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Primary Qualitative Research on Hard-to-Reach Youth Facing Barriers to Employment in Order to Improve Reach of ESDC's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS)

Final Report



Ference & Company Consulting Ltd.
550 – 475 West Georgia Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 4M9

Cover Photo: Quebec Youth Creative Voice Submission as part of this research project, in response to the question: "Share with Us a Person Whose Employment or Training is Interesting to You"

Please note the views and opinions expressed in the paper are solely those of the author and research participants, and not those of the Government of Canada.

The authors would like to thank all participants and the youth advisory committee for their thoughtful support and feedback to make this project possible.

ABSTRACT

Background

In Canada, the issue of youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) has been of particular importance given the long-term effects of sustained unemployment and the exasperated levels of NEET rates during the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications of unemployment for youth include lower lifetime income potential and health problems, as well as intergenerational effects on their children, such as child neglect, or early school leaving. Additionally, employment may be one of the most important factors for escaping poverty and building intrinsic value in youth such as building self-confidence, structured social interactions, and networks.

Youth who face barriers to engaging with employment programs may be connected to other services, resources, or touchpoints in their lives that support them in their goals, both within and outside the scope of employment. Understanding how youth engage with familiar touchpoints in the community could allow workplace programs and initiatives, such as Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) programs, avenues for engagement to better support youth transitions to the workplace.

About the Research Project

The Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) and ESDC hired an external team to conduct primary research that connected directly with hard-to-reach youth populations. Findings from this project identified “touchpoints” within the lives of youth and provided ways these relationships, spaces and services can be leveraged in future work to provide meaningful and high impact supports to this population and improve the reach of ESDC’s youth programming, such as YESS programs. This assignment aimed to learn more about structures that are effective at reaching and influencing youth populations facing barriers to employment, and how to leverage these structures to increase awareness and access to workforce development supports. This project also aimed to inform funding decisions and policy directions to increase uptake and outreach of YESS programs for hard-to-reach youth facing barriers to employment.

This research project utilized a participatory and equity-focused approach to directly engage hard-to-reach youth and learn more about their touchpoints and experiences with employment and workforce trainings. This research was guided by a set of seven questions provided by ESDC. Methods included a literature review, a hard-to-reach youth survey (n=241) distributed through service organizations, key informant interviews with youth touchpoints (n=14), and case studies which included a Creative Voice activity for youth (n=30), and six focus group discussion with youth-serving organizations (n=23). A youth advisory committee of hard-to-reach youth was recruited and engaged throughout the project to provide insight and expertise based on lived experiences on methodology, data collection, key findings, and final report.

Key Findings

Findings from the seven overarching research questions were synthesized and compiled into four main areas that responded to the goals of the research. These sections include: About Youth Community Touchpoints; How Touchpoints and Youth Interact and Interplay; Workplace, Career and Training Supports; and Opportunities for ESDC Employment and Skills Training.

About Youth Touchpoints

Research found that hard-to-reach youth most frequently interacted with friends, parents/guardians, siblings, romantic relationships, public spaces for hanging out, mental health services, libraries, and recreation programs. The percentage of youth who interacted with a service and space 2-3 times a month, compared to 2-3 times a year was quite different; with more youth interacting with touchpoints on a yearly basis. Most and least frequented touchpoints were similar across sociodemographic characteristics of youth, with several key differences noted such as:

- Indigenous youth and disabled youth have the highest levels of engagement with social networks and relationships.
- A very high percentage of youth living with addiction engaged their care providers at least 1-2 times a year, compared to all youth who completed the survey.
- Immigrant youth and racialized youth were more likely to be engaged with faith-based organizations and libraries than youth overall.
- Youth with intersecting challenges (i.e., youth who are low-income, in unstable housing, in conflict with the legal system, or living with addiction) were more likely to be engaged with social services (i.e., food banks or shelters) compared to youth who did not identify with these characteristics.

Youth appeared to interact with touchpoints based on their previous experiences, current needs, and influence from close relationships. They are more likely to interact with spaces that are comfortable to them, such as those that are safe, supportive, autonomous, relatable, reflective, consistent, accessible, and private. Over their life, youth touchpoints often change due differences in youth's needs and priorities, interests, life circumstances, or age.

How Touchpoints and Youth Interact and Interplay

Youths' interactions with touchpoints pivoted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to become increasingly virtual. Youth described both negative and positive experiences with this change. For example, online platforms had issues such as access to safe spaces, lack of technology, and isolation anxiety; however, this virtual landscape also provided increasingly accessible and diverse touchpoints for youth who are able to connect online. As a result, the hybrid model is an increasingly popular option to interact with hard-to-reach youth as it prioritizes accessibility and preferences for each individual.

Overall, youth touchpoints were found to interact in three primary ways to engage and support youth. These include awareness, referral, and collaboration. Each of these interactions are important to facilitate different types of youth engagement and require varying levels of time and capacity.

Touchpoint Influences on Workplace, Career and Training Supports

Youth described their parents/guardians, educational institutions, employers, teachers, romantic relationships, and friends as most influential toward their work, training and career opportunities. This differs depending on who youth primarily interact with or who influences their day-to-day lives. Service organizations shared several strategies to best engage and retain hard-to-reach youth successfully in workforce training programs. Best practices often seek to understand and support the holistic needs of hard-to-reach youth labour market attachment, which includes addressing structural and systemic barriers where possible.

Throughout youth survey responses and dialogue with service providers some important challenges and facilitators to workforce programs were identified. Challenges included the ability for youth to find opportunities that meet their unique needs and the social and structural systems surrounding touchpoints. Facilitators included the ability to find individualized and tailored supports, as well as interactions between touchpoints through wraparound or collaborative approaches.

Opportunities for ESDC Employment and Skill Training

The hardest-to-reach youth are often those not only facing multiple barriers to employment but also facing multiple social and structural challenges impacting their everyday livelihoods. The underlying needs of youth should be at the forefront of YESS workplace programs to best engage hard-to-reach youth, albeit directly within the program or indirectly through wraparound supports.

There are two main avenues to increase awareness and meaningful engagement of hard-to-reach youth in employment services and training: indirect engagement with their relationships or direct engagement with youth through the spaces and services where they are already seeking employment supports.

Recommendations

This research outlines some program-specific opportunities for ESDC's YESS to continue to engage hard-to-reach youth through their programming. These include:

- Continue to partner with other federal departments to provide choice and diversity.
- Continue to fund projects that incorporate flexibility and innovation.
- Continue to fund programs that include employers.
- Continue to fund demographic-specific organizations, where possible.
- Continue to build collaborations with youth's immediate relationships.
- Explore opportunities to leverage wraparound supports.
- Explore ways to co-design employment training with youth and their touchpoints.
- Explore how funded programs utilize best practices to youth employment.
- Expand online and virtual presence in youth spaces.

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ACCRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
SEB	Skills and Employment Branch
YESS	Youth Employment Skills Strategy

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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Research Rationale

Youth face multiple structural, systemic, social, and economic barriers when connecting with programs designed to support their transition to the workplace, with hard-to-reach youth often experiencing multiple barriers to this type of engagementⁱ. Research describes long-term negative effects of sustained unemployment including lower lifetime income and health problems, as well as intergenerational effects on their children, such as child neglect, or early school leavingⁱⁱ. Additionally, employment was found to be the most important factor for youth to escape poverty and build intrinsic values such as self-confidence, structured social interactions, and networksⁱⁱⁱ.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic the levels of youth in Canada who are not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET) has been exacerbated^{iv}. Around 11% of youth in Canada met the criteria for being NEET, with about a third of this group actively looking for work (38%) or caring for children (27.5%)^v. Characteristics of NEET vs non-NEET youth describe NEET youth as more likely to be in an older age bracket (i.e., ages 25-29 relative to ages 18-24), more likely to be married or common-law, more likely to have less high school education, much more likely to be in the lowest household income category, and much more likely to be in poor physical and mental health^{vi}. In addition to these characteristics, NEET youth were described as more likely to be Indigenous and to live in the North, Newfoundland/Labrador, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or New Brunswick^{vii}. Other key considerations that may influence experiences of NEET youth sub-populations include early school leaving, the school-to-work transition, the long-run scarring effect of early negative labour market experiences, youth crime and delinquency, positive and negative peer effects, non-standard work and the gig economy, access to labour market information, growing inequality, and intergenerational mobility^{viii}.

Effective strategies for recruitment and supportive wayfinding to integrate hard-to-reach youth into employment, education, or training programs and therefore support their transition to work, includes collaboration with people, spaces, and services where these youth are already connected^{ix}. Youth who face barriers to engaging with employment programs may be connected to other services, resources, or touchpoints in their lives that support them in their goals, both within and outside the scope of employment.

About Youth Touchpoints

This research project adopts the term “touchpoint” to describe a point of contact or interaction in youth’s lives. The research breaks “touchpoint” down into two main facets:

- (1) **Relationships** (i.e., direct connections with individuals’ parents, friends, family, partners, teachers, coaches, elders, mentors)
- (2) **Spaces and services** (i.e., areas or programs that a youth may engage with such as mental health services, health providers, social services, recreational spaces, public spaces, etc.)

Understanding how youth interact with familiar touchpoints in the community could allow workplace programs and initiatives, such as Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) programs, avenues for engagement to better support youth transitions to the workplace.

About the YESS Programs

The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) is a horizontal initiative, led by ESDC in collaboration with 11 other federal departments, agencies, and crown corporations, which provides funding to organizations to deliver a range of activities that help youth overcome barriers to employment and develop a broad range of skills and knowledge in order to participate in the current and future labour market. ESDC's YESS program also encourages collaborations and innovation to increase capacity across the youth service provider network (e.g., employers, service delivery organizations, and educational institutions), to better support youth, and to help employers hire and retain youth, in particular, those who face barriers. YESS aims to connect young people with information, programs, and services that facilitate and support transitions into the labour market.

The YESS provides funding to organizations to deliver a range of activities and supports that help youth overcome barriers to employment. The program completed a process of modernization in 2019, which included an increased emphasis on reaching 'youth facing barriers' to employment with enhanced supports and services. As youth across Canada continue to face barriers in the labour market, ESDC seeks to improve and update YESS programming to ensure that it better addresses those barriers.

2.0 ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT

2.1 Objectives

The Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) engaged Ference & Company to undertake a research project that connected with youth to learn about their touchpoints and experiences with employment programs to provide recommendations for how ESDC's YESS could better their reach.

Mandate of ESDC's Skills and Employment Branch

With its mandate to promote skills development, labour market participation and inclusiveness, and labour market efficiency, ESDC's Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) relies on research and analysis of the skills gaps, learning needs, and barriers faced by equity-seeking groups in order to adapt and target its programs and services.

This project specifically aimed to:

- Identify “touchpoints” within the lives of youth that can be leveraged through future work to provide meaningful and high impact supports to this population and improve the reach of ESDC's youth programming, such as the YESS.
- Learn more about structures that are effective at reaching and influencing youth populations facing barriers to employment, and how to leverage these structures to increase awareness and access to workforce development supports.
- Inform funding decisions and policy directions to increase uptake and outreach of YESS programs for hard-to-reach youth facing barriers to employment.

2.2 Research Questions

The research was guided by a set of seven questions provided by ESDC. Each question was addressed by at least one data source. This report highlights findings for each research question and line of evidence.

The research questions included:

#	Research Question
1	How are the various touchpoints (e.g., school, family, friends, faith-based, community institutions, government institutions, mentors, recreation, other trusted sources) different according to the sociodemographic characteristics of youth?
2	How do these touchpoints interact and interplay with each other over the life courses of youth, and how do each inform youths' perceptions about work, training, and career? How does this vary according to the sociodemographic characteristics of youth?
3	How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected how youth with varying sociodemographic characteristics interact with these touchpoints? How can service providers leverage the reopening post-COVID to transform their services and reach out to youth that were not interested in their services before?

- 4 How can these touchpoints be leveraged to increase awareness of and participation in employment and workforce development programs and services? What types of organizations should play a more prominent role in the provision of employment supports?
- 5 What is the existing evidence on the best places & strategies to capture youth's attention? What are promising interventions to support actual in-person services if virtual services are not appropriate or possible?
- 6 What organizations in Canada are reaching these hardest-to-reach youth sub populations successfully with employment/workforce development programming, and what are their characteristics?
- 7 Why isn't YESS currently reaching hardest-to-reach youth, and how can we do this better? How can wraparound supports be more appealing to these segments of youth?

2.3 Methodology

Approach

This research took a **participatory and equity-focused** approach which included the direct engagement of hard-to-reach youth across Canada, as well as engagement of a youth advisory committee to inform different phases of the project. This research drew upon pre-existing networks of hard-to-reach youth sub-populations by targeting regions and service organizations with high engagement of target youth. The selected data collection methods were strategically chosen to facilitate information exchange in a safe, trusted, and dignified environment.

Who Are Hard-to-Reach Youth?

This research uses this term to refer to individuals who are:

- (1) **Between the ages of 15 and 30**
- (2) **Not currently connected to employment or workforce development supports and**
- (3) **Part of one or more of the ESDC-identified priority populations including:** youth who are early leavers from high school, racialized youth, youth living with a disability, involuntary, short-term and long-term youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET), youth in rural, remote or official-language minority communities, immigrant and newcomer youth, youth living with mental health and addictions, urban and non-affiliated Indigenous youth, youth in low-income households, youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, youth aging out of care, and youth who are experiencing homelessness or precarious housing.

For purposes of outreach, this project also connected with youth who have already connected to employment and workforce development supports to learn from their experiences, as it was recognized that these youth would also have valuable insights into how to best reach their peers.

Youth Advisory Committee

This research project recruited and engaged a youth advisory committee to provide insight and feedback into the research at four key stages of the project.

- Methods and approach (perspectives on data collection methods and tools),
- Data collection progress (insight into data collection including how to reach target populations),
- Preliminary findings (perspectives on analysis and how findings resonate), and

- Final report (perspectives on whether the report is reflective).

The committee was recruited through outreach to twelve youth-serving organizations across Canada with efforts to reach organizations that work with a wide range of diverse, and across multiple different regions. The application process was a short survey where youth were asked to describe their interest to contribute. The research team accepted all seven applicants onto the youth advisory committee. The youth advisory committee was engaged via Zoom bi-monthly throughout the project. The sessions were offered in French and English, and youth were provided an overview of key research endeavours and asked to provide feedback. After each session, the research team sent the youth advisory committee members an overview of how their perspectives and thoughts were incorporated into the research project. Youth were offered a \$50 e-transfer for each meeting they attended. An overview of sociodemographic characteristics of youth on the committee is in [Appendix 1](#).

Data Collection Methods

The research methodology included collection and analysis of data from a total of five lines of evidence. A brief overview of the key methods can be found below in [Table 3](#). The creative voice activity and focus group discussions informed a series of case studies that allowed for in-depth exploration of findings focused on six target populations including youth living with a disability, youth living in low-income households, youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, Black youth, Indigenous youth, and immigrant youth. A more detailed description of each method is available in [Appendix 2](#).

Figure 1. Overview of Data Collection Methods

Method	Overview
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online review of academic and grey literature was completed. • Intent was to gather additional context and information about youth touchpoints in relation to the research questions.
Youth Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 241 hard-to-reach youth completed an online survey from August to November 2022. Demographic characteristics of respondents can be found in Appendix 3. • The survey was distributed to 150 community organizations in English and French, who were asked to share the opportunity with the hard-to-reach youth engaged in their services and support survey completion where possible. • The survey captured primary data from youth to support a better understanding of their use of touchpoints as well as their preferences with training supports. • A \$25 honorarium was offered to youth who completed the survey.
Key Informant Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom with community organizations who engaged hard-to-reach youth, with an overall response rate of 27%. • The interviews gathered insight on youth touchpoints from organizations who work closely with target demographics to provide an additional perspective on best practices for youth engagement and use of touchpoints. • Two interviews were conducted with ESDC staff to learn about YESS programming.
Creative Voice Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 youth participated in a creative voice activity, with a response rate of 54%. • Youth were provided with options to choose which questions they would like to answer (i.e., select 2 of 4 questions) and how they would like to share their responses (i.e., photos, poems, stories, interview, etc.). • This method allowed for collection of in-depth youth experiences and preferences related to receiving workplace supports and services in the community. • A \$50 honorarium was offered to youth participants.

Focus Group Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 focus group discussions were planned with service organizations, one for each of the youth demographics represented in the case studies, resulting in a total of 5 focus groups and 5 interviews held with 23 individuals from different organizations. This line of evidence was intended to explore similarities and differences between organizations who support specific youth populations.
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Data Analysis Approach

Technical approaches to data analysis can be found in [Appendix 4](#). Several key lines of evidence contributed to 6 case studies focused on findings for different youth populations found in [Appendix 5](#).

Consideration of Gender-Based Analysis Plus and Intersectionality. The methodological approach for this study was considered through a GBA+ and intersectional lens. The research questions included looking at diverse groups and the impact of sociodemographic characteristics on youth. The project was informed by an advisory committee of diverse youth. The methodology was designed to be low-barrier and inclusive and the data collection tools were strategically designed to incorporate important demographic questions. The data collection utilized an ongoing gap analysis to ensure inclusion and representation of diverse populations, and analysis considered how findings varied between and within sociodemographic characteristics.

Intersectionality

The complex and cumulative way in which systems of inequality such as race, class, and gender create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

GBA Plus

A rigorous approach to analysis of systemic inequalities that acknowledges how diverse characteristics influences the way people experience policies, programs, and initiatives.

2.4 Limitations

There were some methodological limitations and challenges encountered during the research project. The table below outlines the key limitations and the strategies employed to mitigate them.

Table 1. Key methodological limitations and mitigation strategies.

Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
Sampling Bias: Youth engaged in this research were engaged through snowball recruitment from their relationships with service organizations. It was not possible to know if youth who participated were representative of the target populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspectives of various youth captured within different regions or and demographics The survey was shared widely, and youth were encouraged to share with their peers Multiple lines of evidence used
Generalizability: Although there was diversity in representation amongst the youth engaged in the survey, youth face a multitude of barriers and those engaged may not be generalizable to all hard-to-reach youth across Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple lines of evidence used to verify findings against other research engaging diverse youths A large and diverse sample of service organizations were engaged to gain perspectives from diversity of youths
Non-Response Bias: Due to low response rates to interview and focus group discussion invitations, the results may not be representative of touchpoints that were non-responsive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple lines of evidence used (e.g., literature review) to supplement the interview and focus group data

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 About Youth Community Touchpoints

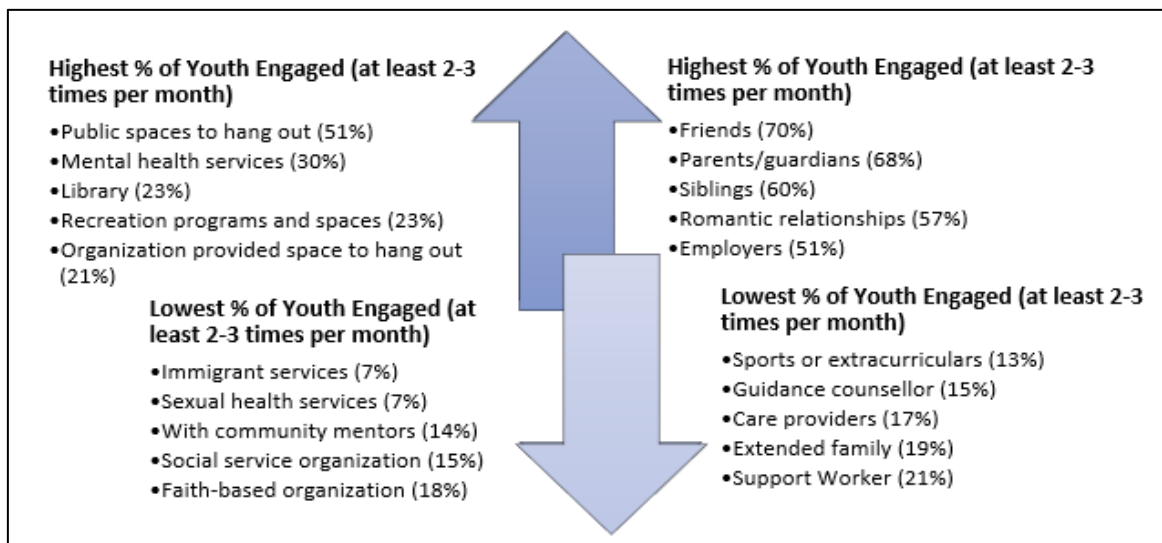
What Are Youth's Primary Touchpoints?

Hard-to-reach youth reported most frequent engagement with friends, parents/guardians, siblings, romantic relationships, public spaces for hanging out, mental health services, libraries, and recreation programs. The percentage of youth who interacted with a service and space 2-3 times per month, compared to 2-3 times per year was quite different; with more youth interacting with services yearly. Most and least frequented touchpoints were similar across sociodemographic characteristics of youth, with several key differences noted in findings.

Which touchpoints do youth most frequently engage?

Youth survey respondents were asked to identify how often they engage with a pre-determined set of community touchpoints. The touchpoints were broken up into two categories: relationships and services/spaces. [Figure 2](#) below indicates the highest and lowest percentage of youth that indicated frequent engagement (at least 2-3 times per month) with a certain touchpoint.

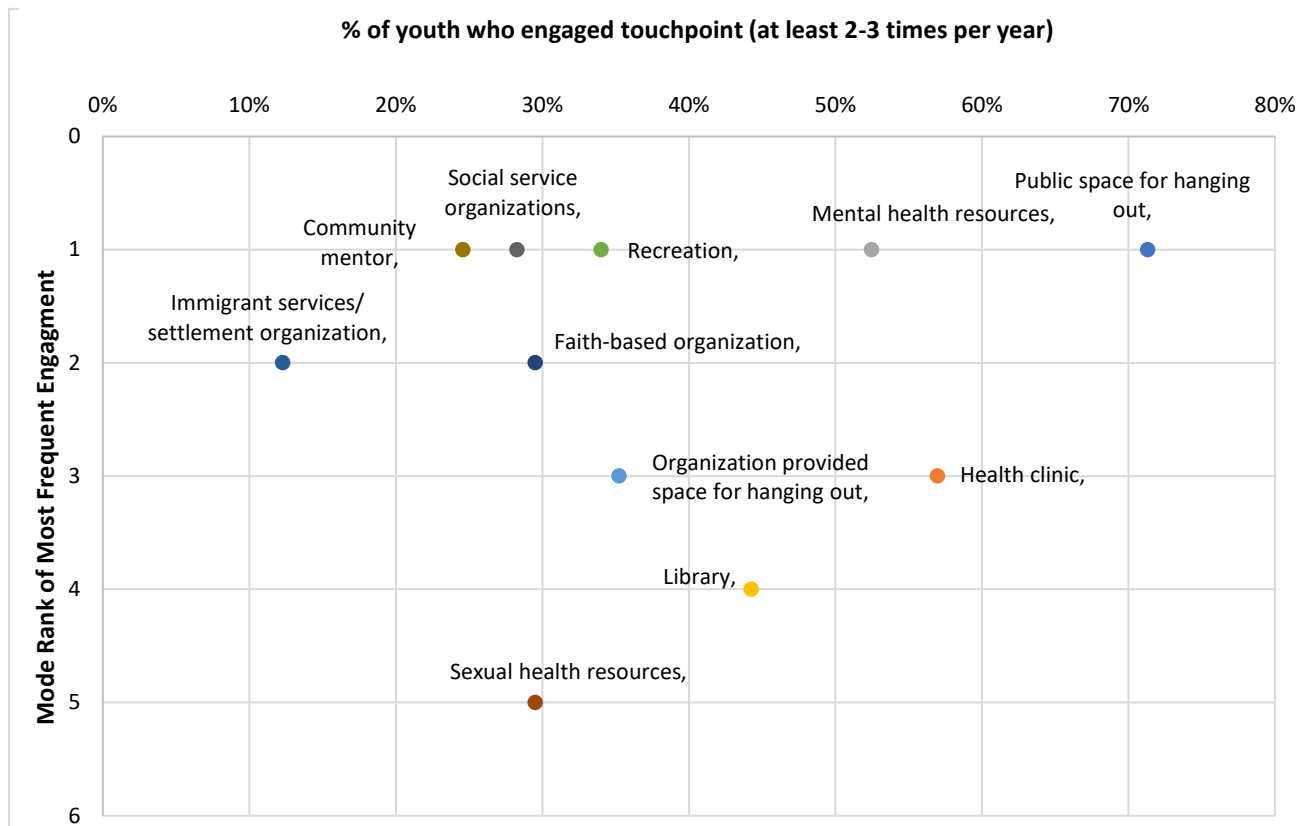
Figure 2. Highest and Lowest Engagement of Youth Touchpoints, All Youth



Notably, the overall percentage of youth who engage with any space or service at least 2-3 times per month was relatively low (i.e., 51% of youth engage public spaces the most); however, this is unsurprising given the target population is hard-to-reach youth who are less likely to be connected to services in the community. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has decreased engagement with community services and spaces over the past several years. The top 5 spaces and services that youth engage had similar frequencies to the lowest 5 (i.e., 18% engaged faith-based organizations compared to 21% engaged organization-provided space to hang out). The differences become more pronounced when looking at spaces and services youth frequent over the span of one year (i.e., youth indicated engagement at least 2-3 times per month OR at least 2-3 times per year), with the following figure providing additional

information about where youth most often engage in the community. [Figure 3](#) below, depicts the overall percentage of youth who engaged a particular touchpoint at least 2-3 times per year, by the mode of which they ranked their engagement (i.e., 1 is most frequented, 9 is least).

Figure 3. Services and Spaces Frequency, All Youth



The above figure also shows that although more youth are likely to have engaged public spaces for hanging out, health clinics, mental health resources, and the library over the span of 1-year; if a youth does attend a space such as recreation programs, social service organizations, community mentors or faith-based organizations, they're likely to go just as frequently if not more.

What are the key differences across sociodemographic groups?

There were no major discrepancies between males and females with touchpoint engagement except that female youth who engaged with social service organizations were found to attend more often than males; and more female youth identified having engaged with mental health resources at least 2-3 times a year (58% of female youth compared to 40% of male youth). Frequency of engagement with social service organizations and community mentors were identified as higher in urban communities than rural communities, despite the same percentage of youth who attend.

Overall, the top and least frequented touchpoints were fairly similar between different demographics of youth. Some key differences were identified, including:

- More immigrant youth engaged employers (74%) compared to their friends (67%) or their parents/guardians (59%).

- Indigenous youth and disabled youth have the highest levels of engagement with social networks and relationships. For example, 88% of Indigenous youths indicated frequent engagement with friends, compared to only 67% of immigrant youth.
- A very high percentage of youth living with addiction engaged their care providers at least 1-2 times a year (78%), compared to all youth who completed the survey (17%).
- 2SLGBTQ+ youth engaged more with community organizations and social services compared to other youth. Not only do a higher percentage of 2SLGBTQ+ youth interact with these services (41% compared to 35%), they also indicated going more frequently compared to other spaces.
- Immigrant youth (48%) and racialized youth (56%) were more likely to be engaged with faith-based organizations than youth overall (30%). These two demographics were also more likely to visit libraries, and less likely to engage sexual health resources compared to youth overall.
- Youth with intersecting challenges (i.e., youth who are low-income, in unstable housing, in conflict with the legal system, or living with addiction) were more likely to be engaged with social services compared to youth who did not identify with these characteristics.

Why Do Youth Interact with Certain Touchpoints?

Youth appear to be more likely to interact with touchpoints based on their previous experiences, current needs, and influence from close relationships. They are more likely to interact with spaces that are comfortable to them, such as those that are safe, supportive, autonomous, relatable, reflective, consistent, accessible, and private. Over their life, youth touchpoints often change due to differences in youth's needs and priorities, interests, life circumstances, or age.

Why do youth engage certain touchpoints over others?

During key informant interviews, service providers described hard-to-reach youth as more likely to engage spaces or service based on their previous experiences, their current needs, and the influence from close relationships. For example, if immigrant youth require support to process their work visa, they would be likely to seek out organizations that provide those types of services. However, if they've had a negative experience or faced prejudice at one of these organizations, they would be less likely to engage or may seek support from other areas. On the other hand, if a youth were to engage an organization that they found comfortable and welcoming, they may be more inclined to continue a relationship with this space.

Which youth touchpoints do youth disengage over time?

Youth who responded to the survey were asked to identify if they had previously engaged with a touchpoint, but no longer did. Survey responses showed youth were most likely to disengage with education-specific touchpoints (i.e., teachers, school, guidance counsellors, sport teams), their parents/guardians, youth groups, organization-provided spaces, and the library as they got older. The touchpoints youth no longer used did not show any significant differences between age groups (i.e., 15-20 vs 21-29); however, a higher percentage of older youth aged 21-29 identified not engaging with touchpoints as frequently as they used to.

What changes the use of certain touchpoints?

When asked to describe why they do and do not engage with certain touchpoints over time, youth indicated the following:

- **Need and Priority:** Youth described disengagement with community touchpoints over time because their needs and priorities shift depending on the prevalence and accessibility of touchpoints. For example, youth described new touchpoints such as having a baby or a new relationship as adjusting priorities. Whereas accessibility of touchpoints, due to COVID restrictions or a change in health status (i.e., mental health or anxiety), can limit their ability to interact. These changes create less time to engage with touchpoints, so youth will prioritize which touchpoints they are able to access or is of higher need. The quote below illustrates this shift in priority.

“COVID really put a higher need for certain things less accessible”

- Indigenous Youth, 21-24 years old, living in rural Ontario (Survey)

- **Interests:** Youth stipulated a change in their general interests will influence their engagement with certain touchpoints. This was described as occurring because services no longer felt applicable in their lives, or touchpoints like recreational spaces are either no longer of interest or become interesting. This is also applicable to faith-based spaces and romantic relationships.
- **Change in lifecourse:** As life circumstances change, so do youth’s engagement with particular touchpoints. There are many contextual and circumstantial reasons for this but could include moving to a new city, economic strain, homelessness, employment, etc.
- **Aged out:** A subset of youth survey respondents identified wanting to access services but no longer being able to due to their age. The youth that felt this way were between 17-30 years old, no one under 17 years old mentioned aging out of services. The quote below is from a youth between the ages of 17 and 20 who can no longer attend the organization they were engaged with due to their age. This is also applicable to educational touchpoints such as high school and related touchpoints like guidance counsellors, teachers, etc.

“J’allais beaucoup à la maison des jeunes avant pour m’occuper, puisque mon âge ne me le permet plus, je ne peux plus m’y rendre. Il n’y a pas de maison pour adulte.”

– 2SLGBTQ+ Youth, Age 17-20, Living in Quebec (Survey)

What are the characteristics of youth’s most comfortable and frequented touchpoints?

In exploring why certain spaces were more comfortable to youth than others, some important themes emerged about preferred in-person environments. The traits in [Figure 4](#) were described by youth survey respondents and service organizations. There is an added consideration about the time it takes to build trusting relationships with youth who often face multiple barriers in their lives or may have experiences with different types of discrimination or trauma. Especially when a hard-to-reach youth might engage a service yearly as opposed to monthly, availability and accessibility for long periods of time is important.

Figure 4. Traits of In-Person Environments Preferred by Hard-to-Reach Youth

Description of Trait	Example
Safety: Environments where youth feel safe (physically, mentally, emotionally, economically). This prioritizes acknowledgement of systemic and systematic constructs such as racism-free environments, decolonized practices, creation of physically accessible spaces, use of inclusive language, etc.	<i>"I feel accepted and there are others like me that I can connect with. Meeting my mentor and going to the mosque is not overwhelming [or] crowded with lots of people."</i> — Racialized youth, Age 21-24, Living in Alberta
Supportive: The space provides supports that may benefit the youth or helps meet one of their needs. This could be anything from development of confidence or soft skills, provision of supports for mental or physical health or accessibility of food or books, etc.	<i>"I chose the top choices because I interact with them based on my need and mental health is something I am using frequently. It is comfortable because it is helpful for me"</i> — Racialized and immigrant youth, Age 25-30, Living in British Columbia
Autonomy and choice: Youth described scenarios where they feel most comfortable when involved in decision-making processes or when they are able to make their own decisions about where, when, with who, and in which ways they want to interact and participate. The creation of autonomy and choice is the development of <i>shared power</i> with youth that differs from the top-down experiences youth often have.	<i>"Most of my top choices are places where there is no pressure to interact with anyone or anything if I don't need to. It takes the pressure off of me and allows me to feel more natural and safer"</i> — 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with a motor-skill disability, Age 21-24, Living in Nova Scotia
Relatable and Reflective: Spaces that can relate to youth through shared experiences (i.e., persons with similarities in age, gender, race, background, etc.) is meaningful as it means someone understands youths' personal context without them having to relive or explain nuanced or traumatic experiences.	<i>"I'm able to find people who understand my struggle and who are also trying to work towards a better lifestyle and as [we] communicate [we] will build a bond that makes all of us feel like family."</i> — Black male youth, Age 17-20, Living in Ontario
Consistent: Spaces that are consistent with when and how services are offered can help foster trust. The importance of consistency for hard-to-reach youth was described as exceptionally important as it helps to build trust overtime and create accountability for the youth.	<i>"They're always available to support me one way or the other. My worker with income assistance always, always has my back and gets to work when I have any thing regarding income assistance that she can support me with."</i> — Female youth living with a disability, Age 21-24, British Columbia
Accessible: It is important to provide youth with low-barrier environments in terms of spatial, financial, and social considerations. Primary barriers were described as transit and childcare; however, there are a variety of potential barriers that youth may face to interact with a service, and a holistic look should be considered.	<i>"Je fais partie d'une équipe de soccer amateur dans mon quartier et ceci me rend heureuse. Accessible et parfait pour voir et entretenir des relations amicales"</i> — 2SLGBTQ+ youth, Age 25-30, Living in Quebec
Private: Youth describe the importance to have spaces where they can share their opinions and experiences or access sensitive resources in a trustworthy and confidential manner. You may not want their relationships to know when they access a service.	<i>"Mental health resources often give me a sense of comfort and privacy when I need to open up about my feelings. They are validating, inclusive and offer a safe space for me to be vulnerable."</i> — Racialized and immigrant youth, Age 17-20, Living in Nunavut

3.2 How Touchpoints and Youth Interact and Interplay

How Do Touchpoints and Youth Interact?

Youths' interactions with touchpoints pivoted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to become increasingly virtual. Youth described both negative and positive experiences with this change. For example, online platforms had issues such as access to safe spaces, lack of technology, and isolation anxiety; however, this virtual landscape also provided increasingly accessible and diverse touchpoints for youth who are able to connect online. As a result, the hybrid model is an increasingly popular option to interact with hard-to-reach youth as it prioritizes accessibility and preferences for each individual.

How did youth's interactions with touchpoints change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Due to the pandemic restrictions, youth survey respondents described challenges interacting with touchpoints outside of their immediate household/social circle. Touchpoints youth described as struggling to interact with the most included school (and relevant stakeholders such as teachers, guidance counsellors, coaches, etc.), friends, programs, and social services (such as health care practitioners, mental health practitioners, case workers, etc.). Generally, youth who identified as 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous, Black, living in a rural area, and/or having stayed in a shelter over the past 5-years were slightly more likely to describe negative experiences engaging touchpoints throughout the COVID-19 restrictions, compared to other groups. For some of these youth the inability to engage their usual touchpoints was an issue due to lack of safe spaces or resources. For example, the quote below illustrates one youths' experience navigating engagement with their healthcare provider due to inability to find those safe places within their home environment.

"It was very hard having over the phone appointments because I often couldn't access a safe place to privately speak to my doctors. It was a negative experience."

– Female youth with a developmental disability, Age 16-17, Nunavut (Survey)

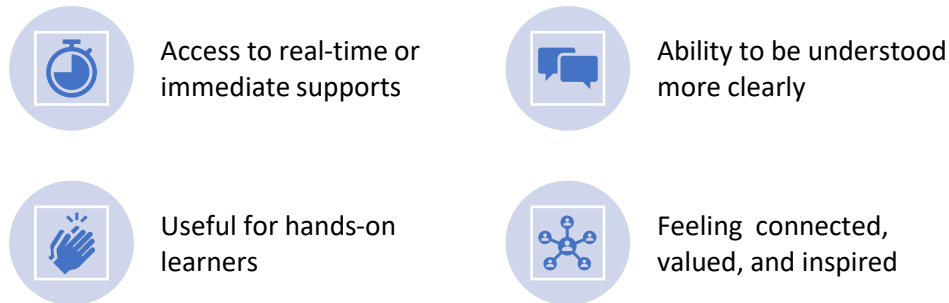
Some youth indicated that even at the time of survey completion they had not returned to their usual levels of interaction with some of their pre-COVID touchpoints due to ongoing fear about COVID-19, a decrease in social capacity, or an increase in health challenges such as anxiety.

What do in-person interactions with touchpoints look like?

Many youth survey respondents indicated that they value in-person interactions with touchpoints. Some youth shared that they continue to solely use in-person touchpoints and do not, or will not, use online platforms to interact. Organizations involved in key informant interviews that work with low-income or homeless youth often described continuing in-person interactions with youth throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and being creative to work around the restrictions. This was primarily because their clients often did not have access to internet or virtual tools such as telephones or computers, so online services were not as viable of an option.

[Figure 5](#) below highlights the key benefits to in-person interactions, as described by youth survey respondents.

