engaged in Skills Link were experiencing multiple barriers, requiring access to other services concurrent to the program (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2009).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that, due to funding cuts, some Skills Links programs in British Columbia will not be offering work placements since they will not have the resources for wage subsidy contributions to work placements.

Employment Program of British Columbia

In April 2012, the Employment Program of British Columbia (EPBC) began to provide services for any eligible unemployed or underemployed (part-time work under 20 hours per week) individual, combining federal Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) funded and provincially funded employment programs into a one-stop shop approach. Youth and immigrants are among the designated Specialized Populations for the program. With rare exceptions, youth must be out of school to be eligible for services.

Clients can avail themselves of a suite of employment services through the EPBC at one of 73 WorkBC Centres managed by contracted providers. Services include case management, employment skills workshops, apprenticeship and self-employment supports, skills training and job retention support. How providers implement services to Specialized Populations may differ, with some providing satellite services or outreach services to do so.

A recent research report for MOSAIC investigated the characteristics of an Immigrant Lens to EPBC service provision. Conclusions relevant to this project from this research are: working with immigrant clients involves specialist knowledge and skills; many immigrants need access to longer-term

See http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/epb/yl/ype/newprog/yesprograms.shtml
interventions to allow them to achieve their employment goals, and there could be an enhanced focus on service coordination and unpaid work placements within the model (Bailey, 2014).

Many Case Managers working with youth in WorkBC Centres refer youth to Skills Link programs as part of their employment action plans.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada — Settlement Program

In 2009, CIC modernized settlement programming in Canada into one single program. Employment-related services are one component funded within this program, and newcomers are expected to achieve immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes related to labour market access:

- Immediate: Clients acquire knowledge, skills, and connections related to the Canadian work environment.
- Intermediate: Clients participate in local labour markets, broader communities and social networks.
- Ultimate: Newcomers contribute to the economic, social and cultural development needs of Canada.

Employment services funded through this program are not meant to duplicate any other federal or provincially funded programs.

Participating Programs

This section offers a brief profile of each of the programs and services through which all the research participants were recruited. While not exhaustive, it does offer a sense of the employment services available to immigrant and refugee youth.

Drive Youth Employment Services (Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House)

Drive Youth Employment Services (DYES) is a partner provider with MOSAIC in Vancouver Northeast, providing satellite EPBC employment services to youth on Commercial Drive. It refers many immigrant and refugee youth to Skills Link programs as part of their employment action plans.

Kaleidoscope — Finding Your Way (Agora Employment Essentials)

Kaleidoscope is a Skills Link program that prepares youth for future employment emphasizing digital film-making skills with an eight week work placement component. Emphasis is on the transferability of skills developed into any career and/or workplace. Objectives for the program include: completion of several media projects; creation of a career action plan; development of job search skills; development of skills for long-term attachment to the workforce; entrepreneurial skills; and work experience.

Participants receive a wage subsidy while in the program. Targets set for the program include:

- One hundred per cent of those participants completing the program will have a better understanding of their skills and abilities, as well as the tools required to find and maintain employment.
employment. They will have knowledge of the employment resources and support services available in their area;

- Eighty per cent of the participants who start the program will complete it;
- Sixty per cent of those who start the project will be employed, or will have gained employment or self-employment within 12 weeks of completing the program; and
- Of those who start the project, 15.6 per cent will have returned to school within 12 weeks of completing the program.

PAWS – Paving a Way for Success, Job Options B.C., and Free Running

These are three programs which MOSAIC either leads or partners to deliver.

PAWS — Paving a Way for Success

MOSAIC partners with the Burnaby Board of Education to engage language learner students aged 16–19 in employment services, many of whom are also refugees. In addition to other goals, the program seeks to better prepare youth for work in Canada as adults. It entails language learning and fostering workplace essential skills. Targeted unpaid workplace learning is also part of the program.

Job Options B.C.

This is a provincially funded employment and skills training program open to immigrants 18 and older. Participants must be non-EI eligible individuals. This program consists of four to six weeks of employment skills training, four to six weeks of further skills training and unpaid, paid or subsidized work experience and follow-up support. MOSAIC runs this program for immigrants in Burnaby and Vancouver.

Youth represent a small cohort of participants in this program. Participants receive a training allowance during the program. Along with four weeks of job search strategy training, participants also complete a one-week short-term certificate course relevant to their job goal. They then do four weeks of paid or unpaid work experience. Program results expected by the funder include:

- Participants have increased skills and confidence, increasing their employability;
- Participants are employed, ideally in a job consistent with their Return to Work Action Plan; or
- Participants are moving into an employment-related intervention such as further training consistent with their Return to Work Action Plan.

Moving Ahead — Free Running

This intervention is the youth development component of the Moving Ahead program, which is a holistic settlement program for refugee and multi-barriered immigrants. Free Running is for youth ages 16–25 not in school full-time. It involves a case management approach to achieve, amongst other settlement goals, the medium- and long-term goals of: helping participants find volunteer opportunities that provide them with Canadian experience; equipping them with skills to find employment; and
preparing them for vocational and educational planning. The program emphasizes job readiness as opposed to labour market attachment, which is an acknowledgement that for this target group, employment may be a longer-term goal.
Literature Review

This review presents a theoretical lens through which to view the data about the role and value of work placements for immigrant and refugee youth. This lens is pertinent to what authors describe as the “1.5 generation,” or the foreign-born children of immigrant and refugee families. Authors describe a paucity of research about the cohort. Where there were gaps and where appropriate, literature about career development for visible minority youth is considered, since the majority of first generation immigrants to Canada are members of ethnic minority groups (Gemici and Curtis, 2011). As the literature will suggest, both visible minority youth and immigrant and refugee youth — who are likely to be from visible minority groups — deal with employment challenges related to ethno-racial discrimination. Many visible minority youth and immigrant and refugee youth share similar cultural backgrounds: these shared cultural dispositions can shape how youth from both groups think about work and career development.

Employment Barriers

The literature is replete with the numerous labour market barriers experienced by immigrants, in Canada and other Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries. Wilkinson et al. (2012) report that half of all migrants to Canada are under 29 and one-quarter arrive as refugees. How identified barriers affect the labour market attachment of immigrants in this age bracket is an important field of study, because of a misguided belief that young people adjust more quickly to Canada and are more successful in the labour market than their parents (ibid.). The literature cautions that young immigrants and refugees are a heterogeneous group, resulting in impact differentials for these obstacles.

There are barriers that many immigrants face, regardless of their age. The OECD contends that the immigration class of immigrants “is the most important predictor of labour market outcomes” (2009; p. 11) as this dictates the human and social capital that they arrive with as well as resulting income levels.

Generally, immigrants, many of whom are from visible minority groups, face the employment barrier of ethno-racial discrimination due to what Guo (2013; p. 65) describes as a “deficit model of difference.” Gemici and Curtis (2011), amongst others, note a “colour barrier to integration” (p. 387).

Which ethno-racial group or region of origin an immigrant belongs to affects the perceived level of cultural distance to Canada. The more distant the person is perceived to be, the higher the intensity of the named barriers. Contributing to a perception of cultural distance and sheer capacity to negotiate the labour market and education systems is an immigrant or refugee’s level of English fluency as this creates challenges in finding employment (Khadka et al., 2011).

An assessment of cultural distance contributes to the level of discrimination experienced and the valuation of credentials and prior experience. Thus, qualifications from Western, English-speaking countries are better recognized and immigrants from these countries fare better in the labour market than those perceived to be from places (and ethno-cultural groups) more distant from Canada (Fuller and Martin, 2012; Wilkinson, 2008).
While many immigrants face the barrier of *lack of Canadian work experience*, it is consistently referred to as a key issue for immigrant youth (Lauer et al., 2011). This obstacle is exacerbated by the *lack of foreign credential and work experience recognition*. Many immigrants arrive in Canada with university education and prior work experience (ibid.). According to the authors, this barrier means that many immigrant youth are asked to do credits in Canadian high schools before university credits are assessed. The OECD points out the late school-to-work transitions of well-educated immigrant youth (OECD, 2009).

Linked to this barrier, *age* at immigration is a key issue for young immigrants and refugees as language acquisition becomes more difficult as a person gets older (Corak, 2011).

The impact of all the named barriers, according to Lauer et al. (2011), is that “Immigrant youth are less likely to have worked during secondary and post-secondary education than Canadian-born.”

Refugees experience all of these barriers with greater intensity, “Refugee youth are less likely to know English or French prior to arrival. This affects their chances of succeeding in education or employment. The effect of trauma and past experiences is another aspect differentiating refugees from immigrants” (Wilkinson, 2008; 152). They experience the highest rates of unemployment (ibid.).

Moreover, the 1.5 generation encounters a host of *acculturation* barriers, such as a tension between the place of origin and the place of settlement, and having to negotiate a bicultural existence (Gemici and Curtis, 2011). This negotiation can have an impact on their perceived sense of belonging and their comfort level in Canada (ibid.). The authors document a link between these two psychological states and visible minority status in Canada.

It is important for the research described here to document the extent to which employers and programs are aware of these barriers and the extent to which youth perceive that work placement helped to overcome barriers.

**Double Jeopardy**

Relevant to 1.5 generation immigrants is that the family’s socio-economic status and networks can have a direct effect on young people’s employment trajectories. Yan et al. (2012) propose that if youth are from visible minority groups and are from an immigrant family, they experience a “double jeopardy” in the labour market. While focused on youth who arrived at a very young age or who were born in Canada, this notion is applicable to the 1.5 generation and is discernible in a variety of ways. Lauer et al. (2012) found double jeopardy in their research through not just perceived discrimination of immigrant youth because of skin colour, but also due to accented English.

Additionally, language barriers and the related discrimination faced by parents may be transferred to children in terms of the advice and support they offer to their children. For instance, some researchers report parents advising young people to take up jobs or courses of study that do not require language fluency such as math or science (Winnie Mah and Yeh, 2010). What is important here is perceived discrimination on the basis of language fluency and how that affects young people’s occupational aspirations.
Double jeopardy is also documented through the intergenerational transmission of ineffective bridging and bonding social capital (Yan et al., 2012). Social capital as it relates to employment includes resources such as labour market information and access to connections for labour market mobility, including references, mentorship9 or actual employment. Bonding capital refers to intra-group resources for labour market attachment, such as those available through family, co-ethnic peer and/or ethno-cultural communities. Research has found that the quality of capital available for immigrant and refugee youth through these connections is inadequate to foster labour market mobility. The lesson is that what parents do not have they cannot give their children. As immigrants, many parents may not have adequate labour market information. If young people rely on their ethno-cultural communities for jobs, Yan et al. (ibid.) show that these may not be quality attachments. The same can be said for jobs obtained through connections to co-ethnic peers. Taylor and Krahn (2013) conclude that “the racialized immigrant youth in our study experienced the added complexity of negotiating social systems without the kind of access to social capital provided by parents who have achieved success in Canadian labour markets” (p. 1017).

Thus, bridging capital becomes crucial for young immigrants and refugees. This capital involves resources harnessed from social connections external to the family, community and co-ethnic peer network. Yan et al. (2008) document a lack of this capital for new generation immigrant youth and Wilkinson (2008) suggests the same for 1.5 generation youth. Recommendations to address this barrier include the provision of work placements that can give youth access to bridging capital, and efforts to draw the whole family into the career development of young immigrants. The degree to which work placements gave participating youth access to this bridging capital is of note, as is whether or not this goal of giving youth access to bridging capital is a stated priority for programs and employers.

Many authors have reported that newcomers, including youth, “go to friends and family before anyone else” (Guo, 2013; Lauer et al., 2011). Research suggests that immigrant and refugee youth have a low awareness of and do not tend to use formal employment services (Yan et al., 2008; Lauer et al., 2009). This research offers some valuable feedback on employment services as they relate to the work placement component of them.

**School-to-Work Transition**

**Educational Aspirations and Outcomes for Immigrant and Refugee Youth**

Taylor and Krahn (2005) document the higher than average educational aspirations of visible minority immigrant youth. Seventy-nine per cent of them hoped to go to university compared to 57 per cent of Canadian-born. This finding is in stark contrast to findings by Corak (2011), which suggest that if a young person arrives in Canada after the age of nine they appear “to face a distinct and growing increase in the risk that they will not graduate [from high school].” This trend is marked for those who arrive after the age of the 13, with the risk of not graduating rising by 20 to 25 per cent.

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9 Mentoring is a relationship between two individuals where one person, the mentor, works to facilitate a mentee’s professional, academic or personal development (Donaldson et al., 2000).
As already touched on above, a key reason for this high risk is the challenge of acquiring a new language since the risk does not apply to those who came to Canada from a French or English speaking country. It varies according to region of emigration, with those who came to Canada from regions speaking a language with little similarity to English — such as India or Hong Kong — facing the highest risk (ibid.).