Figure 5. Benefits to In-Person Touchpoint Interactions



In-person engagement with spaces and services was described by organizations as gradually increasing since COVID-19 restrictions were reduced, as youth often find value to in-person interactions.

What do virtual interactions with touchpoints look like?

Many youth survey respondents described negative experiences with the pivot to virtual platforms and highlighted how this created barriers to engagement. Across the various different sociodemographic populations, younger youth (i.e., 15-20), rural youth, and Indigenous youth were more likely to express negative comments about virtual platforms.

The **challenges** with virtual interactions that youth described can be found in [Figure 6](#), below.

Figure 6. Challenges to Virtual Touchpoint Interactions

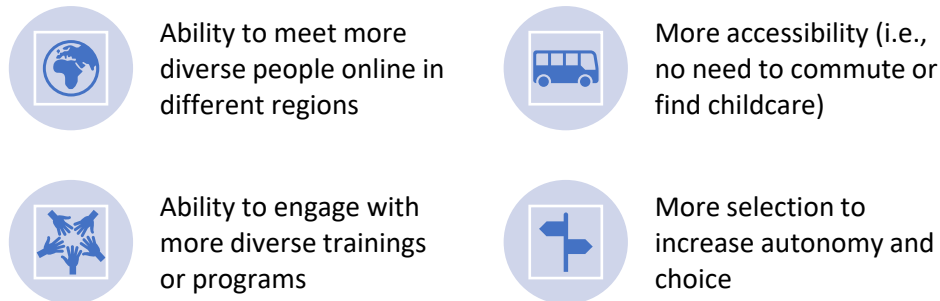


Target youth populations become even more difficult to reach where digital/remote outlets were not available. With more services, programs, jobs, and media pushed online, the digital divide experienced by these youth is even more exacerbated.

Despite the above challenges with virtual platforms, there were youth who described their experiences with online interactions as positive. For example, female Black youth, were more likely to describe positive experiences with virtual interactions compared to other youth populations, despite describing negative experiences with COVID-19 overall. Youth shared how the recent increase in virtual engagement actually facilitated some interactions with their touchpoints.

The **opportunities** that youth described as emerging from an increase in virtual interactions can be found in [Figure 7](#), below.

Figure 7. Opportunities to Virtual Touchpoint Interactions



Virtual engagement continues to help increase engagement of youth who face accessibility barriers. The quote below illustrates how the increased use of virtual platforms has continued to help remove barriers to engagement, specifically for low-income youth who have access to technology and Wi-Fi.

“I accessed a lot of services online and continue to do so. I really do like online options way better, because I don’t have to leave my house, sometimes I do not have money to go out and meet with my workers!”

—2SLGBTQ+ youth, Age 21-24, Living in British Columbia

What do hybrid models look like?

The emergence of hybrid models post-COVID created opportunity for youth engagement as it allowed for in-person services to support relationship building while also allowing for larger reach and engagement of youth via virtual models.

The hybrid model was described as implemented strategically and uniquely by each organization to best fit the youth they interact with, with virtual components primarily leveraged to reach youth who face barriers to in-person attendance. As illustrated in the quote below, some organizations have increased their service flexibility with hybrid models to expand how youth may interact with their program. Many organizations described utilization of a case-by-case scenario to assess the best model for youth interactions.

“We have incorporated some COVID best practices so we can work with youth in a way that works for them- we evaluate if a conversation needs to happen in person or if its better over the phone?”

- Service Organization, Alberta (Interview)

How Do Touchpoints Interact With Each Other to Engage and Support Youth?

Youth touchpoints were found to interact in three primary ways to engage and support youth. These include awareness, referral, and collaboration. Each of these interactions are important to facilitate different types of youth engagement and require varying levels of time and capacity.

What ways do youth touchpoints interplay to reach and support youth?

The way youth touchpoints understand and interact with each other can influence how youth engage with resources and other touchpoints in the community. When asked if their touchpoints influence their decision-making about touchpoint engagement, most youth agreed that their close relationships and touchpoints were a deciding factor. Three ways touchpoints were found to work together to influence youth decision-making are through awareness, referral, and collaboration.

Awareness

If the primary relationships in youths' lives are knowledgeable about other touchpoints, they are able to create awareness about these services and spaces. Some examples described in interviews included: friends share information about programs they attend, posters at the library bring to youths' attention programs in the community, agencies can help youth become aware of other programs or spaces, or parents share information with youth about programs they participated in when they were younger.

Outreach is a strategy that facilitates awareness because it allows programs to share information by meeting youth where they are as opposed to having a youth go to the organization, which can create barriers. For most organizations outreach was described as working with touchpoints such as schools, including post-secondary education, and community spaces such as shelters, food banks, or other areas youth may go to seek resources they don't have access to otherwise, such as Wi-Fi. Outreach strategies were variable and often catered to target youth populations. For example, school outreach is important to interact with younger youth (ages 15-18) who may be more likely to be found in high schools. Older youth were described as having more flexibility, autonomy, and confidence to travel so it may be easier for them to engage a service in-person or to cater outreach to their unique experiences, for example to meet them at a coffee shop.

Social media is also a method of generating youth awareness and a prominent theme of youth engagement noted from this research. Several organizations identified social media and other virtual platforms as a new effective way to create awareness about service delivery. This was described as an accessible way to reach youth, as many young adults have social media presence. Platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were notable avenues for engagement. Social media was most often described as an effective strategy to interact with immigrant and racialized youth. Despite the capacity for interactions through these platforms, this approach was also described as time consuming, especially given most programs don't receive additional funding for this type of engagement, and often as not reaching the hardest-to-reach youth (i.e., those without reliable access to the internet or with higher priority needs such as housing and food). However, an online presence (regardless of if it is on social media or not) is a way to interact with youth, as many will use these online platforms to find and engage supports and services relevant to them.

Active Referral

A step further than awareness, touchpoints can facilitate active referrals to services or spaces for youth. Youth touchpoints such as friends or family, may refer youth by actively supporting their participation or connection to a service. This type of interaction requires more trust between youth and their touchpoint, and often a closer relationship between the two touchpoints. For example, a friend who attends a program with the youth or a service provider who actively facilitates an introduction for the youth to someone at a community centre.

Service organizations described the importance of word of mouth to create youth referrals through trusted touchpoints that meet youth where they already are. However, effective referrals are an active process and approaches such as word of mouth requires lots of time and effort to be successful, with relationship building and thoughtful knowledge translation needed to properly convey information to youth and have buy-in from a touchpoint. For example, to best leverage intergenerational knowledge sharing by parents who may refer a service they attended when they were young, means that program would have existed in the community for many years. This type of referral was described as occurring most often by organizations that serve low-income youth. The concept of intergenerational referral is also utilized through provision of wraparound supports, where parents/guardians may utilize an organization for a service and then also bring their youth to that organization. This type of referral was described more often by organizations that support Black youth and immigrant youth. Organizations that support 2SLGBTQ+ youth described being more likely to have youth referrals come through friends or other youth who also identify as 2SLGBTQ+, as they may need to access similar services; whereas Indigenous organizations were more likely to describe referrals through community champions or community partners as an effective way to share information through youth touchpoints.

Dynamic Collaboration

An interaction considered a step further than referral is the dynamic collaboration between two or more touchpoints. For this purpose, collaboration is described as touchpoints working together in tandem to meet the needs of youth. For example, some providers described working with providers at different organizations to leverage each others' skillsets and programs to find complementary ways to support one youth. This can also happen within one organization, where wraparound services are offered to support different facets of youths' needs. Many service providers described the use of mental health services as a strong area for collaboration to successfully engage and retain youth in programming. Another important example of collaboration between touchpoints was described as the active inclusion of youths' natural supports during consideration of ongoing care. Several organizations described part of their collaborative approach is to work to build-up the capacity of youths' pre-existing relationships (or natural supports) that can then help provide support to youth when they're not directly engaged with the program.

Collaboration is important but can create challenges if not done in a way that is privy to what the youth needs and wants. One organization discussed the danger of wraparound supports if too many people or programs support youth at the same time as it can be too demanding or put too much pressure for the youth to make changes at a pace that they may not be ready for.

How has COVID-19 influenced these interactions?

COVID-19 restrictions were described by service organizations as sparking new challenges with youth interactions, as many youths could not be reached at their usual touchpoints during a time in their lives when they would have been exposed to important opportunities. For example, many organizations utilize school as a critical touchpoint to advertise services and share opportunities for youth post-graduation; however, this type of engagement was not conducted the last few years. Additionally, youth were described as not able to be found in the community at the touchpoints they were before (i.e., spaces like malls, recreation spaces, etc.) which created additional barriers to engagement. Being able to recognize where youth are in the community and working with touchpoints to better provide awareness and opportunities that are useful to youth can be very important when trying to reach this population.

Which touchpoint to touchpoint interaction is most valuable?

The different types of interactions between touchpoints and their potential uses are best leveraged based on consideration about need and background of youth. For example, youth who are not in school (i.e., early leaving) would not benefit in the same way from awareness created through this institution; however, collaborations with schools were described as able to create linkages for youth who have dropped out to return or achieve their education through a different mechanism more appropriate for them. Another example is from organizations that support youth living with physical or mental disabilities, which described parents as an integral touchpoint for youth in their younger years to engage with their services. Guardians were described as interacting through referrals and collaborations with provision of emotional and physical supports for youth to attend services in-person.

As the examples above illustrate, collaboration is exceptionally important when considering the multi-faceted nature of youth needs (i.e., social, cultural, educational, economical, structural, physical, etc.) that can't always be met by one touchpoint. [Appendix 6](#) depicts a conceptual framework to reflect these findings and show how touchpoints work together to meet needs of youth. The story, illustrated in the box below showcases a collaboration between touchpoints that helps provide training and skills to Indigenous youth in a way that is also culturally aware and sensitive toward this population.

Real World Story (Literature): Example of Collaboration with Indigenous Youth Touchpoints

The Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP)^x finds success through collaboration between Government, Indigenous Communities, Educational institutions, and key industry players/stakeholders. These touchpoints and service providers work collaboratively to provide a fully immersed natural-resource based work culture, including safety training, time management, remote and rotational work schedules, and work-life balance.^{xi} The foundation of the analysis was based upon the Four Elements of Self, part of the Traditional Medicine Wheel Teachings, this recognizes that effective education requires the integration of the learner's spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical realities. What is important to consider here in the characterization of the interactions between touchpoints and service providers is that it considers the importance of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and guidance/successes measured through individual narrative, rather than more contemporary and rigid indicators of success that are found within Contemporary Western Knowledge/frameworks. The interactions provide training and skills that are necessary in many Western labour markets, however, it emphasizes these teachings through holistic connection with self, others, and environment through traditional ways of knowing.

3.3 Youth Influences on Workplace, Career and Training Supports

Which Touchpoints Influence Youth's Perceptions About Work, Training and Career Opportunities?

Youth described their parents/guardians, educational institutions, employers, teachers, romantic relationships, and friends as most influential toward their work, training and career opportunities. This differs depending on who youth primarily interact with or who influences their day-to-day lives.

Which touchpoints influence youth's attitude about work, training, and career opportunities?

Youth were asked to rank the touchpoints they felt most influenced their attitude and awareness about work, training, and career opportunities, and then describe why they selected their top choices. The touchpoints with the highest rated level of influence (calculated as the percentage of youth who engaged with that touchpoint, identified it as top 1 or 2 most influential towards their attitude and awareness of work, training, and career) were:

- parents/guardians (56%),
- educational institution (42%),
- employers (37%),
- teachers (35%),
- romantic relationships (35%), and
- friends (31%)

Youth who were younger (i.e., 15-20 years old) indicated coaches/sports teams are larger influences towards their attitude about these opportunities, compared to youth overall. Indigenous youth also identified similar influential touchpoints with a higher overall rank for grandparents and cousins being more influential to inform their attitudes and awareness.

These findings were slightly different for NEET youth as they are not in education or employment and would not engage as much with some of the touchpoints who may have more access and influence over this type of information. For NEET youth, touchpoints such as sports teams/recreation and support workers were more often ranked top 1 or 2 influence on their attitude towards employment. Further, this list looks different for youth who may not have strong social circles such as parents/guardians, romantic relationships, or friends. For example, where immigrant youth identified less frequent engagement with friends and parents/guardians, they ranked their top influences differently and included guidance counsellors (36%) and placed a higher overall emphasis on romantic partners (57%), compared to parents/guardians (21%).

These touchpoints influence youth in different ways and were often selected due to their proximity, relevance, and familiarity in youth's lives. This is underlying the quote below from a youth who describes why her parents have influenced her perceptions of employment based on their shared culture.

"I chose my parents as my number one influence [...] They are the ones who have told me what career options are out there for me and since they know me so well, I feel that they know what would best suit me (at most times). Culturally, they have also told me as a child which jobs are for "men" and "women". In other words, which career options would best suit me as a South Asian woman."

- South Asian female youth, Age 21-24, Alberta (Survey)

What's Working Well to Influence and Engage Youth in Employment and Training?

Service organizations shared several strategies to best engage and retain hard-to-reach youth successfully in workforce training programs. Best practices often seek to understand and support the holistic needs of hard-to-reach youth labour market attachment, which includes addressing structural and systemic barriers where possible.

This research identified characteristics of employment/workforce development programming that best support labour market attachment for hard-to-reach youth populations. These best practices are specific to employment programs but would be best utilized with spaces that embody the characteristics outlined in [Figure 3](#) of this report.

1. Engages with employers: Workforce programs that directly engage employers were found to be effective. Employers often know what they need from an employee or what skills are valuable for their workplace. Workforce programs that engage with employers were found to take on a variety of forms but often help to build linkages and trust between an employer and potential employee. Some examples from service organization interviews and literature include:

- Employment programs that allow the employer to flag youth who may need additional support during more traditional interview and recruitment processes, so the employer then has a connection to seek training or resources for themselves and their youth.^{xii}
- Employer-driven programs that collaborate with an organization to train youth on job-relevant skills, with the intent to hire participants after the course.
- Recognition that inherent biases exist amongst employers who may not have capacity or safe enough work environments to hire and retain someone who is homeless, disabled, living with an addiction, etc. Direct collaboration with employers to appropriately train and provide support can help effective employment (i.e., trainings about how to create discrimination-free environment, detailed information how to support employees with disabilities, etc.).

Real-World Story (Literature): Ready, Willing & Able (RWA)^{xiii} Employer Engagement

A national initiative funded through ESDC's Opportunity Fund, RWA is a highly successful program that works closely with employers and employment agencies to connect youth living with mental disabilities to the labour market. This program provides support directly to employers to best prepare their workplace for accommodation of people living with mental disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as provide support throughout the hiring process. The initiative works to pair candidates with employers that best fits the candidates interests or abilities, and also has funds available to remove barriers to employment such as short-term supply of bus tickets or needed apparel (i.e., work boots).

2. Considers retention: Employment programs that focus only on job attainment without consideration of retention (i.e., what do youth need to know after obtaining a job) can create harmful situations where youth continue to get employed without knowing how to be a successful employee. It is important to recognize that long-term and successful labour market attachment often requires soft skills that youth don't always attain from workforce development programs, such as time management or how to

communicate with your employer. Soft skill development and maintained connections with youth after employment has been attained is critical for successful and long-term employment. Continued connections allows an avenue for youth to reach if they have a workplace issue or question, rather than struggling on their own.

3. Uses real-world scenarios: Training that embodies real-world situations (i.e., experiential learning, work placements, use of bi-weekly pay cheques, work hours, timecards, etc.) to support youth learning about potential employment scenarios were considered important. Not only does this facilitate soft-skill development needed for retention (as mentioned above), but real-world scenarios can help youth decide what type of work or environment may suit them best. Hard-to-reach youth may not have a good sense of where their strengths are, or what kind of work they might thrive in, as they don't always have role models and networks that expose them to what is available. A youth might watch an episode of a cooking show and be interested in pursuing a job as a chef or see a job in action and decide that could be a good route to pursue but have no knowledge of the work skills needed, or career path itself. So, providing experiential ways and real-world scenarios to test careers before making commitments and decisions on course of study or accepting full time positions could help with preparedness and buy-in.^{xiv}

This also allows youth to explore their own areas of interest and develop skills in a way that is engaging to them and will set them up for a future career in a field they may enjoy. As highlighted in the quote below, a youth may already know they are unable to work within loud spaces; however, without knowledge or experience in a job conducted in a suitable environment that would be a better fit for their needs and personality, the youth has limited ability to explore other avenues.

"[...] what is difficult is finding a job that works for my limitations. For example, I have social anxiety and a major trigger is loud spaces and yelling. Most jobs available are in retail or food services which have both triggers frequently."

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with a disability, Age 21-24, Living in Ontario (Survey)

4. Creates equitable opportunities: Workforce development programs often need to recognize and act when youth require additional supports to access the same opportunities as someone else. The creation of equitable opportunities for hard-to-reach youth might mean provision of bus tickets, support attaining childcare, flexible program hours, hybrid engagement models, etc. Often times, equitable opportunities can be achieved with the provision of financial bursaries or honorariums to help youth overcome these challenges. Further, provision of a fair salary to attend programs can help youth show up and succeed, as described in the quote below.

"I would tell them to contact WorkBC [...] They've helped me out with employment training programs, that pay you to have an exceptional attendance and to show a positive and determined attitude."

- 2SLGBTQ+ Métis Youth, Age 21-24, Living in British Columbia (Survey)

Financial support is not the only consideration to equitable opportunities for hard-to-reach youth. For some youth, this also means the program environment is conducive to trust and good relationships. Literature indicates that NEET youth may be more concerned with the type of spaces they're in as opposed

to the actual program, particularly those that come from trauma and who work to ensure their environments are ideal spaces for good mental health^{xv}. Building those solid relationships is part of the process to fully engage with a particular training program or workplace. The development of these environments is part of ensuring all youth can access a training space in a safe and comfortable way.

5. Takes a strengths-based approach: It is important for workforce and training programs to recognize that youth are experts in their own lives and each person has special and unique talents or interests that can be leveraged and expanded. For example, literature discusses how one's experiences with addiction can be a 'parallel process to career.'^{xvi} Addiction as a past career still serves to inform values and goals, develop transferable skills, and positions addiction in a way that eliminates the automatic assumption that a person's experience has been entirely negative which can reinforce self-limiting beliefs and shame. A few organizations who participated in interviews shared that after youth attend their workforce program, they may let them stay to volunteer or work if there's opportunity. This is another great example of a way to acknowledge youth's strengths and help them grow their experiences.

Life experiences uniquely positions youth to perform in other spaces or careers, even if it's unconventional. This is an important practice that should be considered in conjunction with the ability to provide choice and autonomy to youth about how they are engaged in employment and career training, as each youth brings their own skills and preferences.