Wilkinson et al. (2012) found that there are delays in the high school trajectories of young immigrants and refugees. These trajectories vary by immigration status with 76 per cent of refugees one grade behind their Canadian counterparts in high school. Differences were particularly marked among young immigrants and refugees who were racialized.

The determinants of educational and occupational paths for immigrant and refugee youth and visible minority youth are well documented. Family and community characteristics, family income, family structure, parental support and school involvement are important. Those from visible minority groups in low-income families may have lower aspirations (Demer et al., 2010): immigrant and refugee parental aspirations for their children, the level of parent education and grades are important determinants (Taylor and Krahn, 2005; Wilkinson, 2008; Winnie-Mah and Yeh, 2010).

Socio-economic status (SES) cannot be overlooked and will be considered further below.

**Limits of Traditional School-to-Work Models**

There is a small, but growing, body of research detailing the limits of traditional school-to-work models for immigrant and refugee youth. School-to-work transition for immigrant and refugee youth involves role transitions that the “average” young person does not usually have to make such as: cultural adaptation, potentially having to temporarily take on adult roles when immigrating, and language learning (Wilkinson, 2008). Shea et al. (2010) note the challenge of having to function cross-culturally both in school and in other social domains.

The impact of immigrating, particularly after the age of nine, means that “children, in a way different from adults, face important transitions in their lives, and migration may have long lasting impacts on their capacities to become successful and self-reliant adults, impacts that may be much more costly and difficult to remedy at a later stage” (Corak, 2011; p. 7). The author suggests future research on the institutional arrangements that could support young immigrants and refugees to stay in education and make successful transitions.

The main lesson from this area of the literature, and from other findings detailed in the above sections, seems to be the notion of interrupted and lengthened transitions to the labour market for immigrant and refugee youth. Hirschi (2010) says, “Students with an immigration background showed less progress ... more difficulties reaching a state of career preparation” (p. 268). This lesson tells us to explore how work placements feature in these interrupted trajectories for the young people interviewed.
Absorption or Successful Adaptation?

Wilkinson (2008) presents two theoretical models for integration\(^{10}\) of immigrant youth. The **mainstream absorption** model proposes that integration is easier for immigrant youth (than their parents) because they have less cultural baggage and attempt to exploit resources to succeed in Canadian culture through educational attainment, rapid language acquisition and anything that will maximize “fitting in.” Thus, they will also be successful in the labour market.

The **underclass absorption** model proposes that structural constraints due to discrimination involve immigrant youth rejecting the mainstream, and ultimately result in low educational attainment and poor quality employment.

For young people in this research, the perspective they take may shape their perception of the work placement experience and benefits accrued. For instance, do youth view work placements as a strategy to maximize fitting in and do they exploit these opportunities to facilitate mainstream absorption?

For programs, the approach taken may have an impact on program design. For instance, a focus on mainstream absorption could involve a lack of attention to the very real employment barriers faced by immigrant and refugee youth.

**Career Development Theory for Immigrant and Refugee Youth**

Since work placement is usually part of career development and exploration, it is pertinent to note how traditional models of career development may not fit immigrant and refugee youth. Micro-level factors such as valuing parental wishes and having a collectivistic disposition are important to many cultural groups represented by immigrants and visible minority youth and do not feature in traditional models of career development (Shea et al., 2007; Demer et al., 2010). The impact of these variables is that if a person, for example, is perceived to make career decisions in terms of benefit to the family versus on an individual basis, traditional theories assume that this approach hinders career development and causes low self-efficacy.

According to Arthur and Collins (2011), culture has a profound impact on career development and necessitates practitioner cultural awareness.

**Culturally Sensitive Career Development**

The literature points to key ways that career development can be more culturally sensitive. Strauser et al. (2006) document how the effects of trauma can result in lower levels of work personality, which includes timeliness, on task behaviour and suitable interaction with supervisors. This finding is relevant to the needs of refugee youth who have often experienced trauma before migration.

Many authors point out the value of seeing the group as the locus of decision-making for the clients from collectivistic cultures (Mau, 2000; Leong et al., 2010). Stebleton (2007) points out the need to see how living with uncertainty has resulted in African students’ intentional avoidance of “making long-
range plans for the future because of external factors” (p. 294). Therefore, thinking about long-term career goals may not be appropriate with this cohort.

The literature asks us to examine the extent to which the support provided by employers and programs through work placements is culturally sensitive.

Gottfredson’s (as reviewed in Cochran et al., 2011) theory charts the stages of occupational development. Pertinent to this research are the latter two stages. Stage three (ages 9–13) is focused on consideration of societal valuation and status of a particular career. Stage four (14 years and older) emphasizes the importance of motivation, values and ability. Given that immigrant and refugee youth experience delayed school-to-work transitions, it is likely that their occupational development has also been interrupted. It will be important to note in the research what role work placements play in addressing this problem, if any.

Winnie-Mah and Yeh (2010) summarize Kenny’s (2003) research, which explores how the variety of contexts that frame an individual’s life can offer protection or barriers to career development. Contextual factors include family and kinship support, identification with school, dispositions towards work, expectations that a career will be satisfying, and peer relationships. The relationship between these factors and perception of barriers is considered to be significant. This approach asks us to explore how these contextual factors manifest in young people’s orientation to work placements and adjunct expectations for career development.

Elez (2014) points out that career transition for immigrants is part of the larger adaptation process. Thus, this journey has an impact on the integration and well-being of immigrants and vice versa. Employment counseling has a role in “establishing and/or strengthening factors helpful in a successful career transition.” Viewing employment in this way directs us to see if work placements support the development of strengthening factors, such as learning local labour market information and the development of language and transferable skills. It also directs us to ask if those factors contribute to the integration of young people as successful adaptation will also support youth to reach their employment goals by helping them to maintain their well-being and motivation.

**The Role of Parents**

As has already been mentioned, the literature describes a crucial role for parents in the educational attainment and labour market transition of immigrant and refugee and visible minority youth (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2012). Determinants already mentioned include: the SES of parents; their own educational attainment; their perception of their own language fluency and how that structures their advice to children about appropriate occupations; and their own access to quality labour market information and bridging social capital. Many authors document the very real need of parents for children to generate income for the family. Thus they do not promote higher educational attainment or higher aspirations (Wilkinson, 2008).

Cheng and Yuen (2012) report that “adolescents from Asian backgrounds perceive that parental influence is strong in shaping their own career and educational paths” (p. 368). Taylor and Krahn (2013) find that immigrant youth feel a strong obligation to respect parental expectations for education
and employment. The term “parental value” describes the framework of values that parents bring to bear on children’s career development.

Therefore, the interface between work and family is necessary to the career development and labour market transitions of immigrant and refugee youth, particularly for those of school age.

Exploring the parental support experienced by youth and the perceptions parents have of work placements can illuminate further the role and value of these opportunities for youth in light of their longer-term career development.

**Youth Employment Programs and Work Placements**

**Youth Development**

Khadka et al. (2011) propose that a flexible design, particularly when working with refugee youth, is important for programs aiming to meet their settlement and employment needs. Thus, there is a need to ensure that programs can borrow from different youth development models to: foster protective factors in young people’s lives; remove risk factors; promote resiliency against adverse conditions; and focus on the strengths of young people through services that “support all young people in developing a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and power” (National Clearinghouse for Families and Youth, 1998).

From a settlement perspective, the literature sets out a need for youth programs to focus on young people and their parents as well as workforce preparation, amongst other best practices not relevant to this study (Khadka et al., 2011). Of note is that, across the literature explored for this review, authors consistently mention the value of mentoring for the target group. This trend tells us to ask the extent to which work placements for immigrant and refugee youth create opportunities for formal and informal mentoring.

**Role, Outcomes and Impact of Work Placements**

No studies or research could be found that focused solely on the role and benefit of work placements for immigrant and refugee youth, but some relevant findings were scattered throughout the literature reviewed. Taylor and Vargas (2012) note the importance of connecting urban minority youth to their vocational future through work placements to mediate the effects of structural barriers. Many authors note the importance of structured exposure to the workplace for immigrant and refugee and visible minority youth, including work placements (Park-Taylor and Vargas, 2011; Wilkinson, 2008; Yan et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2008).

A literature review of experiential learning in schools, carried out by the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) found that this type of learning fostered career awareness, motivated students to graduate and had psycho-social benefits for young people. They concluded that experiential learning, including work placements, was beneficial but that unsuitable placements could do more harm than good.

Work placement is a common element of youth employment programs. Work placements facilitate the application of vocationally specific skills learned in educational programs, generic transferable life and workplace skills, and can assist clarification on long-term career goals through career sampling.
Employers value candidates who have done work placements and the generic skills developed (ibid., Crebert et al., 2004). In one study, short-term paid work placements in a youth employment program resulted in short-term employment outcomes (Bloom, 2010). The author does not differentiate between different types of paid placements and outcomes. However, we can assume that paid placements are optimal for young people. Wilkinson (2008) proposes that youth employment programs only offer short-lived employment for immigrant and refugee youth.

For unemployed and out-of-school youth, work placements can lead to actual employment, or can motivate a return to education. Obviously, for immigrant and refugee youth, work placements can achieve the aforementioned goals, but may also play a crucial role in gaining Canadian work experience, job-readiness in the Canadian context, and access to bridging capital for labour market mobility.

Collura (2010) outlines two frameworks that express necessary employability skills for young people in the U.S. context that can be used to assess the benefits achieved by immigrant and refugee youth as a result of work placement. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) give a sense of the outcomes that youth employability programs should achieve. The author notes that little is known about the extent to which these “softer skills” are achieved through programs (ibid.).

### Necessary Intersections between Youth, Programs and Employers

Many authors describe a lack of connection between young people, employers and educators when it comes to preparing youth for the labour market (Mourshed et al., 2012; Taylor and Servage, 2011; van Adams, 2007). Amongst others, Guile and Griffiths (2001) detail a lack of connection between learning in education systems and learning in the workplace. Van Adams (2007) suggests that good quality vocational education, including that provided through youth employment programs, is intertwined with employer demand. Mourshed et al. (2012) recommend that employers should help to define education curriculum. This point is relevant to youth employment programs as well. They also advocate employer commitment to hiring youth before enrolment. Simmons (2009) note the danger of supply-side employment programs in reconciling marginalized and racialized youth to the secondary labour market, characterized by unstable and poorly paid work.

Taylor and Servage (2011) caution against an over-reliance on employers to take on labour force planning without incentive (ibid.). In a global review of youth transition from school or employment program to work, van Adams (2007) recommends public financing of employers.

It will be of interest to see whether or not employers influence the content of programs participating in this research and whether or not any employers make commitments to hire any of the immigrant and refugee youth they host.

### Work Placement Elements

The table below sets out the possible elements of work placements for refugee and immigrant youth. This matrix has been compiled from all of the literature reviewed, including general work placement guidelines as well as extracting potentially effective practice from labour market transition literature.
relevant to the cohort. Obviously, many of the elements are applicable to work placements for all youth, not just the research target group.

### Table 3 Work Placement Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Employer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of work placement based on assessment of young person’s skills, qualities and needs, and employer demand</td>
<td>Orientation, induction for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation for employers to program</td>
<td>Development of role description for youth, including &quot;special project&quot; or work shadowing arrangement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientation for young people to employer and resume/job interview preparation</td>
<td>Contract between young person and employer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarification with employer of young person’s role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation of action/learning plan with young person and employer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training on Canadian work environment and employment standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up relevant support services such as settlement, language, counseling etc. and transportation arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site visits with meetings among program, youth and employer if necessary to address emerging issues</td>
<td>Time off for job search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured opportunities to reflect on work placement</td>
<td>Giving young people time to adjust and learn, particularly beginner English speakers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment of one consistent supervisor who meets regularly with young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment of mentor or workplace buddy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of work placement experience</td>
<td>Exit interview to offer feedback on achievement of action/learning plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up at regular intervals to offer further support and track outcomes</td>
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</table>

The research will note which of these supports was provided for the work placements that young people participated in.

**Employer Benefits**

Pertinent to this study are the advantages conveyed to employers who hire immigrants to result in a culturally diverse workforce. Advantages include: better reflection of the communities that
organizations are located in improving relationships with customers and other important stakeholders; improved capacity to garner advantage in international markets because of know-how and languages of a workforce that has operated in other countries and cultures; and enhanced reputation through the promotion of cultural diversity (McMahon, 2010; Skills Without Borders, 2008).

Wentling and Waight (2001) note that diverse workplaces assist the transition of minority youth into the workplace in the USA, contributing to the broader goal of improving transition outcomes for this cohort.

These trends suggest the value of investigating the extent to which employers take a normative, proactive approach when offering work placements to immigrant and refugee youth and if these opportunities are perceived to offer any of the named advantages. Of interest will be whether or not youth did placements in diverse workplaces and whether or not it was of importance to them.

**Summary**

The key findings from the literature review are as follows:

- Work placements could work to address the following barriers: lack of credential recognition; ethno-racial discrimination; lack of English fluency and perceived discrimination due to accented English; lack of Canadian work experience; the determinism of immigration status and acculturative stress.

- There is an intergenerational transfer of a lack of bridging and bonding capital from immigrant parents to youth, which results in lower quality labour market attachment. Work placement and mentoring are recommended to address this challenge.

- Immigrant and refugee youth have high educational aspirations, but face delayed educational trajectories with many having to repeat years of schooling already completed elsewhere. Thus, these youth experience difficulties reaching a state of career preparedness, meaning their ability to connect education and employment paths to achieve sustainable and rewarding careers. Work placements and employment programs could help youth assess their ability to achieve particular occupations and progress towards career readiness.

- Employment services, including work placements, should involve culturally sensitive career development including taking into account parental value and parental support available to youth. For refugee youth, services involve being aware of the effects of trauma on work personality (timeliness, on task behaviour and appropriate interaction with supervisors), and for those from collectivistic cultures valuing how decisions are made from the locus of the group and not the individual.

- There is little research on the outcomes of work placements and the inputs necessary to achieving them for youth generally, and for the target group. Some research suggests paid work placements are optimal and can achieve employment in the short-term for young people. Work placements can achieve generic and transferable skills development.

- An employer demand-led approach is recommended when preparing youth for the labour market, as supply side programs may lead to attachment to the secondary labour market, characterized by
low-paid, unstable employment. This approach would entail employers helping to define educational curriculum to prepare for work placements.

- Advantages conveyed to employers who hire immigrants are: better reflection of the communities that organizations are located in, improving relationships with customers and other important stakeholders; improved capacity to garner advantage in international markets because of know-how and languages of a workforce that has operated in other countries and cultures; and enhanced reputation through the promotion of cultural diversity. Diverse workplaces could assist transition of visible minority youth into the labour market.

**Key Research Questions**

This review of the literature has resulted in the following key research questions:

1. What do refugee and immigrant youth expect and get from work placements, including generic skills, bridging capital and labour market attachment?

2. What role do work placements play in their long-term career decision-making and occupational aspirations, or do they even see work placements as part of a long-term plan?

3. How do cultural variables such as language barriers and acculturation impact on the experience of work placements and what crucial supports do these variables necessitate?

4. Do many of these youth rely on parental value/support and how can work placement programs address this factor?

5. How can service providers assist youth to think about work placements as part of longer-term career planning in the context of interrupted and lengthened school-to-work transitions?

6. What do employers need to do to best support these youth in their placements?

7. How can service providers prepare these youth for work placement in a way that is culturally appropriate and addresses identified barriers?

8. What is the impact of work placement on the integration of and sense of belonging for young newcomers to Canada?

9. How do youth employment programs for immigrant and refugee youth address identified employment barriers through work placement?

10. To what extent are employers aware of (and need support in relation to) the employment barriers that this target group faces?
Research Framework

This chapter sets out the project scope and methodology for the study.

Project Scope and Methodology

Given the lack of published empirical evidence that this project responds to, the research was exploratory in nature and small in scale. It employed a primarily qualitative approach and used a purposive sampling procedure. The following methods were employed:

- One focus group with five staff from the programs that had agreed to assist with recruitment of young people and employers.
- In-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 22 immigrant and refugee youth, 15–29 years of age, who came to reside in Canada after the age of 12 and had completed paid or unpaid work placements. Some youth were still in school while others were not. All had been involved in some kind of employability skills program. Youth were asked to give a narrative of their engagement in work placement in accordance with the research objectives. Through an imagination exercise, they were asked to identify the supports necessary for the “most successful work placement.” If necessary, parental approval was sought. Young people were offered a $50 honorarium for their participation.
- The researcher worked with youth to complete a checklist of competencies called a “Benefits Checklist” to ascertain the specific skills they felt they had gained from work placements (See Appendices). The checklist was adapted from Collura’s (2010) description of the competences that the Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) model indicates that youth should have for successful employment. In addition, benefits related to integration were included since these are valid for the target group. It was reviewed by the research Advisory Group who made additional suggestions and approved it for the research. It is not a validated tool, although it could be used as the basis upon which to create one for future research. Youth were clearly asked to identify if they had achieved any of the benefits listed as a result of the work placements they had done as opposed to other components of their employment program.
- Face-to-face or telephone interviews with 11 employers who had experience offering work placements to immigrant and refugee youth including in some instances, hosting one of the youth

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11 This age was chosen as the exclusion criteria as it is just prior to the start of adolescence, which, as a period of intense development for young people, can be further complicated by issues linked to immigration and integration. Young people arriving as children before this age may have more time to adapt and appear to rapidly integrate. This adaptation may act as a protective feature in terms of their future that can be harnessed for career development; therefore, those who arrive at the start of adolescence may experience more risk factors affecting their career development, which services need to be cognizant of.

interviewed. Youth participants were not named to the employers and they were not asked to reflect on any youth they hosted. Instead, they reflected generally about hosting youth from the target group.

- It is important to note that this research is not an evaluation of the performance of the programs that participated.

A Note on the Imagination Exercise

The imagination exercise used to glean youth reflections on the “most successful work placement” was an activity which many youth indicated that they enjoyed as it helped them to reflect on what they had valued from the placement they had completed and to clarify what they wanted the next time around. For some, it reignited motivation to continue working towards their goals. The success of this participatory activity in this project underlines the importance of these types of methods in research (or in career development services) in ensuring that research empowers participants to solve their own problems and engages them in a co-analysis of data.

Limitations

The limitations of this research are similar to all exploratory research projects. Namely:

- The sample size for all three research cohorts is small and non-representative.
- The youth sample was particularly weighted in terms of a high number of youth who came to Canada as refugees.
- It proved difficult to recruit employers. An initial target for participation was 15‒20 employers, but this number had to be revised to ten as it became evident that the original target could be challenging to reach.
- Since programs purposively sampled participants, there may have been a tendency to recruit those who would report favourably on their placement and/or experience of hosting.
- Interviews with youth were carried out in English and required a certain level of English fluency, which means that the sample is weighted in terms of those youth who indicated that they had intermediate or advanced English proficiency. However, only one youth appeared to have difficulty using English to describe their work placement experience.
- Two of the youth did not meet research inclusion criteria: one had come to Canada before the age of 12; the other had not yet completed her work placement. However, their data was included in the research since their responses did not, during analysis, seem to skew the data.

Recruitment and Ethical Consent

Staff from the participating programs agreed to approach youth and employers to be involved in the research. Important points about this process are:
- Program staff approached youth with a letter and then forwarded contact information to the researcher if a young person was interested. The researcher contacted the youth to make sure they fit inclusion criteria and then scheduled interview times.

- All youth signed an ethical consent and were provided with a copy to keep for themselves. Parental permission forms were also developed and used if the youth was under 18. Youth were asked to choose fake names for themselves to be used for any quotes in the research.

- Program staff approached employers with a letter and the researcher followed up with interested organizations.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis. Responses to individual questions asked of each research group were content analyzed to assess the frequency with which similar responses emerged. Then, the researcher looked across responses within the data from each research group to identify themes.

The research objectives were employed to assist the organization of data, as it was summarized with relevant themes presented underneath each one. The literature review provided the key features and relationships that the researcher looked for in the data, including where trends in the literature were not found in the data from this project.

Image: Example of a "Most Successful Work Placement" Imagination Exercise
Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected from young people, employers and participating program staff.

Profile of Participants

Youth

The following points summarize the demographic profile of the young people interviewed for this research (n=22).

▪ Twelve were male and ten were female.
▪ The average age of participants was 22. The oldest was 30 (did her placement at the age of 29) and the youngest was 16.
▪ The average length of time in Canada was four years, with the longest amount of time in country at ten years and the shortest at four months.
▪ Average age at arrival was 18 years, and the median age 17. The youngest age of arrival was 10 and the eldest was 24.
▪ In terms of country of origin, seven participants were from the Middle East, seven were from Asia, two were from Africa (Congo), three were from South America, one was from the Caribbean, one was from North America (Mexico), and one was from Eastern Europe (Russia).
▪ In all cases, the young people had come to Canada as dependents of their families. The most frequently identified immigration class for parents was refugee (n=11), followed by Family Class (n=8) and Skilled Worker (n=3).
▪ Thirteen young people indicated that their English language ability was intermediate, seven described their ability as advanced and two said they had beginner English.
▪ Eight young people had completed high school before arrival, two had completed a post-secondary Bachelors degree and one had completed a post-secondary diploma. The rest had to complete high school on arrival to Canada.
▪ Twenty young people identified having special skills developed outside of school. Most often, they indicated customer service as a special skill.
▪ Thirteen young people reported having worked prior to arrival.
▪ Twelve of the young people indicated that they were employed at the time of the interview, seven part-time and five full-time. The most frequent type of labour market attachment was in customer service, followed by food service.
Nine of the young people had completed a Skills Link program, seven were involved with the PAWS program, two had been involved with Moving Ahead — Free Running and one with Job Options (MOSAIC). Three were involved in other life skills and employability programs.

Employers

Eleven employers participated in interviews. Five were non-profit organizations, two were in the retail services sector, two were film and television production companies, one was a recruitment agency and the last was a health care service provider.

Young People’s Work Experience Narratives

All of the young people interviewed indicated that their work placements had been positive experiences, to varying degrees. The majority indicated high satisfaction with the support from their employment programs. Eight of the youth completed their placements in the retail industry. The vast majority of youth who did their placements in retail were also still in high school and working to complete the credits required for work experience in the high school curriculum. Five youth did placements at non-profit organizations, two worked at social enterprises, one worked in a human resources firm, three worked in the service industry and two completed placements in the film and television industry. Finally, one youth completed a placement in the automotive repair industry.

The shortest duration of work placement was one week and the longest was three months. About half of the youth received a wage subsidy during their placement. Those who received payment availed themselves of work placement through a Skills Link program.

Box 1 shows the main challenges that youth reported when asked to describe any they had experienced during work placement, in order of most frequently to least frequently named.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1</th>
<th>Main Challenges during Work Placement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication problems (not understanding instructions, taking longer to learn tasks or customers/other staff exhibiting frustration due to youth’s language difficulties, not having enough of an opportunity to communicate with others)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning new technologies such as price checkers, software programs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation (placement far away from home or not reimbursed for money spent on gas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical environment of workplace (too hot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shyness, difficulty talking to customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not being allowed to learn how to use the cash machine in retail settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not understanding Canadian workplace culture and how communication styles differ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All but one of the youth interviewed were members of visible minority groups; however, despite this feature, none reported any experience of ethno-cultural discrimination, although some did reflect on how they felt that potential employers perceived their accented English negatively.
Work Placement Narrative Themes

From our interviews with participating youth about their work experiences, we have identified six themes that emerged regarding the benefits that work placements offered them, as well as their experiences of career development. We have provided illustrations for each of the themes below. Quite often, many or all of these themes would appear together in an individual young person’s interviews. The themes are:

- Participants felt like they were treated like a “Canadian”
- The placements were viewed as an intermediate step toward long-term goals
- Placements allowed participants to feel a connection to their community
- Participants stressed the importance of language confidence
- Participants felt like they were treated like part of the team
- Participants described interrupted and lengthened career development trajectories

Sometimes these themes would be interconnected. In particular, a youth being “treated like part of the team” or the company could also be linked to feeling that they had been “treated like a Canadian.”
Treatment like a “Canadian”

Youth were asked whether or not their work placements had made a difference to their lives in Canada or if placements had contributed to their integration. Many youth said that placements had assisted integration because they had been treated like a “Canadian” during their work placements and that this theme was a positive feature “like the way that work big company, everybody knows the company and my name in head office and everybody knows me...I am part of a different family, big family all from different lands but it’s still Canada” (Naio). Often, this outcome took place as a result of youth being placed with hosts that had ethno-culturally diverse staff and/or clientele. Emaan’s snapshot in Box 2 illustrates this theme.