6. Acknowledges complexities: Service organizations who participated in interviews described success for workforce programs that attempt to meet the underlying needs that create barriers to successful and sustained employment such as provision of mental health resources, housing supports, driving lessons, etc. Wraparound services are an effective way that this can be achieved. For example, an organization may have a relationship with youth through a swimming program and may also host workforce trainings but additionally provides support with mental health services for those youth who may benefit. This can also include no costs associated with registration, simplicity in understanding and navigating programming and services, flexibility in registration processes and program delivery hours, as youth with uncertain life circumstances (transportation, intermittent work, dynamic of periodic disabilities or unpredictable health challenges) may not be able to pre-commit to advanced registrations of training programs.

Real-World Story (From Literature): Achēv^{xvii} Provides Choice and Acknowledges Complexity

Achev is an employment organization based in Brampton, Ontario. They mainly provide services for newcomer and racialized youth. They offer a variety of employment programming so interested youth can select the option that makes most sense to them in order to leverage their skills and interests. They also provide demographic-specific programs where youth can learn from, and with, people who reflect themselves and focus on their unique needs (i.e., programs for newcomers, Black youth, newcomer women, and women). They operate with EDI and accessibility parameters to ensure inclusion of all those who need supports. Further, they provide wraparound supports such as free newcomer services and a variety of soft skills training specific to this population.

What Are Ongoing Challenges/Facilitators to Training and Employment Touchpoints?

Throughout youth survey responses and dialogue with service providers some important challenges and facilitators to workforce programs were identified. Challenges included the ability for youth to find opportunities that meet their unique needs and the social and structural systems surrounding touchpoints. Facilitators included the ability to find individualized and tailored supports, as well as interactions between touchpoints through wraparound or collaborative approaches.

The following section summarizes challenges and facilitators to engagement with workforce development supports and employment more broadly identified through this research. Findings show how the hardest-to-reach youth are often those not only facing multiple barriers to employment but also facing multiple social and structural challenges that they experience in their everyday lives. Consideration of these themes can help employment programs better reach and support youth across Canada. Quotes were used where possible to illustrate the youth perspective and highlight their voices.

What are youths' challenges to employment and workforce programs?

Challenge: Finding Opportunities That Meet Unique Needs. An overarching theme amongst youth survey respondents was the inability to find employment trainings that meet their unique needs. This meant different things to different people, for example many youths living with a disability expressed challenges to find opportunities that suit their abilities or accommodate their needs. Mental health and anxiety were another prominent theme, with some youth expressing difficulty finding programs or workplaces that understand their limitations or work within their capacity to engage. The quote below illustrates how programs that are not flexible enough can create harm and further put-up barriers to attainment of successful employment.

“Beaucoup de service sont difficile d’y avoir accès, en plus d’être très bref et court, il y’a de lourde attentes pour certains service, beaucoup de taches à faire soi même pour avoir accès à des rencontres. Je ne suis toujours pas apte à travailler du à ma santé mentale mais le manque de service urgent m’impose de travailler quand même et de me surcharger mentalement.”

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth, Age 17-20, Living in Quebec (Survey)

Youth also expressed challenges to access employment trainings that are applicable to their unique situation or context. For example, immigrant youth described difficulty to find content that is translated into their primary language or situated within their cultural competencies, while 2SLGBTQ+ youth discussed challenges to find queer employment-training content that is most relevant to their workplace needs.

“Difficult to find content by-and-for neurodivergent, queer, and trans people.”

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with a disability, Age 25-30, British Columbia (Survey)

Challenge: Social and Structural Environments. The social and structural environment of an employer or workforce training impacts to what extent youth are able to engage with the labour market. In survey responses, youth shared experiences with employment and workforce training services that were reflective of power imbalances. The power dynamics between marginalized youth and employment programs came across as a frustration, where youth felt engagement was not respectful or programs weren't efficient at meeting their own personal needs. This included narratives about limited accessibility, disrespect within programs by staff, or experiences of being judged because of their past experiences. Below, a youth describes their experiences with youth employment services.

Youth shared similar experiences with employers or in workplaces, where some youth felt unheard or undervalued and others shared experiences of abuse and discrimination. Youth living with a disability were most likely to describe experiences facing barriers to employment due to judgement, discrimination, and a lack of accessibility, with youth living in Atlantic provinces or those who identified multiple marginalized characteristics as the most likely to share a story regarding social or structural barriers.

“A lot of places that offer help getting a job also went on vacation this summer and did not update clients/their voicemail/website about their holiday. [...] It would be helpful if more people had sensitivity training on how to speak to others and were more transparent about their hours/availability.”

-Low-income youth living with a developmental disability, Age 21-24, Prince Edward Island (Survey)

Experiences of social stigma and discrimination were also mentioned across youth demographics (e.g., immigrant youth, racialized youth, Indigenous youth, low-income youth).

Literature shows that in situations where youth identify with multiple marginalized groups, as is frequently the case with the hardest-to-reach youth, experiences of discrimination in the workplace increase significantly^{xviii}. This is mirrored in survey findings and the repercussions of this can be detrimental to youths' own career development and advancement. The two quotes below provide examples of youth's experiences with social and structural barriers to employment.

“Due to an ongoing health issue/disability, I have had a lot of difficulty with finding work I feel I am suitable for. There has been a huge barrier with the industry I am most comfortable and employers stating they are equal opportunists until it's time for the interview and they do not have proper accommodations available or make it difficult to reach out to them ahead of time.”

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with a disability, Age 25-30, Nova Scotia (Survey)

“The fact that I'm an immigrant has made looking for work been slightly difficult. Most employers only offer low paying jobs to immigrants.”

- Immigrant youth, Age 25-30, Living in urban Quebec (Survey)

What are youth's facilitators to employment and workforce programs?

Facilitator: Collaboration Between Touchpoints. According to the literature, effective strategies for recruitment, referrals, and supportive wayfinding for hard-to-reach youth includes partnering with local institutions (i.e., social service providers connected with youth) and involvement in local groups to better understand pre-existing resources for youth. At the Calgary Youth Employment Lab in 2019, youth themselves suggested that a best practice to identify and access “hard-to-reach” youth and connect them to employment pathways was through pop-ups or engagements at community locations to provide an informal setting for interactions^{xix}. This was mirrored by youth survey respondents in this research, with many who indicated their relationships and community spaces were welcome areas to receive information about training and careers. Touchpoints that are supportive and able to advocate for youth were perceived as helpful during a youth's trajectory to enter the workforce. Many of these strategies involve an in-depth understanding of organizations and touchpoints at a community level.

Facilitator: Individualized and Tailored Supports. Organizations that serve specific youth populations have a comprehensive understanding of what that population needs to be successful. For example, 2SLGBTQ+ youth may be navigating more complex social systems or health care services than their non-queer peers, and often require additional supports to learn about life skills that would help them after they age out of programs. It was also shared that the best approach for youth living with disabilities is individualization of services and interactions to best encourage autonomy and fit needs of youth, as described in the quote below. Hard-to-reach youth often face similar structural barriers and respond well to programs with similar characteristics; however, they all have unique circumstances and needs.

“Anything that feels truly individualized is the way forward (in terms of service delivery/care planning) sometimes services can be too broad, they’re not individualized for the person and their family’s needs. Tailored, individualized supports.”

- Service organization, British Columbia (Focus Group Discussion)

Real World Story (Literature + Survey): Regina Immigrant Women's Centre (RIWC)^{xx}

RIWC is a non-profit organization which operates in Regina, Saskatchewan. They provide programs and services for immigrant and refugee women and their families to facilitate and support their smooth integration into our local communities. Employment programs are one facet of their organization, with additional wraparound supports available to meet the holistic needs of their clients. They provide settlement advising, family support, education and training, and community outreach programs.

“Typically, most of the youth would mention the problem that Canadian employers aren't welcoming enough for the immigrants who do not have any Canadian experience. I've applied lots of the jobs and the only one that called me for an interview is after being referred by a Canadian organization. And that's where RIWC played a big role. They gave the opportunity to be with them, observed me closely and placed there, where I qualify to be. Their effort worked like magic.”

- Immigrant and racialized female youth, Age 25-30, Living in Saskatchewan

3.4 Opportunities for ESDC Employment and Training Services

Where are there Opportunities to Increase Youth Engagement in Employment Services?

There are two main avenues to increase awareness and meaningful engagement of hard-to-reach youth in employment services and training: indirect engagement with their relationships or direct engagement with youth through the spaces and services where they are already seeking employment supports.

Which Touchpoints Could Be Leveraged to Increase Youth Engagement in Employment Services?

There are two main avenues to reach youth and capture their interest to engage them in employment services and training.

- The first avenue is to indirectly interact with youth through their touchpoints in a way that allows for awareness, referral, and collaboration. Youth survey respondents indicated their touchpoints greatly influence their decision to use services, and research shows partnerships or connections within areas youth frequent can draw their attention. This also allows for the inclusion of wraparound supports as a way to engage with youth who may not be ready for employment training but could be an avenue they seek out in the near future.
- The second avenue is to directly interact with youth at the touchpoints where they are already seeking employment and training information, to provide them with areas of opportunity and increase interest and awareness amongst youth who may already be in a position to engage.

Drawing from findings in the research, we describe touchpoints that may be useful points of connection for ESDC employment and training services to consider when seeking to engage hard-to-reach youth.

Youth Relationships

When asked where they would direct a friend seeking information about workforce training and supports, many youths identified social touchpoints such as friends, family, neighbours, etc., who already have experience seeking employment, may know what the youth is interested in, or may have a job opportunity to offer. Many youths perceive the utilization of social networks and touchpoints as a good way to find employment opportunities or trainings.

As described previously, youth shared relationships such as parents/guardians, romantic relationships, and friends as important influences to their attitude about work, training, and career opportunities. Racialized and Black youth in particular indicated use of social networks such as friends or family to learn about employment training opportunities over other touchpoints. If people in their lives with similar demographic backgrounds have attended a program and can recommend it, there may be a sense of security that it is a space with less risk to the experience of discrimination or inequity, compared to spaces that are unfamiliar. In this sense, collaboration could be founded on the provision of programs in racism-free environments and advocacy for spaces that have staff or attendees who are diverse and share characteristics of youth participants. This is underlying in the quote highlighted below.

“The more my influences interact with a specific organization, the more likely I am to use their services due to the familiarity. It also gives me a sense of security knowing that it has been approved, validated, and trusted by my peers, family, and others that I uphold.”

- Racialized youth, Female, Age 21-24, Living in Ontario

Friends/partners: Youth described their friends/parents as influential to their attitude about employment and training opportunities as they would share their own experiences with a program, bringing the youth to a program with them, and creating awareness about programming. 2SLGBTQ+ youth in particular were described in interviews and focus group discussions as more likely to connect with their chosen social networks (i.e., friends, chosen family, romantic partners, teachers, Elders, youth champions) who may better understand them and their experiences with sexuality, as that may not always be the case with family members.

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to encourage referrals from youth who have already participated in a program and focus further on development and creation of natural supports through wraparound services.*

Parents/guardians: Youth described their parents/guardians as an influence as they create awareness, provide encouragement, or facilitate referrals to participate in a program. Parents/guardians were described as a prominent touchpoint across all demographics of youth, and also appeared to have significant influence on their perceptions of work/career opportunities. In interviews with service organizations, parents/guardians were described as a dominant touchpoint for people living with physical disabilities to engage with programs as parents are often the ones with knowledge of youth’s capabilities and are able to support with their youth’s unique physical or mental needs. This was reflected in youth survey responses, with the below quote reflective of why parents/guardians (or other relationships that know their abilities) are a touchpoint youth refer to for training information. There are exceptions to this, for example youth in care or homeless youth may be less connected to their parents/guardians and not all youth experience close or trusting relationships with this touchpoint.

“It is my parent/guardian/caregivers that know me best in terms of my physical limitations being a person with a disability. My friends can help point out the unique opportunities as can my siblings. [...] Educational institutions unless they know the severity of my disability is not necessarily an effective place to go for advice unless I have made one and one connections.”

- Youth living with physical and mental health disabilities, Age 21-24, British Columbia (Survey)

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to engage or partner with organizations where family members already connect with, and to consider what supports youth may need family members to provide for them to engage a program (i.e., childcare, transportation etc.). Finding ways to support these needs may also create further opportunity to engage youth.*

Community mentors: Particularly in the creative voice activity, community mentors were described as a useful touchpoint for youth to become aware or motivated to participate in training opportunities. Often these mentors were described as having similar characteristics or interests to youth and acting as a role model in terms of exploring potential careers and opportunities. Some of the benefits of community mentors is reflective in the story below from a young Indigenous women living with a long-term physical disability. She shares how a community mentor in her life influenced her trajectory to engage in training and employment. The story was slightly redacted to ensure confidentiality and condensed to provide appropriate context; the full story can be found in the Case Studies in [Appendix 8](#).

The Impact of Community Mentors

There is this one person in my life who I consider like a father to me. He is a wonderful person. He is a red seal carpenter. I've been given the opportunity to work with him in the past [...]. I learned basic skills of a carpenter and was fascinated by the types of work I was able to be a part of. Some people in life have jobs at a desk where they are still important, but they can't see the work they've done. In carpentry, you always see the work you're doing. It's kind of historic. Being a part of something you can reflect on from years later. I find it incredibly amazing. After speaking to [my community mentor] more about the steps to take to become a carpenter, I enrolled in a college course that would allow me to build the knowledge and skills to better understand this work. I am very grateful to have such an empowering and inspiring mentor like such. He has helped me find my passion for career life.

- Indigenous youth living with a physical disability, Age 17-20 (Creative Voice)

Inclusion of youth across the life course instead of division by age can be a useful practice to support creation of role models and community mentors, as described in the quote below, however; a primary consideration would be to make sure spaces are still designed with comfort and confidentiality in mind (i.e., so youth are not walking into a program labelled for 2SLGBTQ+ youth and risk encountering someone they don't want to be outed to).

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to engage multiple generations and age groups to increase awareness of programs and foster community mentors.*

"If I'm 28 I don't want to take classes with those who are 16, but we've done that, and the older ones set good examples for younger and those who are younger want to impress the older ones. Youth are given a voice where adults can hear them, and then they have role models from that."

- Service Organization, Low-Income Youth, British Columbia (Interview)

Community Spaces and Services

Many youths also described how different community spaces and services can influence their decisions around engagement and use of employment/training opportunities. In the creative voice activity, when youth were asked to identify spaces that made them feel productive or inspired, as well as where they'd prefer to learn about or participate in training, responses varied as youth have different experiences and preferences. Youth indicated appreciation for community spaces and services that gave them autonomy

over their actions and interactions. This included places like libraries, gardens, or their own homes. This translates to how youth prefer to receive information about a job or participate in employment training, with most youth seeking opportunities provides them with autonomy and choices that best fits their own capabilities and skills. This was exceptionally true for youth living with disabilities, as their abilities and preferences are very unique to their own person. For example, some youth living with disabilities indicated they liked obtaining information online because it's accessible and they can be in a safe space at home away from others who may be sick; where others identified they preferred in-person because they're more apt to read body language to help them understand.

Public Spaces: Public spaces such as libraries or community gardens were mentioned in both the literature and from youth survey respondents as areas youth across demographics frequent. When youth described why they selected the library as a safe space or a frequented space, it was often because of the autonomy. At the library, youth described the ability to choose who they talked to or what they did (i.e., read a book, play a video game, be on the computer, etc.). The quote below is from one Creative Voice participant who describes the potential to partner with a public space to offer outreach.

“This space [the public gardens] could help me in seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment by being a collaborative space that can allow for community events to happen such as job fairs or social gatherings. It is also just a safe, central space in Halifax that feels like a calm within the hustle and bustle of the city.”

– Creative Voice Participant

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to tailor supports or outreach to a public setting that offers youth choice and variety with engagement. For example, a program that incorporates autonomy about how youth access the information (i.e., self-paced, with a staff, with a friend), or how they work through content (i.e., ability to select modules that are of interest or relevant to them).*

Service Providers: Some youths have established relationships with service providers, such as those who provide social services or implement community programs. In these cases, youth tend to trust the providers and their recommendations to other programs such as those with workforce development supports. Youth survey respondents often recognized their unique barriers to employment suggested that engagement with service providers to access employment training could help mitigate potential challenges. For example, when asked where they would refer their friend to access employment or training supports, immigrant youth were most likely to refer to an immigrant-specific service that understands their unique needs and is able to support the often-complex processes needed for employment such as work VISAs or navigation of work cultures. This recommendation was also prominent amongst disabled youth, Black youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to leverage service providers to increase effectiveness of workforce development training, as youth would already be connected with wraparound services or supports that they would require to later become successfully engaged within the labour market (i.e., accessibility supports, childcare, immigrant status, mental health resources, etc.). This could be done through partnerships, collaboration, or integration with trusted providers to better reach and engage youth in trainings. This could take on multiple forms, such as training an existing provider to provide*

workforce supports or have someone external come into that space who could share information on these supports.

Cultural touchpoints: Youth who identified interactions with faith-based touchpoints identified a high frequency of engagement and ranked these touchpoints highly in terms of comfort levels. Spaces that provide faith-based or cultural supports are relevant in the lives of youth who attend them and valuable to the development of natural supports, networks, and other opportunities that may help youth attain employment. For example, to engage Indigenous youth in workforce programs consideration of how the program meaningfully creates spaces that are culturally relevant could be important, as a youth described in the quote below.

“I use Inuit based services, and clinics because they are more accessible and culturally relevant to me.”

- Indigenous Youth, Female, Age 25-30, Living in Ontario

Collaboration could be founded on provision of programs in more culturally safe environments. For example, through more funding allocated to Indigenous-based services to implement workforce programs in manners most culturally relevant to youth in their community.

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to consider the importance of a holistic approach to best engage youth, and meaningfully integrate youth’s cultural values into employment programs.*

Employers: Many youths suggested the best way to learn about employment and training opportunities would be to directly inquire with an employer or human resources department. This was a very popular suggestion amongst Indigenous youth living in small or rural areas and younger youth across demographics (age 15-20). Direct engagement with employers was not recommended by immigrant youth, racialized youth, or those in conflict with the legal system, which is in line with findings that suggests these youth tend to experience high levels of discrimination and prejudice when applying directly to employers for opportunities.

Notable Opportunity: *There is opportunity to partner and find ways that employment programming can create pathways to support hard-to-reach youth directly through the employer.*

Virtual Platforms: Many youths identified online spaces and virtual platforms as a reliable space to find employment and training-related information. Youth described this as an important avenue because of the large amount of choice and autonomy web searches give them, and it increases the ability for youth to find opportunities that is of interest to them, as reflected in the quote below.

“If my friend wanted a job I would tell them to go on indeed to look for a specific job that they want so that they wouldn’t be forced by anyone to work at a place they don’t want.”