### Box 2 Emaan – Treated like a Canadian

Emaan came to Canada at the age of 23. She came as a dependent of her mother who gained permanent residency through the Family Sponsorship program. She has only lived in Canada for four months and was referred by her local WorkBC Centre to a Skills Link program through which she availed herself of a work placement with a non-profit community services organization. This organization serves a number of different target groups, “[So] it’s a good place to learn about Canadian people, learn about different cultures, [about] different way to help people.” Emaan’s long-term goal is to find a career where she can help new immigrants, particularly girls, in some way. She described the gender discrimination she had experienced in her country of origin.

Emaan reported that her work placement was “good” with no difficulties, except a concern about the work placement being temporary and that the host might not be able to hire her. She worked on a variety of programs in the organization including childcare, an after-school program and a pre-teen program.

She described being treated with respect and “like a Canadian” during her work placement, “They have 100 per cent respect of humanity, they don’t care where I am from, [they] respect what I think, I be easy to be friends with them... If I see the big boss in there, he [is] still kind, patient, able to help everyone, every single person so kind, I never feel I am Afghan, my language is different, my religion is different [they] respect me like a Canadian in there.”

Emaan revised her career goals after she arrived in Canada. Her original goal was to become a surgeon but she felt that the education necessary for that is too long and expensive, so now she is trying to decide between journalism and social work. She is currently studying English so that she can access post-secondary education here in Canada.
Intermediate Step towards Long-term Goals

Most of the young people interviewed had plans to continue on to post-secondary education. Thus, labour market attachment (LMA) was to allow them to make a contribution to their family household and/or to finance pursuit of their long-term career goals. Narratives positioned the work placement as part of a progression to further education, training or employment that often helped achieve short-term LMA or clarified whether or not they wanted to pursue their long-term goal. Only two young people were working in a job that they felt reflected their ultimate career goal. Michelle’s snapshot shows how her work placement motivated her career development.

Box 3 Michelle — Intermediate Step towards Long-Term Goals

Three years ago, Michelle came to Canada as a Skilled Worker — Dependent at the age of 24. Before arriving in Canada, she completed a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. After doing part-time work in the restaurant industry here, she found her way to her employment program through which she participated in a work placement at a company doing data collection and database organization. Although the placement was not wholly related to her qualifications, she enjoyed it because, “Once accepted by one company more confident to go to the next one [it’s a] place to go to start.” During her placement, she also got to experience other parts of the business’s operations.

She reported “My first concern is English. I can tell every week [during the work placement] I improved a lot.” Michelle described how, prior to her placement, she felt that her accent was perceived negatively by potential employers and how this put her at a disadvantage to other candidates, “One time I went to an interview, start talking and people look at you, you are really competitive with local.”

She also indicated that she is still in contact with her supervisor at the company she did her placement with. After she did her work placement, she was not able to find full-time employment so she contacted another employment program through which she availed herself of a co-operative position. From that, she progressed into full-time employment in her chosen field.

However, she described how her first work placement was central to her achieving her employment goal: “It changed my mind, I feel like maybe I should try other jobs, maybe I should challenge myself. Almost all friends around me are working in a restaurant for five years and I think ‘Oh my god, this will be my life in Canada’...without the work placement I can’t find professional job.”

Michelle articulated the value of a professional job, “You will feel more belonging to this job, you feel like you can afford yourself, your life here, you get new friends, some of them might know more places [you will] have more connection with the new place in Canada, more to have fun, enjoy more local life.” She pointed out that if she had continued to work in restaurants, which were primarily dominated by members of the same ethno-cultural community she belonged to, she would know “less about places to go.”
Connection to the Community

Some of the youth interviewed mentioned specifically how work placements facilitated their knowledge of and connection to their local communities. Rahfe described how her placement contributed to her integration into Canada because, “If you are sitting in a house, you are not part of the community; but if you work, you can feel part of the community.” Charlotte’s snapshot also demonstrates this theme.

Box 4 Charlotte — Connection to Community

Charlotte is 21 years old and came to Canada eight months ago as a Skilled Worker — Dependant. She was referred to a Skills Link program by her local WorkBC Centre and completed a work placement as part of that program in January 2014. Before arrival, she was studying to complete a Bachelor of Arts in Geology, but did not complete it before she left. Besides her interest in geology, Charlotte had a strong history of community voluntarism so her Skills Link Case Manager referred her to a non-profit community social services organization for work placement.

While her primary goal for the work placement was to get Canadian experience, she also described the goal of, “Getting to know my community better and the programs it offered, how to give back.”

She described her work placement as a very positive experience where she was able to sample a broad range of programs with a variety of target groups and said that it, “helped me realize I’m not the only one going through this. Vancouver has so many immigrants.” Once she completed her placement, she was hired part-time as a Program Assistant at the organization. As a result of her placement, she is also thinking about whether or not she might pursue early childhood education instead of a career in geology.

A key benefit of the work placement was how it fostered a connection to her community. She said it, “made me more integrated in society. I know a lot more places [we] always go out on field trips and learning about other cultures as well.” Charlotte plans to continue with her post-secondary education here in Canada.
Importance of Language Confidence

Some youth described a lack of confidence attributed to low English proficiency or a felt negative perception of accented English by potential employers, “[I] didn’t speak English that well, had problems communicating...hard to understand [it was] a great experience...have to be persistent with people. At times, I felt I was bothering them” (Anna). Often youth reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate in English that occurred as a result of their work placements. Ben’s snapshot shows both of these features.

Box 5    Ben — Importance of Language Confidence

Ben is 22. He came to Canada at the age of 21 through the Family Sponsorship program. His WorkBC Case Manager referred him to a local social enterprise where he participated in employment and skills training and a work placement on site. In his country of origin, he completed a diploma in architectural design. His placement involved woodworking, so he felt there was a connection between that and his previous qualifications.

Ben also indicated that his work placement had been very positive and focused on its role in improving his English language skills: “[It] was a great opportunity to socialize, know your strengths and weaknesses and see what you have to offer, gain a lot of confidence... my English gets a lot better.” He noted his lack of confidence with English and what he felt were negative perceptions of his accent as it related to seeking employment, “Because of my accent I don’t like to talk too much, people don’t understand me, always someone out there that judge I think I need to improve my English.” He focused on the importance of language in achieving labour market attachment, saying, “English plays a major role, they need to make more English course.”

After his placement, his host asked him to come back and do some finishing work for a couple of months and he also did some work on a construction site. He is currently unemployed and seeking work. Due to health problems that took place as a result of working on dusty construction sites, he is re-evaluating his career goal and is considering training in the health care field.

Ben said that the work placement gave him “a lot of knowledge about the outside world and what to expect in Canadian society.”
**Treated Like Part of the Team**

Many youth reported liking their placements because they had been treated just like other employees and/or had been able to sample all or most of the tasks that employees would do: “From the first day, they treat that I am working there [it] makes me so happy I want to do my work experience for my whole life” (Tony). This feature of work placement had the by-product of fostering some young people’s understanding of what fair treatment in the workplace would be like, which they described as being different from the work world in their countries of origin. Samaan illustrates this theme.

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**Box 6  Samaan — Treated Like Part of the Team**

Samaan is 21 years old. He came to Canada with his family as a refugee. Upon arrival, he was told that he needed to complete high school here, but he was mistakenly informed that he was “too old” to attend his local high school. By the time the school figured out its mistake, most classes were full so he had to enrol in classes that had space, but which placed him with peers who were much younger than him. He felt out of place so dropped out of school. He progressed to the program through which he did his work placement after completing another life skills and employment program, during which staff noticed his interest in filmmaking.

Samaan did a five-week work placement with a post-production company in 2013, which he described as “really awesome.” He reports being immersed in the whole process of post-production and being given a significant amount of responsibility very soon after he started the placement. One week after he started, he began to work as an editor’s assistant for one of the shows that the company works with. Samaan described having one consistent supervisor, as well as a work buddy during his work placement.

In his words, the work placement fostered an expectation of fair treatment in the film industry, “I experience a good behaviour from them so one day if I see bad behaviours I won’t know the whole industry is like that because I know good people.” Samaan also indicated that his work placement contributed to his integration to Canada, “Because I felt that I am part of that now without [them] seeing or checking, because they never ask [or] treat me like I am from Iran or I’m not Canadian or not one of them.” Samaan is still connected with his host supervisor who has said that he will contact Samaan if any employment opportunities arise.

Samaan described always having an interest in film-making, but he only began to see this occupation as something that was achievable as a result of the employment programs and work placement that he completed. He is planning to study film at Capilano University and is currently working two part-time jobs and working with peers to make a short film for the Sundance film festival.
Interrupted and Lengthened Trajectories

Repeatedly, narratives of work placement also reflected how youth had experienced delays and interruptions in their education and career development due to the barriers they face. Many had had to repeat schooling already completed. Others talked about how the process of settlement interrupted their career development because they needed to work immediately on arrival and then became stuck in those survival jobs. Sonia’s snapshot shows how her career development has been delayed due to the barriers and interruptions she has faced.

Box 7 Sonia — Interrupted and Lengthened Trajectories

Sonia, 22 years of age, came to Canada four and a half years ago with her mother and sister. They were refugees to Canada. Soon after her arrival, she gave birth to her son who is now four years old. She was in preparatory college in her country of origin and had to repeat some high school in Canada, which she described as a repetition of curriculum she had already done.

She originally settled in Winnipeg, but moved to Vancouver because her baby son became quite ill and she felt that the warmer climate here would be of benefit. Her mother soon followed her.

She described initially wanting to pursue a nursing education; in fact, she took prerequisite courses for a nursing program but she found she could not participate because she could not find affordable childcare. At that time, she was also studying English and described how supportive her English teacher was: “She always encouraging me when I am trying to give up. She told me I can go learn other stuff for now because it’s not going to be easy to study and have daycare [she said] take practice school and work for a while.”

As a result of that discussion, Sonia decided to participate in an automotive preparation training program through which she did two work placements, one during the program and the other at the end, both for two weeks. She focused on the placement she did at the end of her program and indicated that it had been positive and that she was allowed to take on responsibilities not traditionally given during placements “[They] really had a confidence with me... [they] let me paint Ferrari, they say they never do that before, my manager said ‘I believe you can do it.’ He trusted me and let me paint the whole car and everything was excellent.”

She described the benefits of her host’s diverse workplace, “They have multicultural. They learn Canadian culture plus they still have their own culture [The] owner was from Italy and manager from Germany,” Sonia is still in contact with the garage where she did her placement and said they let her go and fix her car there if she needs to.

Unfortunately, Sonia has been unable to find work since she completed her work placement and described how unemployment was preventing her from progressing in her career development, “If I’m not getting any job, I can’t change to try something else.” She reported that potential employers are citing a lack of Canadian experience as a reason for not hiring her and said, “When are you going to get this experience if someone doesn’t give you the opportunity to try?”

Sonia went to her local WorkBC Centre for assistance to find employment and is currently seeing a Case Manager there.
Expectations and Outcomes for Work Placements

This section compares the data from youth, program staff and employers about what youth expect to happen through work placements and the outcomes achieved.

Expectations for Work Placements

Young people were prompted to describe the goals or accomplishments they wanted to achieve as a result of the work placements they had completed. The main goals named are set out in the box below in order of most frequently to least frequently mentioned.

**Box 8   Named Goals for Work Placements**

- Gaining experience in and practicing the skills necessary for a field they were interested in and could include on resumes
- Labour market attachment (with the host)
- Improving language skills
- Gaining Canadian experience
- Gaining confidence

Many of the young people still in high school hoped that they would get jobs with the employers they actually did their work placement with and for most, this expectation was not met. This expectation was not held by most of the out-of-school young people who seemed to understand that the work placement played the role of getting them experience they could include on their resumes for future job searches. Generally, young people felt that the expectations they had for their work placements had been achieved.

Staff from participating programs reflected on the main expectations they hear from young people about work placements and how they manage those expectations in programming. They, too, mentioned that young people often expect to be hired by their hosts. They manage this expectation by explaining to youth that they can always go back to employer in the future to enquire about opportunities. They also explain that the placement gives them a greater likelihood of being hired by a different employer.

The main benefits that employers noted for youth as a result of work placement were generally described in terms of the development of transferable workplace skills: “[They] get a feel for the workforce” (employer no. 1). Some described community connection or inclusion as a benefit: “Build connection with other people in the community, that’s where they can start building their network, sense of belonging” (employer no. 4). One indicated Canadian work experience as a benefit.
Outcomes for Work Placement

At the end of their interviews, youth were asked to complete a “Benefits” checklist to assess the outcomes that they felt they had achieved as a result of work placement. These benefits were grouped into outcome areas. The results for each area are presented below along with relevant qualitative data from youth, employers and program staff.