- Black Youth, Male, Age 17-20, Living in Ontario (Survey)

In particular, the platform “Indeed” was mentioned by almost half of the youth who suggested use of an online system to find information about work. Youth described online job posting platforms as difficult to navigate and overwhelming, especially when employers ‘ghost’¹ them or are non-responsive. However, these platforms were also highly regarded as they allow youth the autonomy and choice about what work is important or relevant and to select the types of training or employment that they’re interested in.

Notable Takeaway: *There is opportunity to use Indeed as a platform to advertise or promote workforce training programs, as well as further promoting or sharing the Federal government’s current job bank.*

¹ *Ghost:* To ghost someone refers to abruptly cutting off contact with someone, without providing any warning or explanation for doing so.

4.0 Recommendations

The hardest-to-reach youth are often those not only facing multiple barriers to employment but also facing multiple social and structural challenges impacting their everyday livelihoods. The underlying needs of youth should be at the forefront of YESS workplace programs to best engage hard-to-reach youth, albeit directly within the program or indirectly through wraparound supports as reflected in the quote below.

“The YESS program gave me options and opportunities, but I had other obligations to attend to (my child)”

- Indigenous youth, Age 21-24, Living in Nunavut (Survey)

This section outlines some program-specific opportunities for ESDC’s YESS to continue to engage hard-to-reach youth through their programming. The YESS programs themselves already incorporate approaches and tactics to help youth overcome barriers to employment and encourages collaborations and partnerships between touchpoints. The opportunities described in this section are specific to current YESS programs and consider how youth touchpoints could be further involved.

- Continue to partner with other federal departments.** The current YESS program is delivered by 11 departments and agencies within the Government of Canada. This horizontal initiative allows YESS programs to be diverse and span different sectors to provide choice for youth and build enthusiasm for those who may be interested in different fields of work. ESDC could consider furthering these partnerships to find ways that leverage ongoing programs or meet the foundational needs of youth through programs that may act as a pre-cursor or are concurrent with a YESS program. For example, a partnership with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency could provide additional funds to the pre-existing Black Entrepreneurship Program or the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy to bring on youth who experience multiple barriers to employment. Another example is to offer top-up dollars for projects funded by the Youth Justice Fund to help stabilize, train, and help transition youth in restorative programs to the workforce. Where the Youth Justice Fund was described to prioritize activities that involve “Collaborative and integrated approaches across youth related support systems/sectors (justice, social, health, education, private sector and community service providers, etc.)”, adding in an avenue that intersects employment training could help reach this group of hard-to-reach youth.
- Continue to fund projects that incorporate flexibility and innovation.** Hard-to-reach youth have diverse and unique experiences which require flexible and innovative approaches to best reach them. The YESS program is valuable as it funds community-based programs who are able to be on-the-ground, develop meaningful relationships, and recognize how to best provide supports that enable youth to successfully engage in workforce programs. Allowing flexibility with how funds are allocated allow programs to be innovative and creative with how they reach youth, depending on the needs of the individual. The current YESS application is very flexible in-terms of eligible activities. A good example of a program offered by ESDC which encouraged innovation in practice was the Union Training and Innovation Program^{xxi}, which allocated funds for (1) training equipment and (2) innovations in apprenticeship to increase participation and success of underserved groups in Red Seal trades and build broad-based partnerships. The use of innovation allows the flexibility for programs

to address unique needs that they see on-the-ground. This particular program was able to meet and surpass its short-term equity inclusion targets and 90% of newcomers involved in the program (about 940) were employed in a skilled trade at the time of the final evaluation.

- **Continue to fund programs that include employers.** The continued inclusion of employers in programs and funds to engage hard-to-reach youth in the labour market can help mitigate structural and systemic barriers youth face to employment. The currently funded YESS programs are able to use funding to strategically collaborate and partner with employers, which should help to build connections between these touchpoints to better support youth in employment. ESDC could continue to explore unique ways to engage employers in future funding streams such as the provision of employer-driven funds that provide opportunity to build a program that meets the specific needs of employers and mitigate barriers for hard-to-reach youth employment. Employer funds that cover subsidies for youth employment is useful to attract employers; however, funds that address the broader contextual environments of the workplace such as training about discrimination or accessibility could be included as an important component focused on continued and sustained labour market inclusion for hard-to-reach youth.
- **Continue to fund demographic-specific organizations, where possible.** Programs that are demographic-specific can be helpful to address unique needs of certain youth populations. For example, organizations that intend to provide programs tailored to Black youth, or newcomer youth, or 2LSGBTQ+ youth. With Indigenous-serving organizations, demographic-specific programs often have a better understanding of the cultural needs of their youth and may be better positioned to find the hardest-to-reach youth in their community. These programs are often led by staff that are reflective of the individuals they intend to reach and are tailored to create a comfortable space for that group. These touchpoints may also be more connected in the community to other touchpoints that youth interact with, for example an immigrant-serving organization may be better situated to identify and interact with relevant religious spaces. Although there are benefits to fund national organizations and non-demographic specific programs, ESDC should ensure funding opportunities are not exclusionary to the often-smaller programs that provide these services.
- **Continue to build collaborations with youth relationships.** The YESS program encourages strategic collaborations and partnerships to increase capacity across the youth provider network. This report outlines multiple relationships that influence hard-to-reach youth and could be useful to further future awareness, referrals, or collaborations with YESS funded programs. Use of strategic collaborations could also include exploration of how organizations develop natural supports for youth; for example, programs that aim to increase youth's social networks such as foster community mentors or develop intergenerational spaces. Youth are often trying to find more space and autonomy when seeking services and advice (i.e., rather than seeking this from their parents), and being able to use their touchpoints to learn about employment could be important.
- **Explore opportunities to leverage wraparound supports.** The provision of wraparound supports in conjunction with employment and workforce training may provide multiple benefits to participants as they are more able to address their holistic needs in a trusted space to build and develop the multiple skills required to attain and sustain employment. However, to successfully leverage sufficient organizations with the multitude of programs required to facilitate wraparound supports, a considerable amount of relationship-building and sustainable programming is required. Wraparound

supports rely on collaboration and trust with youth, and the hardest-to-reach youth may interact with community programs only several times per year. This means extended program operational periods and premeditated consistency are required to form those trusting relationships, inform youth about the program, support them to a place where they are ready to participate, and then enroll them in the service. Additionally, individuals cannot be pressured into wraparound supports and meaningful attention to each individual is needed for success. Whereas one youth may be ready to engage in employment training while receiving mental health services for pre-existing trauma and obtain their license at the same time; other youth may not have the capacity or stability (albeit mental, physical, emotional, financial, or social) to participate in multiple overlapping services concurrently.

- **Explore ways to co-design employment training with touchpoints and youth.** Many service organizations that work on-the-ground in community are well-connected with the needs of their target populations. Co-design and development of programs with touchpoints, including youth themselves, would be a good opportunity to ensure funding can best meet the needs of youth. Co-design and creation provide an opportunity to work towards a decolonized system that utilizes expertise and puts trust in those who know how to best work with youth.
- **Explore how funded programs utilize best practices to youth employment.** Through this report and other ESDC research into the area of employment programming for hard-to-reach youth, several key characteristics for successful employment programs within comfortable spaces have been identified. Exploration about how organizations who seek funds through YESS meet these criteria could have benefits to ensure continued best practices are utilized to support youth.
- **Expand online and virtual presence in youth spaces.** The spaces youth are seeking employment information include online, from employers, and through their social networks. This provides opportunity to expand reach of online presence into the areas youth already are. Sharing information through Indeed or advertising employment training opportunities with the current Federal government job bank could be useful. Youth appreciate the online spaces because they provide clear information and often include details such as hours, salaries, benefits, etc. They also give youth a way to choose which programs or jobs are of interest to them, which increases buy-in and increases the likelihood that youth will complete the program. It is not recommended that virtual be the only method of outreach, given that multiple barriers and challenges continue to persist for some youth to engage these online platforms.

Appendix 1: Characteristics of the Youth Advisory Committee

Seven applicants applied and 7 youth advisory committee members were accepted. The characteristics of this committee can be found in the table below. The below data was self-disclosed by youth and information has been anonymized and shared in aggregate form to protect confidentiality.

Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Youth Advisory Committee

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Number of Youth (n=7)
Province/Territory	
Saskatchewan	1
Yukon	1
Alberta	2
Quebec	2
Age	
17-20	1
21-24	3
25-30	3
Gender	
Male	0
Female	7
Primary Language	
English	2
French	3
Other	2
Ethnicity	
White	3
Middle Eastern/North African	2
Black or African Canadian	2
Employment Status	
Employed	3
Unemployed	2
In school or training	1
Prefer not to answer	1

Appendix 2: Description of Data Collection Methodology

Communication with Project Authority: Throughout the research project, ESDC (“Project Authority”) was provided with bi-weekly progress reports and progress meetings to discuss timelines, challenges, and overall project advancement. The Project Authority reviewed and provided feedback on all data collection tools and supported outreach to organizations with recommendations. They did not participate in youth advisory committee meetings or any data collection to ensure privacy of those involved.

Literature Review: Academic and grey literature was reviewed to gather additional context and information about youth touchpoints in relation to the seven research questions. Previous research conducted on NEET youth was also provided by ESDC.

Youth Survey: A total of 241 hard-to-reach youth respondents completed an online survey made available from August to November 2022. The survey was distributed in English and French via community organizations who were asked to share the opportunity with the hard-to-reach youth engaged in their services, and to support the youth in completion of the survey, where applicable (i.e., provide access to a computer, support receipt of honorarium, accept a mail-in survey where applicable, etc.). Those invited to share the survey were selected through an online review of organizations in each province and territory who engaged target youth populations. In total, 150 organizations were contacted to support youth participation in the survey. The research team then worked closely with organizations to answer questions and support survey participation, where possible. Each organization received two follow-up emails. As organizations were not required to respond to our email if they shared the survey with youth, there is no way to know what the overall response rate was. The target number of survey responses was 200 youth, with representation of approximately 23 youth (10%) from each target sociodemographic background, noting intersectionality and multiple characteristics that intersect experiences of each youth. These targets were met. Further information about the demographics of youth survey participants is provided in [Appendix 3](#). The purpose was to capture primary data from youth to better understand their relationships and touchpoints and learn about their preferences and experiences with training supports and employment.

Key Informant Interviews: A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom with community organizations who engage hard-to-reach youth. 51 organizations were contacted to participate and sent two follow-up emails or phone calls, with an overall response rate of 27%. This was below the target of 25 interviews with touchpoints; however, given project timeframes and extensive data collected from completed interviews, it was decided with the Project Authority to conclude data collection. Guides included questions that were consistent across each interview and focused on better understanding the needs and nuances of specific youth demographics that each organization worked with. Their purpose was to gather insight on youth touchpoints from organizations who work closely with each target demographic and could provide an additional perspective on best practices to reach youth. In addition, 2 interviews were conducted with ESDC staff who were knowledgeable about the YESS program to better inform how this research could support future decision-making. Representatives from the Project Authority helped identify the ESDC key informants for these interviews. The following table describes the key demographics of organizations engaged in a key informant interview. In total, 50 organizations were invited to participate with a response rate of 28%.

Table 3. Youth serving organizations engaged in key informant interviews

Youth-serving organizations engaged in key informant interviews (n=14)	
Province	Number Completed (n)
Alberta	2
British Columbia	4
Ontario	2
Quebec	1
Saskatchewan	3
Yukon	2
Populations of youth served	Number Completed (n)
All youth	8
Homeless youth	2
Newcomer youth	2
Racialized youth	1
2SLGBTQ+ youth	1

Case Study Data Collection Methods

The following methods were employed to complete six case studies that focused on answering the key research questions for six youth sub-populations. The case study population groups were identified as hardest-to-reach youth populations based on the literature and input from the Project Authority. The case studies allow for an in-depth exploration of data that relates to these youth demographics and then leveraged as lines of evidence for the overall research. The six case studies focus on youth living with a disability, youth living in low income households, youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, Black youth, Indigenous youth, and immigrant youth.

Creative Voice Activity: A total of 30 youth completed the Creative Voice activity. Youth were invited to participate if they expressed interest during the survey and aligned with one of the case study demographics identified above. Youth received one intro email, one follow-up email and a text to remind them about participation. In total, 55 youth were invited to participate, with a response rate of 54%. Youth were given the option to choose which questions they would like to answer (i.e., select 2 of 4 questions) and how they would like to share their responses (i.e., photos, poems, stories, interview, etc.). [Table 4](#) illustrates the sociodemographic characteristics of youth who participated and which ways youth opted to engage in the activity. The intent of this method was to collect in-depth youth experiences and preferences related to receiving workplace supports and services in the community.

The following table describes the key demographics of youth who participated in the Creative Voice Activity. The intent was to engage demographics at the focus of the case study. In total, 50 youth were invited to participate and 30 submitted responses, with a completion rate of 60%.

Table 4. Youth participants in Creative Voice Activity

Demographic for Case Study	Number of Creative Voice Activities Completed (n=30)
Youth living with a disability	7
Youth in low income households	14
Youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+	8
Black youth	10
Indigenous youth	6
Recent immigrant youth	9

**Note, youth with intersecting demographics may be included in multiple categories*

Focus Group Discussions: 6 focus group discussions with service organizations were planned, one for each of the youth demographics represented in the case studies. The discussions had varying attendance and in cases where schedule conflicts didn't allow for a group discussion, key informant interviews were held instead. A total of 5 focus groups and 5 interviews were held with 23 individuals from different organizations. [Table 5](#) shows the number of organizations contacted and response rates, stratified by case study. This line of evidence was intended to explore similarities and differences between organizations who support specific youth populations.

The following table depicts organizations that were involved in the focus group discussions as part of the case study. The response rates for each target demographic differed, as additional outreach was done for focus groups with low interest to help increase number of engaged organizations. In total, 23 stakeholders were engaged through a focus group discussion, or if unavailable at the time of discussion, rescheduled and engaged in a key informant interview.

Table 5. Organizations engaged in focus group discussions

Demographic for Case Study	Invited (n)	Completed FGD/KII
Youth living with a disability	10	3
Youth in low income households	10	3
Youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+	20	5
Black youth	22	3
Indigenous youth	11	5
Recent immigrant youth	15	4

Appendix 3: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Survey Responses

The table below depicts sociodemographic information of youth survey respondents, as well as the exact questions that were asked to identify that particular characteristic. A total of 241 hard-to-reach youth completed the survey. All demographic questions were optional.

Table 6. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Youth Survey Participants

Sociodemographic Characteristic (Survey Question)	Number of Youth Respondents (n)
Province/Territory (What province or territory do you live in?)	
Ontario	49
Alberta	40
British Columbia	36
Quebec	18
Nova Scotia	17
Nunavut	15
New Brunswick	14
Newfoundland	14
Northwest Territories	14
Saskatchewan	11
Manitoba	6
Prince Edward Island	5
Yukon	2
Area (How would you estimate the area where you live?)	
Large urban population centre (100,00 or greater)	88
Medium urban population centre	57
Small urban population centre (1,000 to 29,999)	62
Rural area	15
Prefer not to respond	16
Age (Age – please select one)	
15-16	21
17-20	65
21-24	84
25-30	68
Prefer not to answer	3
Primary Language (What is your main language?)	
English (34 also speak French)	209
French	15
Other	17
Gender (What gender do you self-identify as?)	
Female	140
Male	78
Nonbinary	14
Two Spirit	5
Prefer not to answer	4
Transgender Youth (Do you self identify as transgender or gender nonconforming?)	
Yes	14

No	212
Prefer not to answer	10
2SLGBTQ+ Youth (Do you self identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community?)	
Yes	86
No	138
Prefer not to respond	17
Disabled Person (Do you self-identify as a person with a disability?)	
Yes (of those, 30 received disability supports)	73
No	154
Prefer not to respond	13
Type of Disability (Please indicate if you self-identify as having any of the following disabilities)	
Mental Health	53
Developmental/Learning	32
Speaking	10
Motor Skills	9
Visual	6
Hearing	3
Racialized Youth (How would you describe yourself?)	
White	96
Black or African Canadian	40
South Asian	20
East/Southeast Asian	13
Middle Eastern or North African	6
Latino or South American	3
Prefer not to answer	4
Write-in response	13
Indigenous Youth (If comfortable, please share how you identify)	
First Nations	26
Inuit	20
Metis	11
Other	3
Non-affiliated Indigenous	1
Prefer not to answer	1
Homeless/At-Risk Youth (Do you consider yourself to have stable housing?)	
Yes	166
No	53
Prefer not to answer	22
Immigrant Youth (Did you or your parents/guardians immigrate to Canada in the past 5 years?)	
Yes	27
No	169
Prefer not to answer	15
Low Income Youth (Have you accessed supports such as food stamps or food bank in the last year)	
Yes	92
No	129
Prefer not to answer	20
Average Yearly Income (What was your average individual yearly income last year?)	

Less than \$6,000	47
Between \$6,000 - \$9,999	31
Between \$10,000 - \$19,999	42
Between \$20,000 - \$39,999	29
Between \$40,000 - \$59,999	16
Between \$60,000 - \$79,999	5
More than \$80,000	1
Don't know	56
Prefer not to answer	14
Youth with Addiction (<i>Do you have experience living with substance abuse disorder?</i>)	
Yes	49
No	174
Prefer not to answer	18
Family with Addiction (<i>Does a close family member have experience living with substance disorder</i>	
Yes	88
No	133
Prefer not to answer	18
Legal Conflict (<i>Have you been in conflict with the legal system in the past 5-years? (i.e., police, probation, courts, judicial detention, jail, etc.)</i>)	
Yes	30
No	201
Prefer not to answer	10
Employment Status (<i>Which of the following best describes your employment status?</i>)	
Employed	108
In school or training	51
Unemployed	55
Self-employer	7
Not in the labour force	2
Prefer not to answer	16
Education (<i>What is the highest level of education you've attained?</i>)	
High School or Equivalent	84
Less than High School	54
Certificate in Trades	10
Some Post-Secondary	40
University Degree	40

Appendix 4: Data Analysis Approach

The table below provides additional details for the data analysis approaches undertaken as part of this research assignment.

Figure 8. Description of Data Analysis Approaches

Data Analysis	Description of Approach
Qualitative analysis (key informant interviews, focus groups, Creative Voice, survey).	The interviews, focus groups, and Creative Voice responses were analyzed with NVivo using a thematic analysis and a deductive approach to ensure relevance to research questions. Findings were considered with sociodemographic characteristics in mind and through an intersectional lens. Qualitative survey responses were analyzed in Excel using a thematic analysis and inductive approach to best explore youth experiences without pre-determined responses.
Quantitative analysis (survey).	The quantitative survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Excel, while open-text box responses were using thematic analysis (see above). Survey ranking questions were analyzed through the calculation of the mode for each category of touchpoints that youth ranked, analyzed alongside the percentage of youth who responded for each touchpoint. This allowed for comparisons of the most frequent/repeated rank of each touchpoint (mode) and also the number of youths that selected each touchpoint. The quantitative survey results utilized an iterative approach, where all questions underwent multiple layers of analysis with thoughtful intent towards what types of intersectional stratification would make the most sense given the youth respondents and overall data.
Synthesis approach	Themes from each of the lines of evidence were analyzed and placed in a results matrix. The relative strengths and limitations associated with line of inquiry were considered during this process with greater priority placed on data and themes considered to be more reliable or more relevant to the respective study question. Each line of evidence in the results matrix was considered, and the most appropriate were selected to include in this report.

Appendix 5: Case Studies

The following pages depict the case studies for key demographics. Data displayed was primarily obtained through the survey in order to compile a map of where youth are in the community, but also contains highlights, quotes, and best practices as identified through the focus group discussions and creative voice activity. Each case study contains information about intersecting characteristics of youth, a description of youth relationships, a description of services and spaces youth are engaged in the community, details on where they feel most comfortable in the community, insight into perceptions of workforce development supports, and information about best practices to engagement.

Case Study #1: Black Youth

Who is represented in the research?

The survey reached a total of **40** youth who identified as **Black**. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Do you identify as Black or African Canadian?”

The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the Black youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research (n). All demographic questions were voluntary; therefore, numbers may not correlate with overall breakdown.



Geographic Representation

- Alberta (6)
- British Columbia (1)
- Manitoba (2)
- New Brunswick (5)
- Nova Scotia (1)
- Ontario (20)
- Quebec (1)
- Saskatchewan (3)



Region Size

- Large urban (17)
- Medium urban (12)
- Small urban (7)
- Prefer not to respond (2)



Employment Status

- Employed (19)
- In training (10)
- Self Employed (3)
- Unemployed (7)



Languages Spoken

- English (35)
- French (10)
- Other (9)



Age Range

- 15-16 (9)
- 17-20 (9)
- 21-24 (16)
- 25-30 (6)



Gender Identification

- Female (58%)
- Male (32%)
- Nonbinary (3%)
- Two Spirit (4%)

Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristic	Number (n) of Black Youth with Intersecting Characteristic	(%) of Black Youth with Intersecting Characteristic
Indigenous Youth	32	35%
2SLGBTQ+	2	5%
Immigrant Youth	11	28%
Indigenous Youth	1	3%
Disabled Youth	6	15%
Low-income Youth	14	35%
Youth With an Addiction	4	10%
Youth With Unstable Housing	25	63%
Youth Involved in Legal System	4	10%

Who are Black youths' key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by Black youth.

Below are relationships Black youth identified engaging frequently (2-3 times per month)

- Friends
- Parents/Guardians
- Siblings
- Educational Institutions
- Teachers/Tutors
- Elders
- Romantic Relationships
- Neighbours

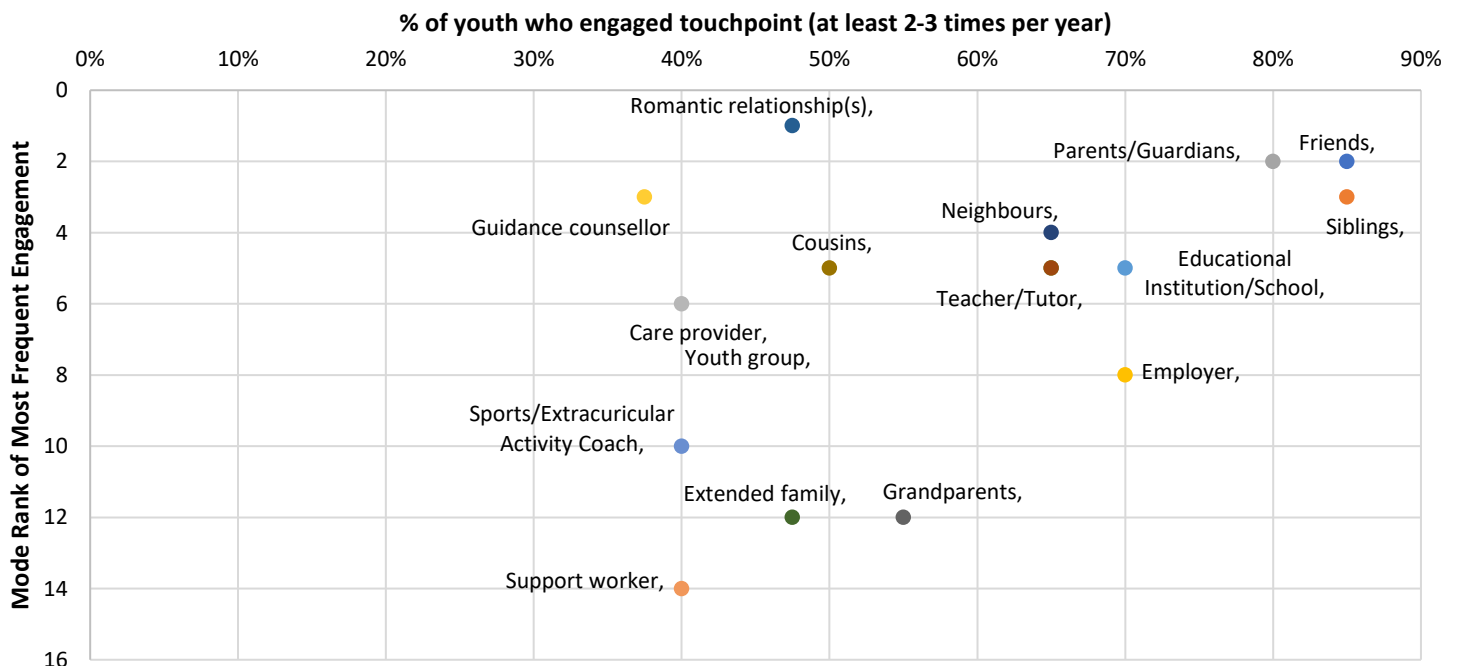
Below are relationships most Black youth identified never engaging or not applicable to them.

- Care Providers
- Support Workers
- Romantic Relationships
- Sports/Extracurriculars

Disabled Black youth were less likely to engage with educational institutions and much more likely to engage with youth groups and care providers compared to Black youth overall. Additionally, Black youth who live in unstable housing and were low-income reported more frequent engagement with school and teachers.

Visual Depiction of Engagement with Relationships. The figure below depicts what percentage of Black survey respondents identified engagement with a particular relationship in the last year (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 85% of Black youth identified their friends as their key touchpoints, and most responded their romantic partners were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint. Compared to other youth who completed the survey, Black youth were more likely to engage employers, but with less frequent engagement.

Table 7. Black Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged in A Year



What spaces and services do Black youth engage in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by Black youth.

Below are services and spaces Black youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Public spaces (i.e., mall, beach, etc.)
- Faith-based organizations
- Recreation organizations
- Library
- Community Mentors
- Social services (shelters, food banks, etc.)

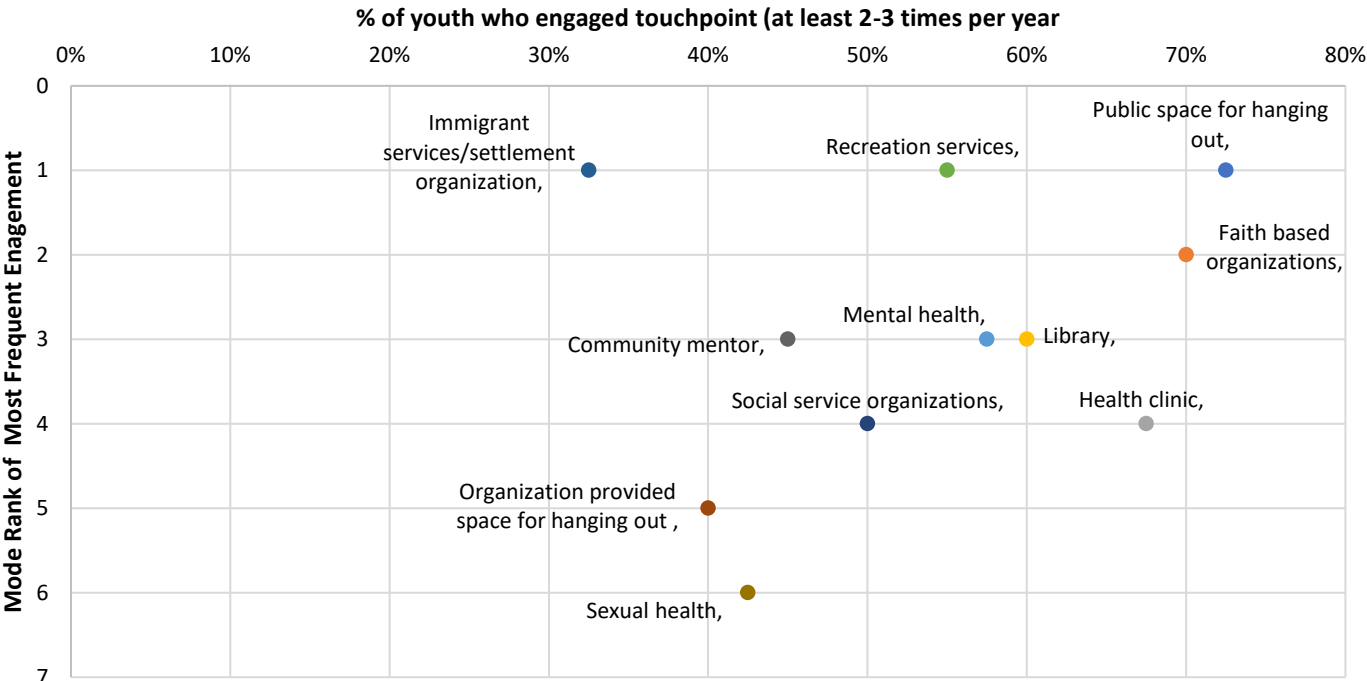
Below are services and spaces Black youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Community Mentors
- Social services (shelters, food banks, etc.)

Black youth overall didn't report frequent interactions with mental health services; however Black youth who were also disabled, low-income, and/or living in unstable housing were more likely to be engaged with mental health resources, and also reported their more frequent use compared to other Black youth.

Visual Depiction of Services and Spaces Used in the Community. Survey findings were stratified to identify which community services and spaces were identified as most frequented by Black youth. The figure below depicts what percentage of Black survey respondents identified engagement with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 70% of Black youth identified faith-based organizations a place they engage at least 2-3 times a year, and most youth ranked this as their #2 most frequented touchpoint.

Table 8. Black Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are Black youths most comfortable with services and spaces in the community?

The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by Black youth. Most Black youth identified **faith-based organizations** and **recreation services** as a the top (#1) spaces that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, Black youth indicated that they feel the least comfortable with organizations that provided a **space for hanging out**, mental health services, social services, and the library.

Although Black youth living with a disability were one of the groups that frequently uses mental health resources, this demographic rated these services as much lower in comfort compared to other Black youth who also interact with this touchpoint.

Table 8. Black Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Comfortable?



What are best practices to engage Black youth in employment services?

Black youth ranked their frequent relationships **as most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities**. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and lowest ranked included:

Top Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/Guardians Romantic relationships Friends Guidance counsellors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer Support worker Care provider Extended family

Black youth who participated in the Creative Voice Activity described their perceptions and experiences regarding employment, education, and training. Many Black youth described the importance of finding work that makes them feel motivated and inspired. The ability to provide flexible programs that incorporate choice in terms of what materials are engaged and how is important. However, youth described structural and social systems as barriers to find meaningful employment and training.

“A lot of young people out there are always looking for the right motivation before they begin to get engaged, but when this motivation doesn't come, what do you do? As a Black American, growing up to so many opportunities was not really easy for people like me. We had to struggle to get anything we needed.”

“As a Black immigrant, you don't really get all the opportunities in the world. You are first limited as an immigrant, and then as a Black. You face life the hard way cause you've been trained that way”

- Black and Immigrant male youths, Age 21-24 (Creative Voice)

Another key finding from creative voice activity was the general preference from Black Youth to learn and take-in information online. Youth described appreciating the access to online information from anywhere, albeit at home or at a library, as well as the choice that comes with online training.

“I would prefer learning through social media. I learn better when i watch videos online, they are self explanatory. I am more particular about YouTube and then TikTok recently. One thing that gets my attention is how the videos are structured with letters, signs, symbols and patterns that will make you not forget what you have learnt in a while. And i think that this is the best choice for me as a programmer and web developer. I basically learn everything i need from YouTube because it has the right contents i need.”

- Black female youth, Age 21-24 (Creative Voice)

Organizations that serve Black youth discussed several **best practices for employment programs**. In particular, considerations included:

- Importance of wraparound supports as a way to create a one-stop approach to care for youth and their families. Wraparound supports were described as having the skills and resources needed to combat obstacles and barriers, especially in regard to the cycle of oppression.
- Ability to help youth develop their capacity and to do so within the community, around Black-led organizations as well as champions and role models who are also Black.
- More collaboration with Black communities and youth when developing programs.

Case Study #2: Disabled Youth

Who is represented in this research?

The survey reached a total of **73** youth who identified as living with a disability. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Do you self-identify as a disabled person?”.

Disabled youth survey respondents represent different physical and mental disabilities, and various intersecting characteristics. The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the disabled youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research. All demographic questions were voluntary; therefore, numbers may not correlate with overall breakdown.



Geographic Representation

- Alberta (9)
- British Columbia (15)
- Manitoba (3)
- New Brunswick (2)
- Newfoundland/Labrador (7)
- Northwest Territories (4)
- Nova Scotia (7)
- Nunavut (4)
- Ontario (13)
- Ontario (20)
- PEI (4)
- Quebec (4)



Region Size

- Large urban (28)
- Medium urban (24)
- Small urban (10)
- Rural area (4)
- Prefer not to respond (5)



Employment Status

- Employed (29)
- In training (13)
- Self Employed (3)
- Unemployed (20)
- Prefer not to respond (7)



Self-Identified Disability

- Mental Health (54)
- Developmental/Learning (33)
- Speaking (11)
- Motor Skills (10)
- Visual (7)
- Hearing (4)
- Other (16)

**Note many youths identified as living with multiple intersecting disabilities.*



Age Range

- 15-16 (4)
- 17-20 (18)
- 21-24 (32)
- 25-30 (17)



Gender Identification

- Female (36)
- Male (22)
- Nonbinary (9)
- Two Spirit (4)

Table 9. Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Disabled Youth

Intersecting Socio-Demographic	Number (n) of Disabled Youth	(%) of Disabled Youth
Indigenous Youth	19	26%
Immigrant Youth	3	4%
Racialized Youth	20	27%
2SLGBTQ+ Youth	35	48%
Low-Income Youth	28	38%
Youth With an Addiction	18	25%
Youth With Unstable Housing	45	62%
Youth Involved in Legal System	14	19%

Who are disabled youths' key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by Black youth.

Below are relationships disabled youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Friends
- Parents/Guardians
- Romantic Relationships
- Siblings
- Employers
- Neighbours
- Support Workers
- Care Providers

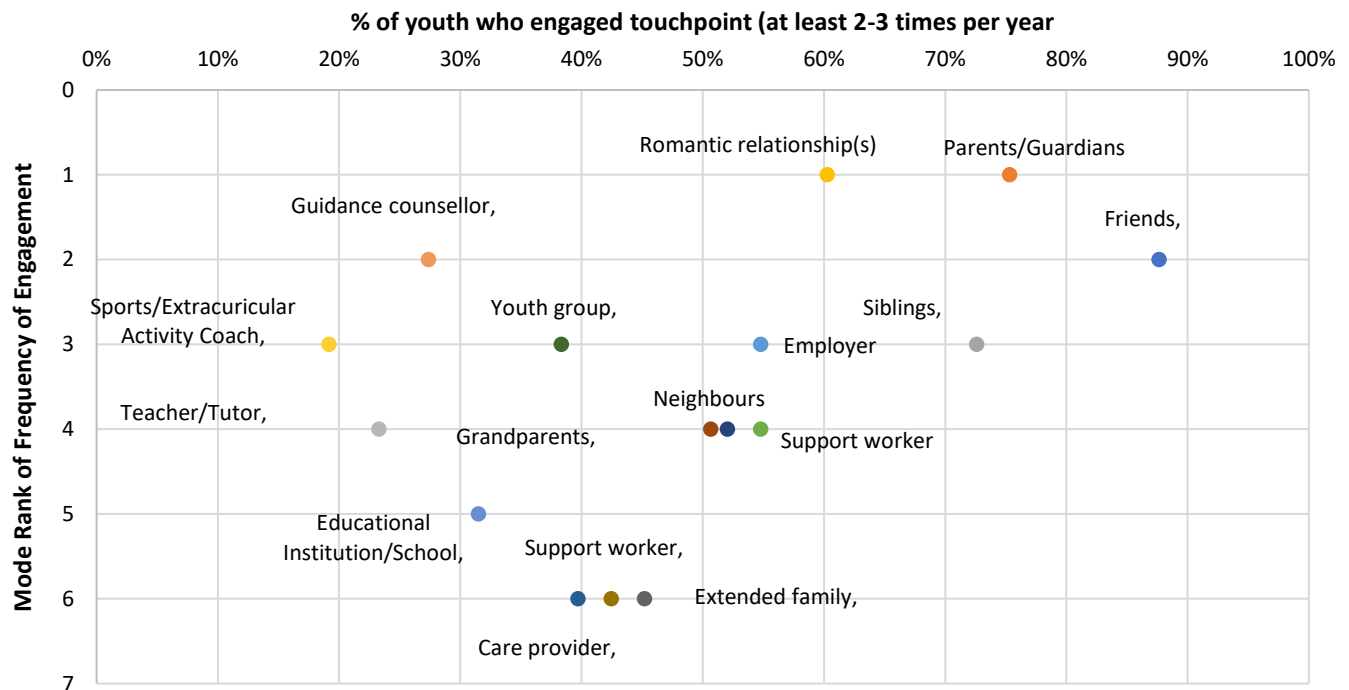
Below are relationships disabled youth most often identified never engaging or not applicable.

- Sports Teams/Extra Curriculars
- Care Providers
- Support Workers
- Youth Groups

Care providers and support workers both had high numbers of disabled youth who reported either frequent engagement, or no engagement at all. Disabled youth with the least engagement with care providers were those who also identified as 2SLGBTQ+ and/or Indigenous; whereas those who reported the most engagement with care providers were disabled youth with unstable housing. In the case of support workers, low-income disabled youth were more likely to be the demographics who engage this touchpoint, especially if living with an addiction, and 2SLGBTQ+ disabled youth were least likely to have ever engaged this touchpoint.