Career Development

Box 9 shows the order in which young people indicated they experienced outcomes related to career development (most frequently experienced to least frequently).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 9</th>
<th>Career Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Got a reference for future job searches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Improved my ability to cope with any challenges I might face in reaching my job goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Expanded my network of people who are in the occupation/industry I want to be in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Practiced the skills and qualities necessary for my chosen occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Figured out the steps I need to take to achieve my job goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Understand the skills and qualities necessary for the occupation I want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Figured out the occupation I want to achieve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Got a job that can pay my bills while I keep working towards my chosen occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Got connected to a mentor or someone who can guide me on career development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Figured out I don’t want to do the occupation linked to my work placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Got a job in my chosen occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Got any job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top three outcomes in relation to career development were “got a reference,” “improved my ability to cope with any challenges I might face in reaching my job goal,” and “expanded my network.” The outcomes least frequently identified were “got any job” or “got a job in my chosen occupation.”

The qualitative data from young people about their work placements showed that many young people felt that their experiences had given them the chance to sample occupations they were interested in or learn skills that they could employ when they reached their goal. Some young people also talked about how their work placement had allowed them to see that there were a range of options open to them for their career development, which they had been unaware of before they did their placements “because before doing that, I never even thought about those jobs, know that there are lots of other options [it] broaden of my horizon, what to look for in a job” (Saskia).

Program staff indicated that the key outcomes for programs related to those tracked above included: labour market attachment; reference on a resume; learning marketable/transferable skills, and continuation of education. We know from the demographic profile of youth that the majority identified
that they were going to continue their education. We can also see that many youth identified that they had learned and practiced the skills and qualities necessary for their chosen occupation, which relates to the outcome identified by staff of developing marketable skills. Staff did identify that it can be a challenge to get youth to see that no matter what placement they do, they are developing transferable skills despite engaging youth in a discussion of how skills developed through placements are applicable to their longer-term goals.

Over half of the youth attributed labour market attachment to the work placement. A few of the youth interviewed had been hired by their host. Staff noted that labour market attachment was important but that it did not denote success for programs, as other outcomes were also deemed significant. They did acknowledge that funders emphasized this outcome, but that it was not always relevant to young people’s overall career development and the employment barriers they were facing. This program challenge was very relevant for the participating Skills Links programs, where there are targets for participant labour market attachment. Of note is that the majority of young people employed had participated in Skills Link programs. Half of those youth who were not working were still in high school.

A closer analysis of the employment outcomes of youth showed:

- For out-of-school youth, there did not appear to be any relationship between length of time of the work placement or length of time elapsed since the work placement and employment.
- No themes emerged in relation to language level and employment.
- Young people who were of African or Afro-Caribbean descent were unemployed.
- Young people who were unemployed had come to Canada either as refugees or dependents in the Family Class.
- When asked whether or not they had hired newcomer youth they had hosted on placements, only a few employers indicated that they had. The main reason for this response was a lack of available opportunities: “No position was available at that time” (employer no. 11).

Basic Skills

Box 10 below shows the order in which young people indicated they experienced outcomes from their work placements related to the development of basic skills (most frequently to least frequently selected).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. Improved my listening skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Improved my English speaking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Improved my presentation skills (i.e., talking in front of a group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Improved my English reading skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Improved my information technology skills (e.g., using a computer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Improved my English writing skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of young people indicated an improvement in basic skills as a result of the work placements they did. In particular, they all noted that they improved their listening skills. As reported above, a theme in youth work placement narratives was the importance of developing language confidence. Staff also reflected the importance of sourcing work placements for young people, which allowed them to speak English consistently, develop their language skills and gain confidence in their communication in English. They described making considerable efforts to find these types of placements, or to find non front-line placements for young people whose English was low.

**Job Search Skills**

Box 11 below shows the order of in which young people selected outcomes related to the development of job search skills (most frequently to least frequently selected). Youth were less likely, compared to other outcome areas, to attribute job search skills to their work placements because they had not applied the skills learned in their programs to the acquisition of their placements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 11</th>
<th>Job Search Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Learned how to do a job interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Learned how to do a resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Learned how to search for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Learned how to fill out a written job application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Learned how to write a cover letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Learned how to fill out an online job application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Box 11 show that the most frequently practiced job search skills for work placements were “learned how to do a job interview” and “learned how to do a resume.” While all the youth would have learned these skills as part of the employment programs they were participating in, these skills were less likely to be applied to the sourcing and acquisition of placements. Only one of the participating programs required youth to find their own work placement, which shows why so few indicated the outcome of “learned how to search for a job.” In relation to the other outcomes, staff noted the challenge of encouraging hosts to carry out proper interviews with young people so that they could practice the interview skills that they learn in programs. They recommended, “Carry out an interview with young people, youth will be more engaged [and] feel like they earned it.”

**Succeeding on the Job**

Except for “learned leadership skills,” the majority of youth indicated achieving outcomes related to succeeding on the job. Box 12 shows the order in which youth reported developing competencies related to succeeding on the job (most frequently to least frequently selected).
In their qualitative reflections, youth often highlighted how they had learned teamwork skills and some noted that this was different to workplace skills needed in their country of origin: “The work placement] was awesome. I like the teamwork they have. They told me about the safety that they have, if there emergency how I could use the phone...always work as a group to get the job done...here [in Canada] we work as a group but there [in Syria] they don’t work as a group” (Tony). As already indicated, staff noted the importance of programs achieving development of transferable skills, to which the outcomes in the box above belong.

**Self-Confidence and Personal Skills**

The majority of youth interviewed experienced outcomes related to self-confidence and personal skills.

As can be seen above, “improvement in self-confidence” was the outcome most frequently selected by youth in relation to this benefits area. For some, this improvement was closely connected to how they were treated in the workplace. Omar noted this improvement when he was asked about whether or not the work placement played a role in his sense of belonging to Canada: “Yes, like make friends and
communication, because it’s Canadian company and all the workers from Canada. When I work with them I felt like I’m part of them and give me more confidence.”

Program staff also underlined the outcome of self-confidence. They also emphasized the outcome of “keeping momentum going” which echoes the outcome above “increased my motivation to get into the job I want.” However, they noted that the “backtrack can happen fast with immigrant and refugee youth.” The motivation outcome was chosen least frequently by youth. This result raises the question of whether or not work placements make young people more aware of the barriers they are facing and to what extent this decreases the motivation to achieving their long-term goals.

Integration

The majority of young people indicated that they had achieved outcomes related to integration, except in the case of “started to volunteer.” Box 14 shows the order in which young people selected these benefits (most frequently to least frequently selected).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 14</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Enhanced understanding of skills for adapting to the Canadian work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Made new friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Feel more integrated into Canadian society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Increased my sense of belonging to my community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Enhanced understanding of how communication styles differ between here and my country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Started to volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program staff noted the importance of fostering awareness of Canadian workplace culture and skills as an outcome for programs and we can see that for these youth, the programs achieved these outcomes. Of note is that many of the norms that youth said they learned are things that would, most likely, be second nature to most Canadian-born youth: “Back home, no code, no password, in every single room [you] need to know password here, is huge machine” (Emaan).

Consideration of the theme “treated like a Canadian” above demonstrates how the outcomes of “increased my sense of belonging” and “feel more integrated into Canadian society” were achieved through work placements.

One employer noted the benefit of understanding more about Canada as a result of the work placement, “Hopefully [they will] get a good introduction to Canada and Canadian life” (employer no. 5).
Impact of Cultural Variables on the Perceived Role and Value of Work Placements

This section presents data about the main employability variables relevant to immigrant and refugee youth identified by youth, employers and staff. Employers were asked what their understanding was of the employment barriers faced by immigrant and refugee youth. Staff were presented with a range of variables and asked to comment on how, if at all, programs addressed the barriers in work placements. Youth were asked to identify any challenges they experienced during their placements. Sometimes they also reflected, unprompted, on employment barriers they were facing, and these comments were also documented during analysis.

Parental Value and Support

In their interviews, youth were prompted to reflect on what their parents thought of their work placements and career plans. The role of parents was significant for many. For instance, many youth still in high school and living with their parents said they felt an obligation to work to contribute to their households. These youth were from families who had come to Canada as refugees or were sponsored by family members. For some youth, what their parents wanted for their career development was paramount. Christine’s snapshot below demonstrates how parental value impacted on her overall career development and perception of the work placement.
Box 15  Christine — the Importance of Parental Value

Seven years ago, Christine came to Canada with her family under the Family Class program. She was 16 and had almost finished high school in her country of origin but upon arrival in Canada was put back to Grade 10. She said that prior to coming to Canada she wanted to go to college, but that the experience of having to repeat years “makes me think I am a repeater, it really slowed me down.” She ended up not going to college after graduation and went to work in Canadian Tire because she “didn’t have a goal.”

After Canadian Tire and before she went to the program through which she availed herself of a work placement, she tried a sonography program in BCIT but dropped out because she could not understand it. She also went to Kwantlen Polytechnic for one term to study production, but also did not remain in that program.

Christine did her work placement as a production assistant on a television show in late 2013 and enjoyed it, although she described it as not a perfect fit, raising doubts in her mind as to whether or not she should work in film-making, which is her ideal goal: “[The work placement] made me think maybe there’s no chance I can make my own film. I will do film as my hobby.”

The centrality of parental value was emphasized in Christine’s discussion of career development and the work placement, “My mom wanted me to take nursing, [it’s] not for me, that’s why I ended up being in other jobs, trying to find a way to have my own experience, what I want to do.” In regard to the work placement she did, Christine felt that “she [her mother] doesn’t support me,” and that she finds the lack of support depressing. She discussed trying to find a career that would make both her and her mom satisfied, “I just want to support my mom, not nursing related, but in the hospital ... that’s what my mom wants.”

Christine has just secured employment as a host in a restaurant since she had not been able to secure employment in the film industry since completing her work placement.

Staff from participating programs identified the importance of involving parents in discussions about work placements, particularly when youth are still in school. They also noted the importance of being aware that “familial influence may affect youth choices.” A couple of employers noted that familial obligation and parental involvement might need to be taken into account when hosting immigrant and refugee youth on placements.

Parents’ lack of social capital was often evident or articulated in the youth interviews. For some youth it was evident that their own parents efforts to support their children’s job searches were yielding few results, “[My mother] feels sorry for me, I have so much experience, she don’t understand me...sometimes she stay at home from work to help me do up resumes, sometimes asks for me offer to work and help me out” (Sonia, currently unemployed). Other youth knew that their parents did not have the knowledge necessary to assist, “If I want to find a better job is hard, they [parents] can’t help me in Canada. They still don’t know about Canada” (Jack).

Language

As has already been mentioned, language fluency is a variable that was referenced repeatedly by youth themselves and by program staff. The majority of employers also noted this barrier as one that affected young people’s ability to find and keep jobs: “ESL [English as a Second Language] challenges are likely
also significant for the early years of a new career” (employer no. 11). They generally said they took language abilities into account when providing work placements to immigrant and refugee youth: “You take more time right, find out what [their] comfort levels are at communicating, for those [who] are not more comfortable do more research side of things [for] others, get on phones, build their language skills...depends on the person themselves” (employer no. 1).

Lack of Canadian Experience

All three groups of research participants mentioned this variable and that it needed to be addressed through work placements: “The main outcome that we try to provide is Canadian experience, they do struggle with not having Canadian experience” (employer no. 7).

Ethno-racial Discrimination

Only program staff mentioned that this variable was important to take into account in relation to work placements. They reported the need to choose employers for placements carefully to avoid young people experiencing discrimination. In particular, they noted looking for hosts that have diverse workplaces. They also reported talking to clients about their rights in relation to discrimination.

While none of the young people mentioned concerns about ethno-racial discrimination per se, some did present concerns about negative perceptions of accented English. Staff focus group data showed that sourcing placements for young people was more or less difficult depending on the young person’s accent and said it was easier to find placements for people from Russia or the Philippines and more difficult to place young people who speak Mandarin as a first language.

Lack of Bridging Capital

It is evident from the consideration of data related to parental support that some youth lacked the bridging capital that could help them to achieve employment. Program staff acknowledged this variable and usually described it as a need to develop formal and informal support networks. Program staff worked to foster this through work placement by encouraging peers within programs to support each other and encouraging youth to attend job fairs, employer presentations and information interviews, as well as making sure that youth were able to get references from work placement employers. Staff did not mention working with employers to see how work placements could be used to develop bridging capital post the placement. Only a minority of employers indicated that they intentionally maintained contact with youth post the placement so that they could communicate to them about job opportunities with them or with clients: “Usually they stay in contact with us...we keep them in our database as well have contracts with part-time work [and will] call them first, quite often. Nine of the last ten interns have progressed into work” (employer no. 9).