Visual Depiction of Relationships. Survey findings were also stratified to identify which relationships were engaged most frequently by youth living with disabilities over the course of a year. The figure below depicts what percentage of survey respondents living with a disability identified engaging with a particular touchpoint at least 2-3 times a year (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall ranking of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 75% of youth with disabilities identified their parents/guardians as key touchpoints, and most responded they were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint.

Table 10. Disabled Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are disabled youths' most frequented services and spaces in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by disabled youth.

Below are services and spaces disabled youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Mental health resources
- Public spaces (i.e., malls, beaches, etc.)
- Libraries
- Health Clinics

Below are services and spaces disabled youth most often identified never engaging or not applicable.

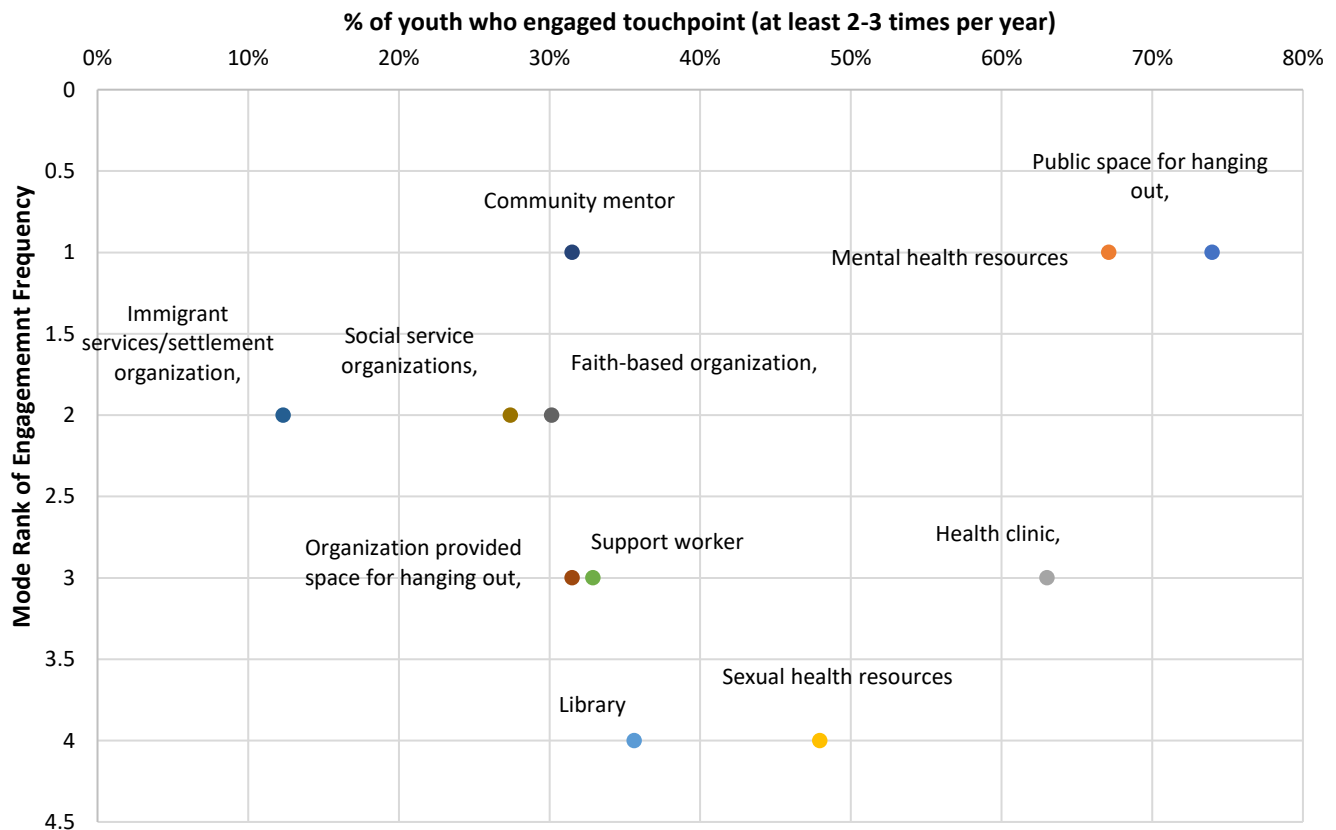
- Immigrant services
- Faith-based organizations
- Community mentors
- Social service organizations (i.e., food bank)
- Recreation services
- Sexual health services

A large percentage of disabled youth indicated they don't engage spaces and services in the community compared to other demographics (i.e., indicated "never/not applicable"). Disabled youth who reported unstable housing were more likely to engage with faith-based organizations whereas disabled youth living with addiction were less likely to interact with this touchpoint.

Visual Depiction of Community Spaces and Services. Survey findings were also stratified to identify which spaces and services were engaged most frequently by youth living with disabilities over the course of a year. The figure below depicts what percentage of survey respondents living with a disability identified engaging with a particular touchpoint at least 2-3 times a year (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall ranking of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 78% of youth with disabilities identified mental health resources as key touchpoints, and most responded that were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint.

This population was most likely to frequently engage with public spaces for hanging out, mental health resources, and their community mentor.

Table 11. Disabled Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged

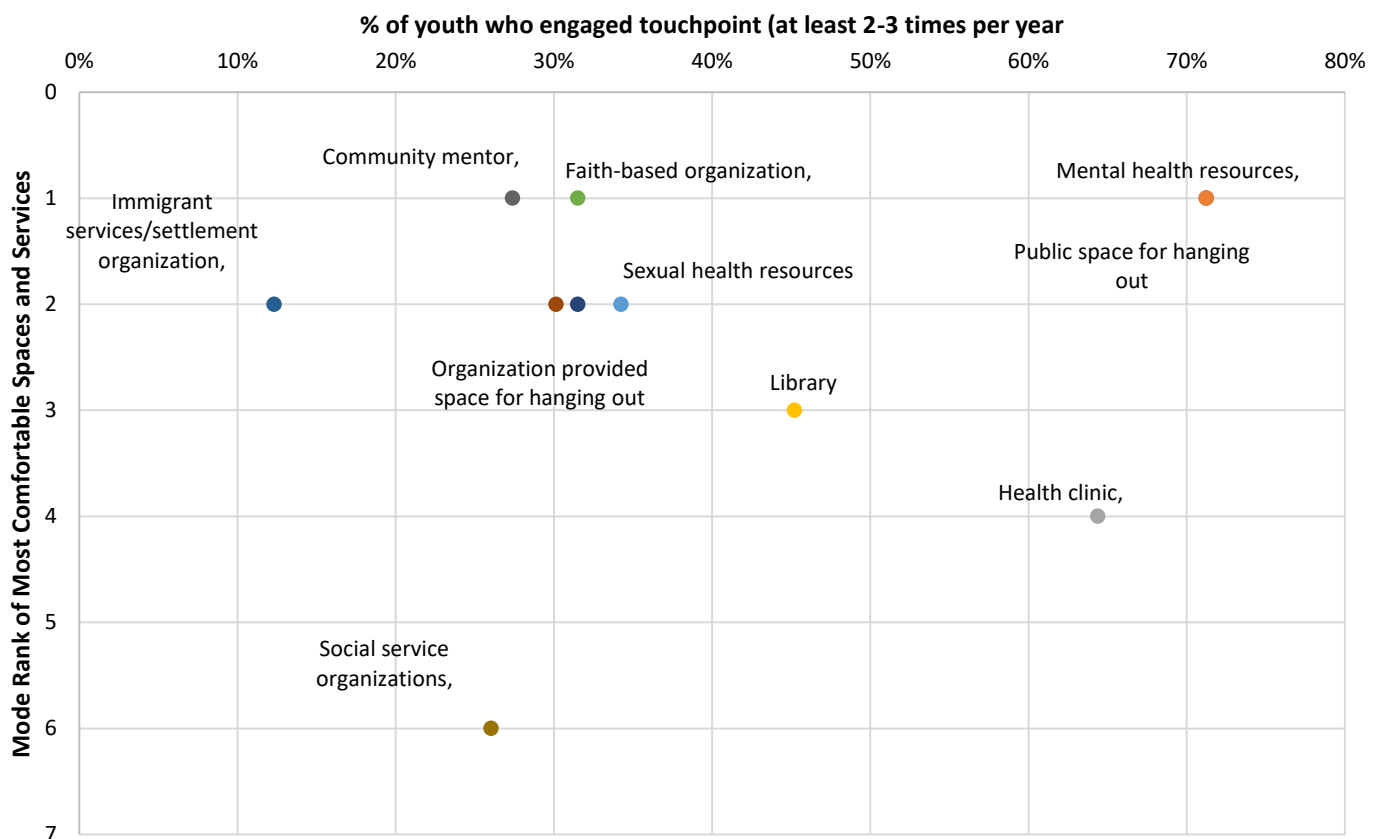


Where are disabled youths most comfortable with in-person services and spaces?

The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by disabled youth. The figure below illustrates the touchpoints youth ranked as most comfortable, by the percentage of youth that selected a particular touchpoint. For example, 71% of disabled youth identified public spaces for hanging out and mental health services as a space they interact with, and then selected this touchpoint most often as the top (#1) space that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, the 26% of youth living with disabilities that use social services such as food banks or shelters, ranked this touchpoint more often as less comfortable (#6).

In the survey, youth who identified as disabled reported more comfort with social service organizations than their non-disabled counterparts. Disabled youth who are also Indigenous were less likely to report mental health resources as a comfortable space. In addition to more frequent engagement, disabled youth with unstable housing also ranked faith-based organizations higher in terms of which spaces were comfortable for them.

Table 12. Disabled Youth: Spaces and Services Ranked as Most Comfortable



What are best practices to engage disabled youth in employment services?

Disabled youth ranked their frequent relationships as **most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities**. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and least ranked touchpoints included:

Highest Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Guardians • Employer • Romantic Relationships • Coach from Sports/Extracurricular Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth group • Support worker • Cousins • Guidance Counsellor

In the creative voice activity, when you were asked to identify spaces that made them feel productive or inspired, youth who identified as living with a disability generally indicated an appreciation for spaces that were outside and/or gave them autonomy over their actions and interactions. This included places like libraries, gardens, or their own homes. This translated to how they preferred to receive information about a job or participate in employment training, with most youth responding in ways that provides them with autonomy and best fits their own capabilities and skills. For example, some youth indicated they liked obtaining information online because it's accessible and they can be in a safe space at home away from others who may be sick; other youth identified they preferred in-person because they're more apt to ready body language to help them understand.

Organizations that serve youth living with disabilities also confirmed the best approach for this population is individualization of services and interactions to best encourage autonomy and fit needs of youth, as described in the quote below, when asked what best practices are to engage disabled youth.

“Anything that feels truly individualized is the way forward (in terms of service delivery/care planning) sometimes services can be too broad, they’re not individualized for the person and their family’s needs. Tailored, individualized supports.”

- Service organization, British Columbia (Focus Group Discussion)

Another finding specific to youth living with disabilities, was not just their challenge to obtain employment but their resilience in continued efforts to find a job that work fit their needs and skillsets. The poem below was submitted by a 2SLGBTQ+ youth living with a disability, in response to a question about their experiences obtaining employment:

One thing people don't necessarily associate with autism is rejection.

I've applied for so many jobs and I get ghosted or told no.

I sit home while others work. Wasting time.

My life is not the same.

I'll keep trying. I'm no longer scared of rejection.

My life may not be the same but I am just like anyone else.

Case Study #3: Youth Who Identify as 2SLGBTQ+

Who is represented in this research?

The survey reached a total of **86 youth who identified as 2SLGBTQ+**. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Do you self-identify as being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community?”.

The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the 2SLGBTQ+ youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research. All demographic questions were voluntary; therefore, numbers may not correlate with overall breakdown.



Geographic Representation

- Alberta (12)
- British Columbia (18)
- Manitoba (1)
- New Brunswick (3)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (5)
- Northwest Territories (5)
- Nova Scotia (10)
- Nunavut (4)
- Ontario (13)
- Prince Edward Island (3)
- Quebec (9)
- Saskatchewan (1)
- Yukon (1)



Region Size

- Large urban (34)
- Medium urban (24)
- Small urban (16)
- Rural area (7)
- Prefer not to respond (5)



Gender Identification

- Female (50)
- Male (16)
- Nonbinary (14)
- Two Spirit (4)
- Prefer not to respond (2)



Age Range

- 15-16 (3)
- 17-20 (18)
- 21-24 (32)
- 25-30 (27)



Employment Status

- Employed (35)
- In training (20)
- Self Employed (2)
- Unemployed (22)
- Prefer not to respond (7)

Table 13. Sociodemographic Characteristics of 2SLGBTQ+ Youth

Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristic	Number (n) of 2SLGBTQ+ Youth	(%) of 2SLGBTQ+ Youth
Identify as Transgender	17	20%
Indigenous Youth	26	31%
Immigrant Youth	2	2%
Racialized Youth	9	10%
Disabled Youth	35	42%
Low-Income Youth	37	44%
Youth With an Addiction	31	37%
Youth With Unstable Housing	59	69%
Youth Involved in Legal System	13	15%

Who are 2SLGBTQ+ youths' key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by 2SLGBTQ+ youths.

Below are relationships 2SLGBTQ+ youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Friends
- Parents/Guardians
- Romantic Relationships
- Siblings
- Employers
- Grandparents

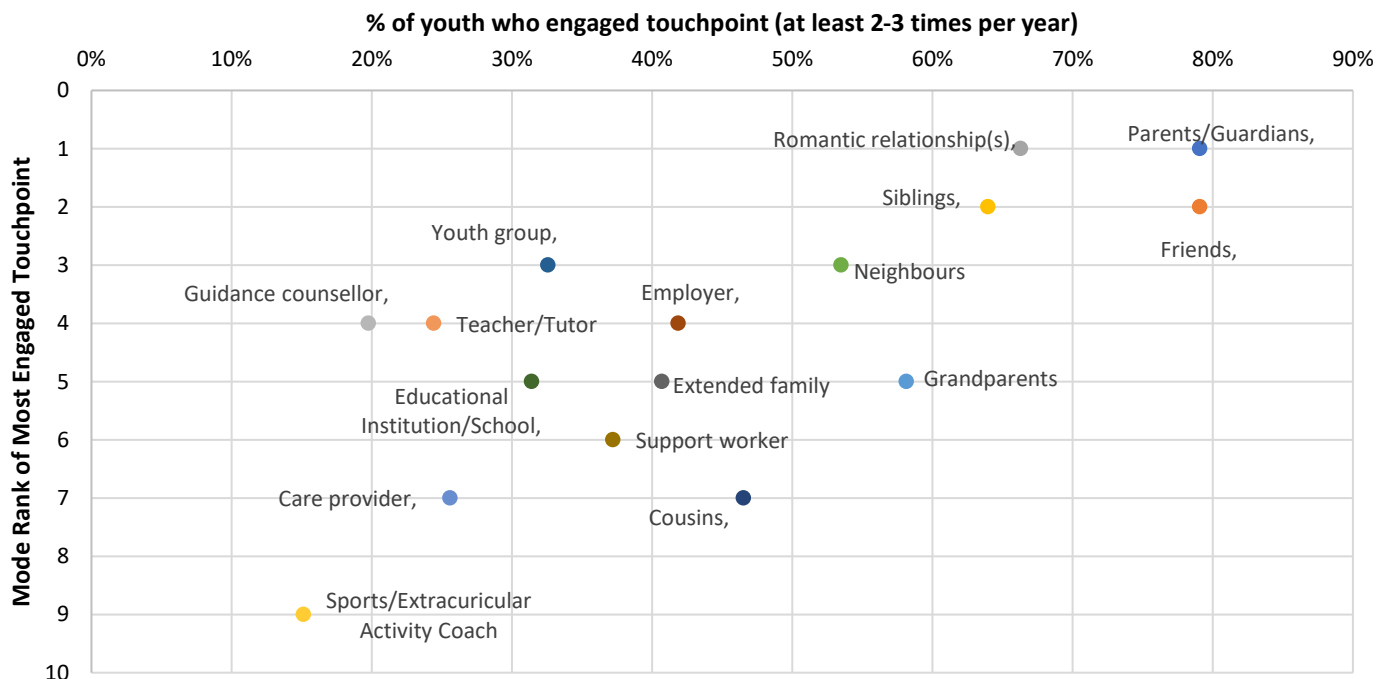
Below are relationships 2SLGBTQ+ youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Care Providers
- Sports/Extra Curriculars
- Support Workers
- Youth Groups

2SLGBTQ+ youth who also identified as being disabled were less likely to report frequent engagement with educational institutions/schools, as well as less likely to report engagement with care providers.

The survey findings were stratified to identify which relationships were engaged most frequently by 2SLGBTQ+ youth. The figure below depicts what percentage of 2SLGBTQ+ survey respondents identified engaging with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 79% of 2SLGBTQ+ youth identified their parents/guardians are key touchpoints, and most responded they were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint.

Table 14. 2SLGBTQ+ Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are 2SLGBTQ+ youths' most frequented services and spaces in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by disabled youth.

Below are services and spaces 2SLGBTQ+ youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month)

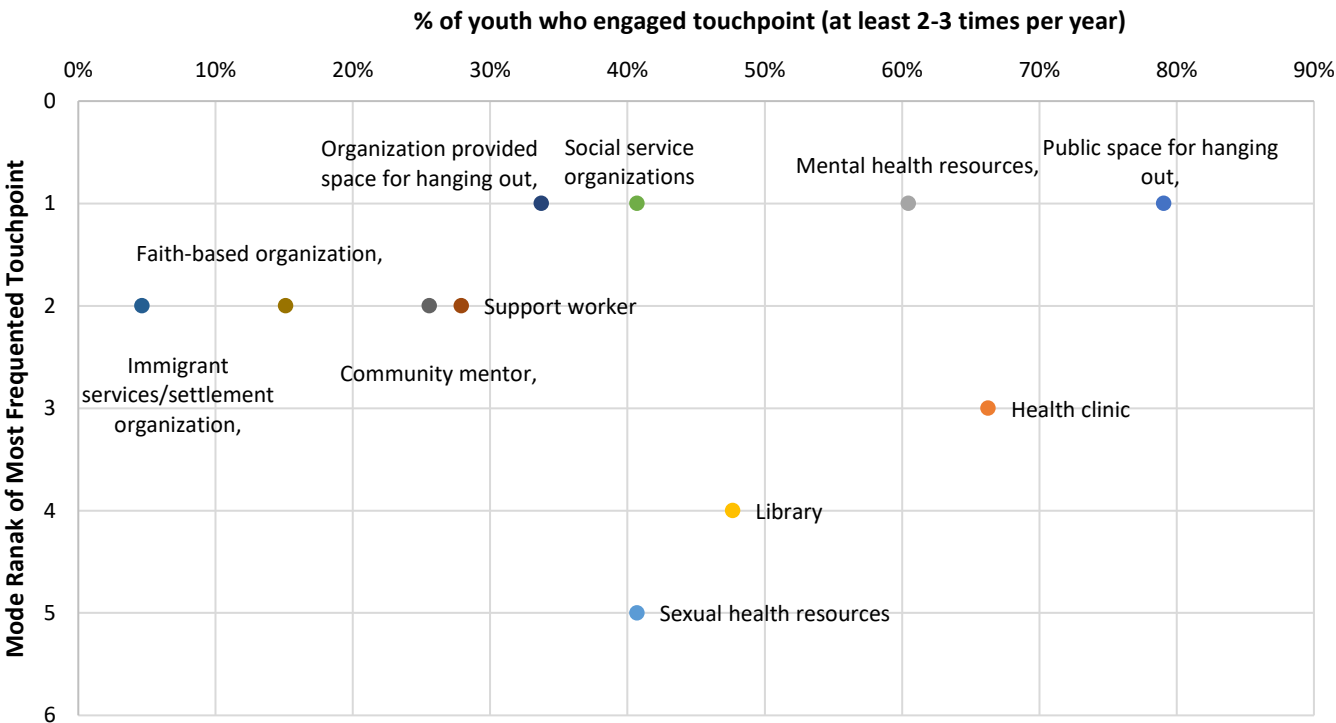
- Public spaces (i.e., malls, beaches, etc.)
 - Mental health resources
- Organization provided spaces
 - Health clinics

Below are services and spaces 2SLGBTQ+ youth identified most often as never engaging or not applicable.