Some young people did mention that they had developed industry contacts through their placements that they could draw on in the future, as can be seen in the snapshots from Samaan and Michelle above.
Gender

Program staff and some employers referred to this variable, mainly as it impacted on the nature of placements available since they may have had to take into account cultural expectations for females. So, for instance, some employers were chosen on the basis that they would allow youth to wear a headscarf. Sometimes, it was noted that placements had to accommodate expectations that parents had for girls to take care of other children in the family or be discontinued.

A few employers brought up this variable in terms of culturally prescribed behaviour for girls that resulted in “shyness.” A minority of employers mentioned that this could be a challenge in Canadian culture where initiative and assertiveness are valued, “We don’t value shyness...we want women who can speak up, have an opinion, be able to be a team player” (employer no. 5).

Acculturation

As previously noted, many young people commented on the ways in which work placements increased their sense of belonging to their communities and made them feel more integrated into Canadian society, as well as fostered Canadian workplace skills. Staff data showed that programs need to support this process. They also acknowledged that it was not a one way process, “Talk about culture while facilitating the group. Everyone has behaviour informed by cultural norms.”

Employer Awareness of Variables

Generally employers were not aware of the full range of employment barriers that immigrant and refugee youth face. The barrier named most frequently was lack of English, followed by lack of Canadian experience. A small minority named barriers related to a lack of bridging capital — “establishing a network of contacts and obtaining initial employment opportunities which provide the foundation for a career” (employer no. 11). Some employers voiced a concern about hosting youth who had higher needs: “[placements] available based on what we have and what their strengths are... [we are] very flexible if they have not very many skills, not very outgoing. If they need staff guidance all the time, there will be fewer and fewer opportunities...less English...less and less available, staff are too busy” (employer no. 5).

Career Development and Work Placements for Refugee and Immigrant Youth

This section presents data from youth, employers and staff in relation to the connection between work placements and career preparation for immigrant and refugee youth, as well as school-to-work transitions. This part of the report also looks at results relevant to the cultural awareness of staff and employers.

Cultural Awareness

Program staff were asked to indicate how programs responded to a range of variables and demonstrated a high level of awareness of those that might need to be taken into consideration in relation to work placements for immigrant and refugee youth. Those variables included finding a fit between placements and the cultural or religious beliefs of the youth and taking into account parental...
value or community/familial influence on work placement and career goals. One gap in this awareness seemed to be the role that a young person’s immigration status might play in their employability, as none commented on this variable.

Employers were asked if they thought it was important to know if a youth they were hosting was a newcomer, as well as what barriers they thought youth faced to employment. Across the responses to these questions, only a few employers noted that it would be useful to be aware of the culture or country that the youth was coming from: “something in family background that’s harder, refugee families, there can be issues with attentiveness…it’s kind of nice to have that background from the program” (employer no. 8).

Career Preparation and School-to-Work Transitions

The theme of interrupted and lengthened trajectories in young people’s narratives of work placements demonstrates how the career readiness and school-to-work transitions of the youth in this research have been affected through repetition of schooling or by other barriers specific to the process of settlement. It seems that the work placements that youth completed did redress some of the effects of these interruptions and delays by clarifying what work they were interested in.

Many of the youth mentioned that they had been surprised by the availability of the employment programs and placements they participated in, mentioning that they would have to pay for such services in their country of origin or that this type of help did not exist. Some described how they found their program late in their settlement and that it would have been better to avail themselves of it earlier in the process. Marianna enjoyed her work placement in a non-profit organization, but afterwards felt she could not pursue a career goal related to it because of financial limitations, so she returned to work in the industry she was in prior to her program:

“I wish I had found it when I moved here, I would have found the right path right away. At the moment I feel I have no more option. [It was] very beneficial but because I had already been into workforce but when I got out I found that I wanted to make money...for a year living on very little money, just enough to survive [I] went back to a restaurant and got stuck again.”

In terms of career preparation, the data shows that, particularly for the out-of-school youth, their educational levels do not align to their career goals. Thus, most indicated that they intend to continue their educational journeys. For the older youth, the road to career preparation is delayed due to the need to work to finance their studies. Many were at an age where their contemporaries pursuing post-secondary education would already have those studies well underway. Many of the youth, both in and out of school, were still working to gain sufficient language fluency to continue their education.

Part of career preparation is knowledge of potential occupations. A few of the older youth were still not sure what their career goal was and their work placement had not clarified their objective. Across the sample, those youth who were interested in a career goal related to “helping people” usually only identified social work as a potential occupation. They did not mention the wide range of other “helping” occupations available.
Staff were asked whether or not they found it a challenge to get youth to focus on their long-term career development, particularly for youth whose cultural background might not emphasize long-term planning. They indicated no challenge in regard to encouraging longer-term career development as part of programs, but that this exercise was in conflict with funder targets for labour market attachment. They also discussed the impact of delayed schooling on young people and the need to work with young people to change negative perceptions of themselves when they are placed in classes with peers much younger than they are, many of whom already have jobs.

**Work Placement — Key Features and Supports**

Employers, youth and staff were asked about the supports that are necessary to optimize work placements for immigrant and refugee youth.

**Key Features of Work Placements**

As part of their interviews, after youth recounted their experience of work placement, they were asked to envision what the most successful work placement would look like if they did the same one again or had to do another one in the future. From a content analysis of those exercises, the key criteria they set out were:

- Learning and application of vocationally-oriented skills related to specific occupations — i.e., nurse, social worker or chef;
- Participating in work that makes a young person feel valued, like they are “giving back” or making a contribution, or are part of a team;
- Working in an environment that is non-judgmental, safe, respectful and free from discrimination; and
- Learning communication and/or English skills.

**Program Supports for Youth**

Youth and program staff were asked to give a detailed list of supports that employers and programs should provide at each stage of the placement. The table below presents a content analysis of their responses in relation to the supports programs should provide.
Table 4  Work Placement Supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
<td>▪ Young person researches opportunities themselves</td>
<td>▪ Addressing non-employment needs: transportation, housing etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Training/ preparation for the placement</td>
<td>▪ Setting up informal support network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Program making contact with and checking out the workplace for/with the young person</td>
<td>▪ Training on job search skills, employment rights, job readiness and workplace culture, relevant certificates (Work Safe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ One-to-one coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensuring youth understand purpose of placement and benefits thereof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Development of learning plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During</strong></td>
<td>▪ Program staff checking in with young person either through site visits, phone calls, meetings with young person and/or employer</td>
<td>▪ Check-in with young person, communicate about achievements, challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Do site visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Manage logistics, i.e. wage subsidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After</strong></td>
<td>▪ Follow-up from program staff to assist with job search, or see how employment is progressing, if youth was hired</td>
<td>▪ Review evaluation from employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Follow-up with youth to assist job searching, networking, update resumes/ references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Evaluate work placement with youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the table above shows a consistency between youth and program staff as to what work placement supports should be provided. One inconsistency is notable: youth did not highlight access to non-employment services as part of the support required prior to work placements. However, their need for other services to ensure that they are work placement ready might not be something that young people are aware of.

Program staff and youth highlighted that there were structured opportunities to reflect on placements during and after, either through individual check-ins or by the youth actually coming back to the program at regular intervals to engage in group discussions about placements. Youth had very few recommendations for program support when they were asked to comment on it in light of the placements they had completed: “I felt like I’m important from both sides” (Samaan).

Only three youth had specific recommendations in terms of program support. One wanted more support on moving forward post-placement. Two mentioned that they would have preferred the program to either initiate or have an established relationship with their employer, which was not the case with the hosts they did their placements with: “[when the program does not contact the employer for you, the host] does not see you as a candidate” (Michelle).

Employers interviewed were not asked to give detailed list of supports, but to comment generally on the supports they felt were essential or if there were any gaps. The main support they identified was the need for consistent check-ins by program staff at regular intervals with young people while on work placement.
Employer Support of Young People

The table below details an analysis of the supports that youth and program staff said that employers should provide. Youth gave these suggestions in the context of thinking about their “most successful work placement.”

**Table 5: Employer Supports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Before**    | • The employer setting out a clear description of what a young person’s role will be, sometimes in negotiation with the young person and/or the employment program staff | • Carrying out a proper interview with the young person  
• Designation of one consistent supervisor who knows the learning plan  
• Take on youth they are interested in hiring  
• Develop a job description |
| **During**    | • Consistent feedback and encouragement from employer                 | • Provision of work buddies  
• Engagement in on the job training  
• Early communication with program staff if any issues  
• Remain flexible with youth who need more support |
| **After**     | • Receive feedback from employer about performance  
• Get hired by the employer  
• Or, ongoing connection/support by employer | • Offer some appreciation of youth — i.e., take out for lunch |

We can see from the table above that there is consistency between what program staff and youth indicated that employers should provide as part of work placements. However, youth appeared to have a much higher expectation of employers compared to program staff about what should happen post-placement in terms of an ongoing connection to their hosts. From their work placement narratives, we know that not all youth maintained contact with their hosts post-placement, and only a small number of the employers interviewed reported that they had contact with youth post the placement.

For the most part, youth described sampling a number of tasks during their placements rather than being devoted to one project or role. They reported enjoying the variety of work they did. Most also reported having one particular person to go to for support and supervision. Few indicated that they had been assigned a work buddy\(^{13}\) who could mentor them while on placement. None of the youth mentioned that they had worked with employers to develop a learning/action plan for their placement.

Rather than indicate what supports they should provide, employers were asked to describe how they actually set up and implemented work placements. The data in relation to this question showed that

\(^{13}\) Refers to an on-the-job mentor who can work with a young person one-on-one during their placement.
employers did not always describe providing the full range of supports named by youth and staff set out in the table above.

The majority of employers indicated that they ensured that youth had one consistent supervisor. Just over half reported the provision of orientation to youth at commencement of the placement with two saying that they had specific policies and procedures governing placements. A few employers said that they provided on-the-job mentoring or “work buddies” for youth. A minority said that they developed role specifications. A small number said they did an interview with youth pre-placement. Only one said they did an exit interview as part of the placements provided.

In terms of support during the work placement, many youth articulated a need for employers to take time to clearly explain what was expected of them and to be patient if the youth required more time to comprehend those expectations depending on their language level. While negative experiences were few, most did relate to staff or customers being impatient when the young person did not understand what was being asked of them. Kristelly had this recommendation: “to be really patient and also to have a range of opportunities and services they offer, explain everything clear and try always to follow them in from routine...all the procedures prepare them well.”

Generally, employers identified that they did take more time with immigrant youth in terms of training and support, particularly when it came to understanding and practicing English, saying, “[You] do need to put in more time in, go slower, do pre-training” (employer no. 4).

Program staff highlighted a lack of employer capacity in terms of hiring practices that would support work placements such as pre-placement interviews, assessment of youth in terms of whether or not they are “someone they really want to hire,” and development of role specifications. They also recommended that employers could improve support during placements in terms of having a work buddy and promoting that role internally to staff as leadership development.

**Employer Engagement**

Program staff were asked to reflect on how they engage with employers to recruit them as hosts for work placements for refugee and immigrant youth. They reflected that “it takes way more work” to attract employers since they “don’t want to deal with language barriers”. However, they noted that some of the strategies that work involved:

- Harnessing the narrative of the “hardworking immigrant”
- Indicating that youth are already customers of the host business
- Pointing out that hosting placements are aligned to the corporate social responsibility goals of the company
- Highlighting how new the youth is to the country “can lower the stigma of needing extra support”

Program staff highlighted the importance of proactive follow-up and communication with hosts and employer recognition activities.

Data from employers appeared to signal the opportunity for deeper engagement with programs with some indicating they would value more contact from the program staff with youth and themselves,
particularly if youth had higher support needs — “getting more honest feedback about the abilities of the youth, sending in someone to work with them one on one to see how things are going” (employer no. 5).

About half of the employers indicated that it would be important for them to know if a youth was a newcomer to the country and they were divided in terms of why. Some felt it would be important to know in terms of language levels and tailoring the placement opportunity and support to that. For those who said it was not important to know if a youth was a newcomer, their reason was that it was more crucial to know the young person’s personal goals and what they hoped to get out of the placement. This employer (no. 2) demonstrates the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ perspective:

“Yes and no, first of all, it’s helpful for us to maybe know that so we can have more patience and awareness for cultural difference [but it’s] more important to know where they are and what’s their goal, making sure that these students have employable experiences [and] being aware of what’s going to be the most helpful for them...making sure that they get a broad experience of the different kind of things.”

Benefits of and Business Case for Work Placements

In order to explore employers’ experience of hosting immigrant and refugee youth, they were asked about the benefits of providing placements for youth from the target group or were prompted to identify the business case for doing so.

The main benefit to employers interviewed was what a youth could bring to their business in terms of their individual skill set: “[We] benefit from each individual that they bring to our programs as well, if they really want to bring new ideas...it allows you to have more help with your agency...bigger picture we want to support youth to be successful because they are our future...each benefit dependent on the individual that it can bring” (employer no. 7).

Just over half of the employers articulated benefits to their organization in terms of increasing workplace diversity and the impact that could have on their business: “Diversity is good anywhere, more different points of view you have the more fuller you see the picture” (employer no. 6). This employer noted how hosting immigrant and refugee youth could affect the bottom line — “that encouragement and that awareness, you invite students from a different culture, you attract people of that culture to your business [they] become an ambassador for your business” (employer no. 2).

All the employers interviewed were positively disposed to hosting immigrant and refugee youth, “If they’re new to the country, they should have that opportunity to experience what the real world is all about...if other businesses don’t take it [the opportunity] I don’t know why, they gotta give it a try. They’ll never know how what this person can provide to this business, sometimes the language is an asset” (employer no. 10).
Key Findings

Key findings are offered in bullet points below and organized under relevant headings.

Role and Value of Work Placements to Immigrant and Refugee Youth

- Work placements appear to be a successful element of employment programs for these youth demonstrated by: the high level of satisfaction with program support; consistency between staff and youth data with regards to the necessary supports programs should provide for young people in relation to placements; the high rates with which many of the benefits tracked were achieved; the high level of enjoyment youth experienced in relation to work placements; and the fact that most youth said their expectations for placements had been met.

- Many youth commented on how the programs and placements they had completed would not have been available in their countries of origin or could not have been accessed without payment, signaling reasons why there could be a low awareness of employment services by immigrant and refugee youth.

- Priority outcomes for work placements for youth and staff appear to be: the development of English skills and language confidence; labour market attachment; community connection; gaining experience in and practicing the skills necessary for a field they were interested in and could include on resumes; and gaining Canadian experience.

Work Placement Outcomes

- For the youth interviewed, work placements helped them with their career development and fostered outcomes related to basic and transferable workplace skills development; acquiring on-the-job skills, self-confidence and personal skills and integration. Placements were less likely to involve the application of job search skills to the work placement opportunity.

- Work placements helped most of the out-of-school youth interviewed achieve labour market attachment at the time of interview. However, this attachment can be seen as an intermediate step towards a longer-term goal for which many youth needed to avail themselves of post-secondary education. Work placements appear to contribute to motivating youth to work towards these goals.

- For in-school youth, labour market attachment was a priority that many had not achieved.

- Placing youth in diverse workplaces could be important for achieving many of the outcomes tracked for this research, particularly when it comes to integration outcomes.

- Work placements appear to promote the settlement of the young people in this research, building a sense of belonging and helping them to understand skills for the Canadian workplace and Canadian workplace culture.

- There appears to be an opportunity for programs to continue to emphasize how work placements develop transferable workplace skills and how that relates to long-term career development, as well as to assist youth to apply job search skills to the work placement.
Cultural Variables and Employment Barriers

- Participating youth were facing a number of barriers to their employability including: being recent immigrants; low educational levels and/or disrupted educational journeys; lack of confidence in English usage and communication skills; and coming to Canada as refugees or members of the Family Class. The barriers appear to contribute to a lack of career preparation for these youth. For out-of-school youth, this challenge is notable as many of them are at an age where their contemporaries pursuing post-secondary education would have this education well underway.

- There would seem to be an opportunity to educate employers on the full range of employment barriers that immigrant and refugee youth face, particularly refugee youth, as well as the outcomes specific to the cohort that placements can help them to achieve, such as: Canadian experience, a sense of belonging, and understanding of Canadian workplace skills and norms.

- Employers indicated that they took extra time with training and support to ensure young people’s comprehension of responsibilities and were very aware that lack of language skills was an employment barrier for these young people.

- There is some evidence that gender is an important variable that needs to be addressed through work placements, both in terms of fit of the opportunity to cultural expectations about gender roles held by a young woman or her family, and in relation to briefing the host around how these expectations could affect behaviour in the workplace.

Future Career Development

- The majority of youth had high educational aspirations and long-term career goals. Out-of-school youth, for the most part, did not have educational qualifications matching those required for their career goal.

- Funder emphasis on labour market attachment, regardless of what type, challenges program staff attempts to focus on the longer-term career development of immigrant and refugee youth.

- The data suggests that youth may require further support to help them to achieve long-term career goals. One support could be around sourcing volunteer opportunities for youth that are relevant to career goals.

- Parental value and obligation are important variables when it comes to the career development of these youth. Work placements have, in part, assisted youth to access bridging capital that some said parents could not provide.

Program and Employer Support of Youth

- There is an opportunity for employers to increase their capacity in relation to the placement supports identified by youth and staff, such as: pre-placement interviews, assignment of a work buddy, and exit interviews.

- It would appear that immigrant and refugee youth may require extra on-the-job support during work placements, but that this need could be a deterrent for employers that could be addressed.
Employer Support

- There would seem to be an opportunity to educate employers about the benefits of hosting young people in relation to fostering workplace diversity, as well as the bottom-line impacts it can have in terms of reflecting the ethno-cultural profiles of the communities they operate in and attracting customers who are immigrants themselves.

- The data suggests the potential for deeper engagement with employers in terms of making them aware of the content of employment programs’ life and employment skills training, as well as inviting their feedback in relation to it. It also signals potential for programs and employers to discuss how placements could foster bridging capital for these youth and to what extent there should be an ongoing connection to employers post the placement.

- It is evident that the majority of the young people arrived in Canada with special skills that they learned outside of school, which is something that could be promoted to potential work placement hosts.
Discussion and Conclusions

Research findings are discussed in light of the literature under headings related to the research objectives. It must be stated that the discussion and conclusions are tentative given that the study was exploratory in nature. Conclusions cannot be generalized to all immigrant and refugee youth and would require further research to validate.

Discussion

Expectations and Experience of Work Placements

The literature asserted that little is known about immigrant and refugee youth in relation to their experience of employment services and that their awareness of those services is low. The research findings show, that for the group of young people interviewed, work placements were positive experiences, as was the support received by programs and employers to facilitate those opportunities. More research would be required to know if a more representative sample of immigrant and refugee youth engaging in work placements would hold these views.

Because many young people acknowledged that these types of services would not have been available in their countries of origin or they would have had to pay for them there, the research tells us to further test whether or not this lack of access in home countries contributes to youth not being aware of or seeking out employment services in Canada. The finding also signals the importance of spreading the word about youth employment programs to immigrant and refugee families early in their settlement process, perhaps through the school system.

The main expectations that youth had for work placements were: the development of English skills and language confidence; labour market attachment; community connection; gaining experience in and practicing the skills necessary for a field they were interested in and could include on resumes; and gaining Canadian experience. These are the criteria for successful work placements generated by this research as well as that of being treated fairly and “like a Canadian” in the workplace. The latter criteria appear to have been achieved by placement in host organizations that had diverse staff and/or clientele. Thus, work placements for immigrant and refugee youth could be chosen according to these criteria.

Outcomes Experienced and Valued by Youth

This research aims to fill a gap in the body of knowledge regarding the outcomes of specific elements of youth employment programs. The research found that the majority of youth experienced the development of soft or transferable skills valued by employers as well as outcomes and expectations important for immigrants and refugees, as outlined above.

Past research into youth employment programs had asserted that these programs may result in labour market attachment in the short-term, and the results of this research bear that out for this cohort, as most of the out-of-school youth had achieved employment and, for the most part, attributed that to the work placement.
We know that the in-school youth interviewed valued employment, but had generally not achieved it. This finding may be as a result of the nature of experiential learning and the understanding of school-to-work transitions asserted within the school system, which, in the main, sees work placements as preparation for future employment. However, this research supports the assertion that the transitions of immigrant and refugee youth are different. In particular, there was a felt obligation and need on the part of many in-school youth to contribute to their households. This need is in conflict with traditional school-to-work transition models. The orientation to work placement in schools also does not address the finding in the literature that many immigrant and refugee youth will not have been employed during their secondary education, in contrast to their Canadian-born counterparts.

The extent to which the outcomes charted in this research will become long-term benefits cannot be ascertained and would require further research. However, many of the outcomes achieved are important in the context of settlement policy in Canada, promoting integration and allowing youth to participate in local labour markets.

The Impact of Culturally-specific Variables

The variety of barriers experienced by the youth participants in this research, many of whom were refugees, mirror those found in the literature and also challenge the assumption that youth may have an easier time than their parents when it comes to achieving employment (Wilkinson, 2012). For the refugee participants, it appears that immigration class was a significant employment variable.

There was some evidence that the youth in this study were experiencing the “double jeopardy” identified in the literature when they mentioned they felt negative perceptions of their accented English (Ibid). Youth identified that work placements helped them develop confidence in their language skills, perhaps assisting them to negotiate this aspect of “double jeopardy.” Some youth also exhibited “double jeopardy” through references to parental support not conveying a benefit to them in their employment searches. Thus, these results underline the importance of providing bridging capital through work placements and suggest that, potentially, there could be a more explicit program focus on this outcome for the target group.

Results showed that program staff work to address the barriers and other variables identified in the literature and staff awareness of them shaped work placement opportunities in terms of: finding placements where the youth can maximize outcomes related to English proficiency; choosing workplaces where youth will not be at risk of discrimination or that are a cultural fit for youth; and taking into account familial/community expectations. Thus, staff work to counter the consequences of underclass absorption through attention to the structural barriers to employment that youth are facing (Wilkinson, 2008).

In contrast, the youth participants seemed to adhere to the tenets of mainstream absorption as they did not articulate many of the barriers outlined in the literature as impacting on their career development (ibid.). Instead, they exhibited a positive disposition to Canada and to employment in Canada. Their participation in these employment programs may demonstrate how they are harnessing resources to support mainstream absorption. Or, it could show that work placements facilitate this disposition by ensuring that youth have a positive experience of work in Canada.
It would appear that the positive disposition to work and work placements may, for this group, be a contextual factor that helps immigrant and refugee youth overcome barriers to career development (Winnie-May and Yeh, 2010).

Yan et al. (2012) asserted that if immigrant and refugee youth relied on co-ethnic connections and on family to find employment it resulted in lower quality attachments. We cannot ascertain the quality of the work that the employed youth in this study are in, but we could conclude that the work placements that the youth completed did help them to create a vision for quality employment.

The research showed that participating employers had a low awareness of the full range of barriers that immigrant and refugee youth could be facing, although some recognized the importance of knowing about the culture and background of the youth when providing placements. They did acknowledge that they had had positive experiences of hosting youth and that many young people had brought their individual knowledge and skills to the placement, which in turn had benefited the employer. While it is important to emphasize that every young person has strengths that they can bring to bear on their placement, there are youth who will need more support and there could be an opportunity to deepen employer engagement in this regard. This point will be reflected on further below.

**Work Placements and Future Career Development**

The research mirrors the literature in terms of young people experiencing interrupted and lengthened trajectories in relation to their career development. Work placements appeared to redress the effects of this by clarifying long-term career goals and increasing motivation to reach them. In this respect, we can see that work placements may have contributed to what Gottfredson (as reviewed in Cochran et al., 2011) calls the fourth stage of career development, which relates to developing motivation, values and a sense of ability related to occupational goals. In this sense, they offer opportunities for career preparation that these youth may have missed out on due to migration.

Elez (2014) contends that employment is inseparable from integration and that the employment barriers encountered by immigrants cause distress, interrupting the adaptation process. In this context, the fact that many young people indicated that their placements fostered integration demonstrate that they may be a strengthening factor, allowing them to persist despite the interruptions many had encountered in their career development.

Work placements also, for the out-of-school youth, assisted them to find employment that could finance the pursuit of their occupational goal. In contrast to the literature, which asserts that long-term planning may not fit the cultural milieu of many immigrants and refugees, none of the youth interviewed appeared to find it difficult to focus on a long-term goal, although a few did not know what that goal was.

If the intended role and value of work placements to immigrant and refugee youth is the development of soft and transferable skills and is an intermediate step towards longer-term goals, then for the youth interviewed, that role and value is realized. If work placements are to assist these youth to work in the careers that they want, then there could be scope for more demand-led programming as well as
apprenticeship training. In this research, there was no evidence of a demand-led approach on the part of employers or programs.

Concern was raised about funder emphasis on labour market attachment as opposed to return to education. It would appear from this research that the youth involved could require follow-up support since the employment achieved was not related to what they eventually wanted to do. As well, much of this employment was part-time suggesting that youth might also need financial support to pursue their goals. This finding suggests the importance of youth being connected to their local WorkBC Centre for case management after work placement. But, as the policy context review referenced, the EPBC may also lack the capacity to assist youth to access longer-term interventions.

This access to longer-term interventions may also be seen as crucial for refugee youth who are restarting their career preparation at a much more basic level than, perhaps, other immigrant youth. If access to follow-on and longer-term interventions is not facilitated, then they risk being reconciled to low-skilled and low quality employment. Federal settlement policy indicates that a long-term outcome for immigrants is to contribute to the economic development of Canada. The research raises the question as to what type of employment youth should ultimately find to best make that contribution. If it is through meaningful employment that matches their career goals, then longer-term interventions are definitely required.

**Employer and Program Support of Youth**

Many of the supports that youth and program staff mapped as part of this research echo those scoped as best practice in the literature and are beneficial to any young person regardless of the target group they might belong to. The research suggests that key supports for immigrant and refugee youth are connection to immigrant specific services such as English as a Second Language learning and settlement services.

It was evident from the research that youth and program staff mapped employer supports for young people that were consistent with the literature, but that many employers interviewed did not provide them. For instance, only a minority said they carried out an interview with youth prior to placement. This finding and the lack of awareness of the barriers facing immigrant and refugee youth signals a potential need to raise the capacity of employers who are going to be providing them with placements. Alternatively, it suggests that only employers with this existing capacity should be offered as hosts for immigrant and refugee youth.

It would also appear that there could be more intentional and deeper engagement with employers, particularly in relation to them being aware of and consulted in relation to program content.

**Employer Support Needs**

The research suggests that hosting immigrant and refugee youth was generally beneficial for the employers interviewed. It was evident from the employers interviewed and the demographic data that immigrant and refugee youth have many skills and strengths they can bring to bear on their work placements.
However, it is tentatively concluded that employers could be supported to understand how hosting youth can increase workplace diversity and how that can be leveraged to impact their bottom line.

Employers indicated sometimes wanting more consistent program staff involvement when youth were on placement and more background about the youth, particularly if they had higher support needs. It should be noted that employers were not always talking about the specific programs participating in this research, but about their experience of working with a range of programs.

**Conclusions**

The following are the conclusions from this research, which are only representative of the views of those who participated:

- The role of work placements is as an intermediate step towards longer-term career goals that develops transferable and basic skills and fosters integration as well as, for out-of-school youth, secures employment that can help them to pursue longer-term goals.

- The value of work placements is in supporting the career preparation of immigrant and refugee youth who have missed out on opportunities for this preparation as a result of issues related to immigration and settlement. The key issues include: interrupted educational journeys; lack of bridging capital; language barriers and confidence; and lack of knowledge of Canadian workplace norms.

- The role and value of work placements may be supported through opportunities that are chosen on the basis of: their capacity to maximize English learning for young people; the extent to which youth can practice or gain skills relevant to a field they are interested in; and whether or not the young person can learn the expectations they should have for quality employment in Canada. Hosts that have diverse workplaces and are able to offer the youth the chance to truly be a “part of the team” will convey the integration benefits that placements seemed to offer youth in this study.

- Immigrant and refugee youth need follow-up support and access to long-term interventions to support them to reach their occupational goals.

- The profile of youth in this study bears out the assertion in the literature that refugee and immigrant youth face similar challenges to employment as older immigrants and that programs need to address these barriers in work placements.

- Immigrant and refugee youth’s lack of awareness of employment services may, in part, be attributable to their lack of access to such services in their countries of origin. Thus, they may not seek such services upon arrival to Canada and are dependent on other community services to raise their awareness of them.

- There could be a deeper engagement between employers, program staff and youth in terms of ongoing support of immigrant and refugee youth during work placements, as well as employers being aware of and contributing to program content.
There could be an opportunity to engage employers by educating them on the benefits of hosting immigrant and refugee youth in terms of how that contributes to workplace diversity and the positive impacts that can have.

The research shows promising results in terms of how work placements, as part of employment services, can benefit immigrant and refugee youth, and potentially help mediate the barriers they face. However, more research would need to be done to validate this conclusion. In particular, there would need to be comparative, longitudinal research carried out with youth who have completed placements compared to those who have not.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations arising from the research are made for each relevant stakeholder group.

**Employment and Social Development Canada**

1. Provide multi-annual funding of programs such as Skills Link programs, as interrupted annual funding limits continuity of follow-up with participants and referral of new participants to programs and weakens relationships with employers.

2. Consider increasing targets for return to education in Skills Links programs and decreasing targets for labour market attachment.

3. Consider increasing the proportion of subsidy for work placements provided by programs and incentivizing employers through tax credits.

**Youth Case Managers in WorkBC Centres**

Recommendations are made to this group of stakeholders, because youth are often referred to employment programs by their local WorkBC Centre and/or are linked back in with the Centre post-program.

1. For eligible out-of-school youth who have not become employed, consider: follow-up work placements using the wage subsidy or the billable for unpaid work experience, or apprenticeship services. Also work with them to access financial support to continue their education.

2. Ensure that youth reflect on the placements they have completed and use any learning to update their employment action plans, if relevant.

3. Emphasize continuing English learning as part of employment action plans, where applicable.

**For Employment Programs**

1. Provide work placements for immigrant and refugee youth as an integral program element, emphasizing the importance of placements for them in the development of English skills and confidence, an understanding of Canadian workplace culture and transferable soft skills.
2. Using the “Benefits” checklist employed for this research, develop a baseline and post-placement assessment of those outcomes, checking the extent to which they are attributable to the placement element of the program.

3. Have discussions with young people about the role that parents play in their career development and address that with young people as part of program content.

4. Vet work placement hosts for young people using the criteria generated from this study. Hosts should: have diverse workplaces; be able to provide the youth with one consistent work buddy while on placement; ensure that they can offer youth a chance to be part of the team; and offer young people the chance to gain and practice skills relevant to a field they are interested in. Attention should be given to ensuring that the placement also “fits” the young person’s cultural background.

Placement Supports

5. Ensure that placements will maximize the development of English skills and the confidence to use English for immigrant and refugee youth in accordance with their current level of language proficiency. For a youth with beginner English, this might mean work that is not client facing, but they should still have plenty of opportunity to take instruction from and interact with other host staff.

6. Prepare immigrant and refugee youth to maximize English confidence while on placements by introducing them to basic workplace terminology and having them practice its usage through information interviews.

7. Get immigrant and refugee youth to apply the job search skills learned during programs to securing the work placement experience.

8. Consider that for some youth with higher needs, support on site may be required during their placements.

9. Ensure that immigrant and refugee youth complete a long-term action plan post-placement, that maps the specific services and supports that they will need to achieve their career goals.

10. For those youth who need it, emphasize and assist them to find opportunities to continue English learning that will facilitate progression to further education if they require it to meet their goal, such as ESL courses at post-secondary institutions.

11. If possible, connect young people to mentors in the fields they want to enter or refer them to mentorship programs.

12. For out-of-school young people who want to become employed but do not find work soon after placement, emphasize the importance of attending case management at their local WorkBC Centre.
Employer Engagement

13. Promote the value of hosting immigrant and refugee youth on work placements in terms of how it fosters workplace diversity and how that can help them to reflect and attract clientele in their local area and tap into new markets. It is also important to promote the value of hosting in terms of the special skills that many of these youth have already developed prior to arrival.

14. Use employer testimonials to promote the value of hosting immigrant and refugee youth on work placement.

15. Ensure that employer engagement for the program involves giving sufficient background about the youth pre-placement, particularly if a young person will require more support, and consistent check-ins with the employer and the youth at regular intervals. Use the “Benefits” checklist as a basis for discussing how the employer could foster skills development on placement.

16. Encourage employer feedback and input in relation to program content.

17. Work with employers to evolve a more demand-led model, even if it is only for a proportion of placements.

Employers

1. Ensure that employers have all of the work placement supports documented through this research in place (see the Appendices for the list).

2. Reach out to local youth employment programs in order to evolve demand-led programming for immigrant and refugee youth.

3. Think about a continuing relationship with the immigrant and refugee youth they host post-placement, since bridging capital is so essential for this target group.

The BC Centre for Employment Excellence

1. Develop a work placement guide/toolkit for employers, which provides templates for setting up the necessary work placement supports for youth, and demonstrates a business case for hosting immigrant and refugee youth (and youth from other specialized populations).

2. Develop a webinar and create a "Have your say" thread for employers to accompany the guide.  

3. Carry out further research into the role and value of work placements/employment services for immigrant and refugee youth that would employ a representative sample of young people.

4. Consider how best to raise immigrant and refugee youth awareness of employment services and programs, engaging WorkBC contractors and their Approved Service Providers in that discussion.

5. Include work placements in any pilot it may fund for youth, incorporating the recommendations in this report.

14 “Have your say” is the Centre’s online discussion forum.
MOSAIC

1. Link with Metro Vancouver Boards of Education to see if they could present to all the Settlement Workers in Schools about the range of employment programs available to immigrant and refugee youth, particularly if they are not going to be continuing on to post-secondary education or they are at risk of early school leaving.

2. Link with the Immigrant Employment Council of BC to discuss the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this research.
References


The Role and Value of Short-term Paid or Unpaid Work Placements for Immigrant and Refugee Youth


## Appendix 1: “Benefits” Checklist

### Career Development

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Figured out the occupation I want to achieve</strong></td>
<td><strong>g. Got a job in my chosen occupation</strong></td>
<td><strong>√</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Figured out the steps I need to take to achieve my job goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>h. Practiced the skills and qualities necessary for my chosen occupation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c. Understand the skills and qualities necessary for the occupation I want</strong></td>
<td><strong>i. Figured out I don’t want to do the occupation linked to my work placement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d. Got a reference for future job searches</strong></td>
<td><strong>j. Got connected to a mentor or someone who can guide me on career development</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>e. Got a job that can pay my bills while I keep working towards my chosen occupation</strong></td>
<td><strong>k. Expanded my network of people who are in the occupation/industry I want to be in</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>f. Got any job</strong></td>
<td><strong>l. Improved my ability to cope with any challenges I might face in reaching my job goal</strong></td>
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### Basic Skills

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Improved my English writing skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>d. Improved by information technology skills (e.g. using a computer)</strong></td>
<td><strong>√</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Improved my English reading skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>e. Improved my presentation skills (i.e. talking in front of a group)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>c. Improved my English speaking skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>f. Improved my listening skills</strong></td>
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### Job Search Skills

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>a. Learned how to do a resume</strong></td>
<td><strong>d. Learned how to write a cover letter</strong></td>
<td><strong>√</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>b. Learned how to search for a job</strong></td>
<td><strong>e. Learned how to do a job interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c. Learned how to fill out a written job application</strong></td>
<td><strong>f. Learned how to fill out an online job application</strong></td>
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### Succeeding on the Job

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Learned how to present myself at work in terms of personal appearance.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Understand the general expectations of a new employee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Improved my time management skills</td>
<td>e. Learned how to work as part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Learned how to follow direction</td>
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<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>Learned leadership skills</td>
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### Self-confidence and Personal Skills

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Got a better sense of the values that are important to me in my work</td>
<td>f. Improved my self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Improved my decision-making skills</td>
<td>g. Increased my motivation to get into the occupation I want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Showed a positive attitude</td>
<td>h. Increased my hope for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Increased my general ability to plan for the future</td>
<td>i. Improved my ability to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Improved my outlook on life</td>
<td>j. Less afraid of new people, new places</td>
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### Integration

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Increased my sense of belonging to my community</td>
<td>d. Understand how communication styles differ between here and my country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Feel more integrated into Canadian society</td>
<td>e. Started to volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Understand skills for adapting to the Canadian work environment</td>
<td>f. Made new friends</td>
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## Appendix 2: Employer Supports for Young People

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
<td>▪ Set out a clear written description of what a young person’s role will be, sometimes in negotiation with the young person and/or the employment program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Carry out a robust interview with the young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Designate one consistent supervisor who knows the learning plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Take on youth they are interested in hiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensure that English learning will be maximized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensure role ‘fits’ the young person’s cultural background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During</strong></td>
<td>▪ Provide consistent feedback and encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Provide work buddies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Engage in on the job training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Provide early communication with program if any issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Remain flexible with youth who need more support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After</strong></td>
<td>▪ Receive feedback from employer about performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Get hired by the employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Or, receive ongoing connection/ support by employer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Offer some appreciation of youth, i.e. take out for lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Encourage youth, if appropriate, to continue to improve their English and get follow-up support from a WorkBC Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>