- Immigrant services
 - Faith-based organizations
 - Community mentors
- Recreation services
 - Social service organizations (i.e., food bank)
 - Sexual health services

Visual Depiction of Engagement with Community Spaces and Services. Survey findings were stratified to identify which community programs and places were identified as most frequented by 2SLGBTQ+ youth over one year. 79% of youth identified public spaces for hanging out as a key space they engage with and most responded that this is their top (#1) space, followed by mental health resources (60% ranked them as #1) and health clinics (66% ranked them as #1).

Table 15. 2SLGBTQ+ Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged

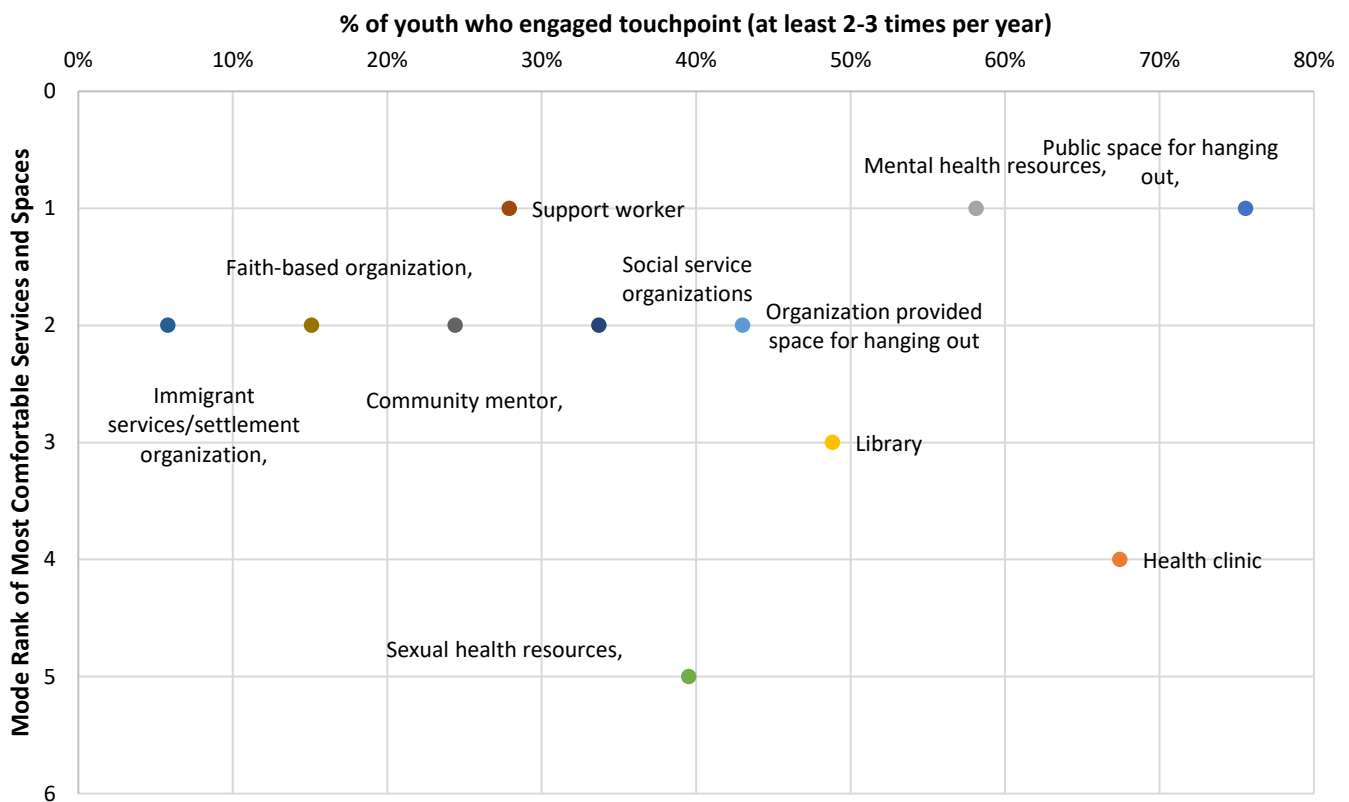


Where are 2SLGBTQ+ youths most comfortable with in-person services and spaces?

The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by 2SLGBTQ+ youth. 76% of youth identified public spaces for hanging out and mental health services as a the top (#1) spaces that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, 40% of youth indicated that they feel the least comfortable with sexual health resources.

2SLGBTQ+ youths who have also interacted with the legal system are less likely to use public spaces, and those who do rank the comfort of these spaces much lower compared to 2SLGBTQ+ youth overall.

Table 16. 2SLGBTQ+ Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Comfortable?



What are best practices to engage 2SLGBTQ+ youth in employment services?

2SLGBTQ+ youth ranked their frequent relationships as **most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities**. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and least ranked touchpoints included:

Highest Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Guardians • Romantic relationships • Friends • Siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach of sports/extracurriculars • Care providers • Cousins • Support worker

A roundtable with several organizations that serve 2SLGBTQ+ youth discussed several best practices to engage this particular group in services, such as those related to employment. In particular, findings included:

- 2SLGBTQ+ youth connect with their peers and people who respect them for who they are and understand them which might not always be their family members. Rather, this could include teachers, Elders, youth champions, chosen family, etc.
- 2SLGBTQ+ youth may be navigating more complex social systems or health care services than their non-queer peers, and often require additional supports to learn about life skills that would help them after they age out of programs.
- Discord or similar online platforms that bring 2SLGBTQ+ youth together and allow them a safe space to speak their mind and engage with their peers was highly successful for this population. This has also been useful to expand reach to more rural areas, where youth interactions can be online instead of in-person.
- Programs should have staff that mirror 2SLGBTQ+ youth and understand their experiences, in this it is important to recognize the intersecting characteristics of 2SLGBTQ+ youth and ensure relevant diversity. The discussion below highlights the importance of this recognition.

“[...] queerness cannot be separated from their blackness, that those two things can’t be separated. So, talking about 2SLGBTQ+ youth is when we miss the mark. When we just market it as queer and trans youth. Who comes through the doors are often white, queer and trans folks etc. and not to say all BIPOC folks are struggling but we do know about these inequities. We can’t separate the multi-faceted identifies. Youth need to see themselves reflected in the work we do. We hire staff that reflect the community they serve. And not just the frontline staff, we hire QTBIPOC folks in all levels of management. This ensures that we have an internal look at our policies and practices to ensure they are welcoming and affirming our 2SLGBTQ+ community members.”

“We’ve shifted our team and I’m now the only white staff and being able to increase that visibility. Bringing in people from Black and indigenous communities- we’re just now after a few years seeing those youth come into our doors and building relationships.”

- 2SLGBTQ+-serving organizations from Nova Scotia and Manitoba (Focus Group Discussion)

Case Study #4: Low-income Youth

Who is represented in this research?

The survey reached a total of **92 youth who identified as Low-income**. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Have you accessed social support such as food stamps or a food bank to get a meal or groceries in the last year?”. The survey questions about income were not well responded (i.e., 30% and 43% of youth responded with “don’t know”, “prefer not to answer” or left the question blank when asked their average personal and household income, respectfully). This question was therefore decided to not be a reliable indicator. Income stratifications are included below for interest.

The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the Low-income youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research.



Geographic Representation

- Ontario (25)
- British Columbia (14)
- Alberta (11)
- Northwest Territories (10)
- Quebec (9)
- Nunavut (6)
- New Brunswick (5)
- Nova Scotia (4)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (3)
- Manitoba (3)
- Saskatchewan (1)
- Prince Edward Island (1)



Annual Personal Income

- Less than 6k (15)
- \$6,000 – \$9,999 (20)
- \$10,000 – \$19,999 (24)
- \$20,000 – \$39,000 (13)
- \$40,000 – \$59,000 (7)
- \$60,000 – \$79,000 (0)
- Don’t know (22)
- Prefer not to answer (2)



Gender Identification

- Female (53)
- Male (30)
- Nonbinary (3)
- Two Spirit (4)
- Prefer not to respond (2)



Region Size

- Large urban (39)
- Medium urban (16)
- Small urban (22)
- Rural area (9)
- Prefer not to respond (6)



Employment Status

- Employed (32)
- In training (14)
- Self Employed (4)
- Unemployed (32)



Age Range

- 15-16 (4)
- 17-20 (27)
- 21-24 (35)
- 25-30 (25)
- Prefer not to respond (1)

Table 17. Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Low Income Youth

Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristic	Number (n) of Low-Income Youth	(%) of Low-Income Youth
Indigenous Youth	32	35%
2SLGBTQ+	37	40%
Immigrant Youth	13	14%
Racialized Youth	24	26%
Disabled Youth	28	30%
Youth With an Addiction	30	33%
Youth With Unstable Housing	56	61%
Youth Involved in Legal System	18	20%

Who are low income youths' the key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by low income youth.

Below are relationships low income youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Friends
- Parents/Guardians
- Siblings
- Romantic Relationships
- Employers
- Cousins

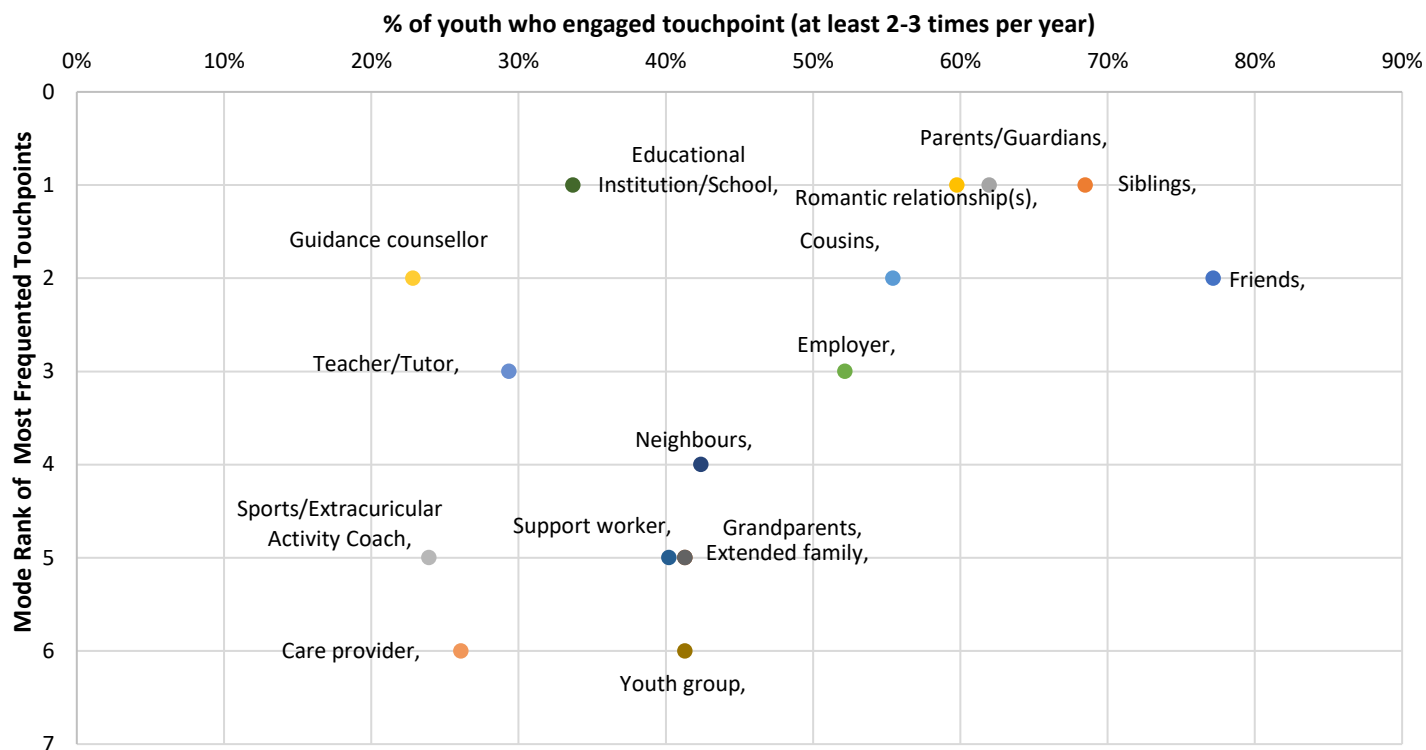
Below are relationships low income youth most often identified as never engaging or as not applicable.

- Care providers
- Sports/ Extracurriculars
- Support Workers
- Teachers/tutors
- Guidance Counselors
- Youth groups

Although youth groups were identified as not engaged by many low-income youths, those also in conflict with the legal system and in unstable housing identified a much higher engagement of this touchpoint.

Visual Depiction of Relationships. The survey findings were stratified to identify which relationships were engaged most frequently by 2SLGBTQ+ youth. The figure on the next page depicts what percentage of low-income survey respondents identified engaging with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 77% of low-income youth identified their friends as their key touchpoints, and most responded their siblings were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint, followed by their parents/guardians.

Table 18. Low-income Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are the most frequented services and spaces in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by low income youth.

Below are services and spaces low income youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

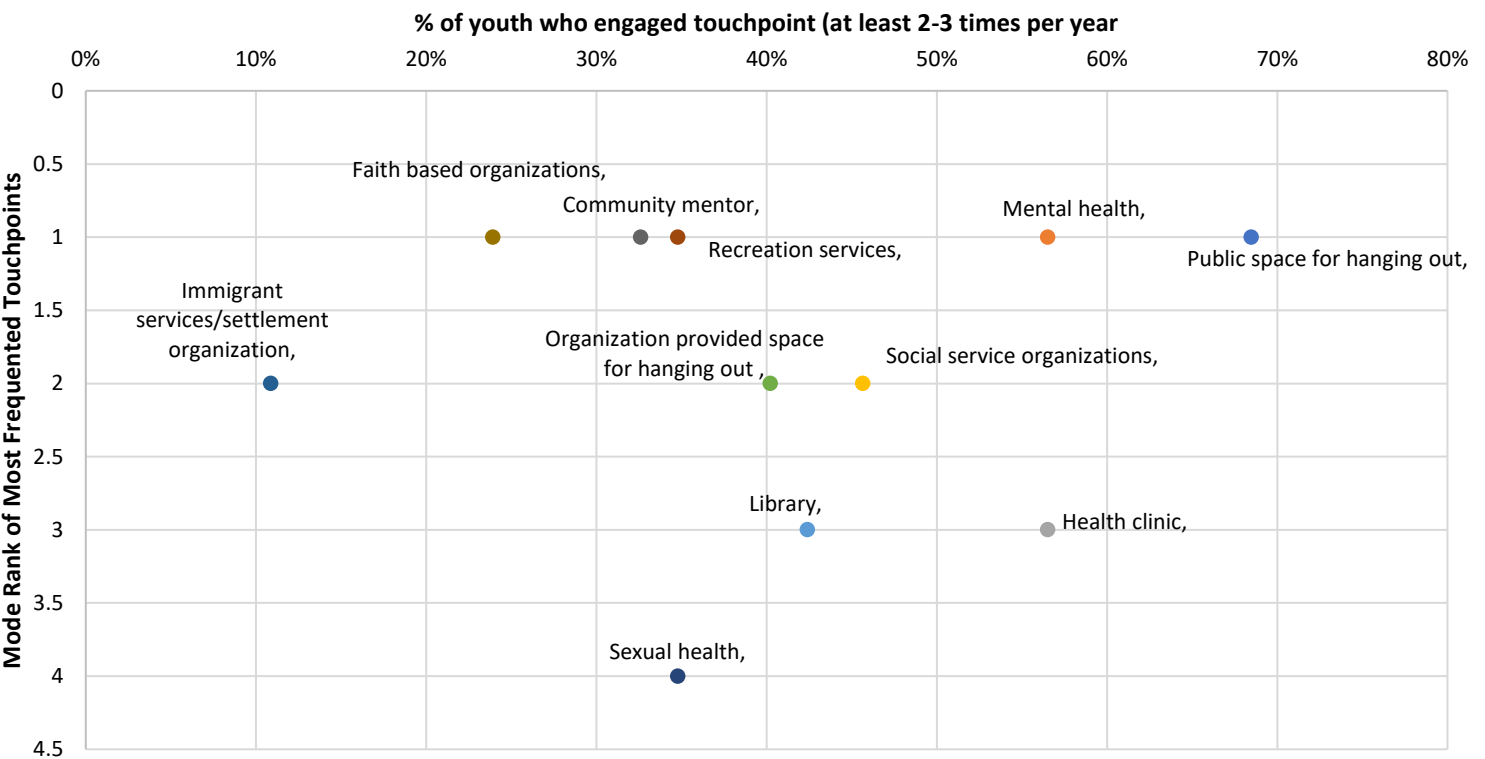
- Public spaces (i.e., malls, beaches, etc.)
- Social services (i.e., shelters, food banks, etc.)
- Mental health resources
- Health clinics
- Libraries
- Organizational spaces

Below are services and spaces low income youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Immigrant services
- Faith-based organizations
- Community mentors
- Sexual health services

Visual Depiction of Engagement with Community Services and Spaces. Survey findings were stratified to identify which community programs and places were identified as most frequented by low-income youth over a year. The figure on the next page depicts what percentage of low-income survey respondents identified engaging with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 68% of low-income youth identified public spaces for hanging out as a key space that they engage with and most responded that this is their top (#1) space that they engage with, followed by mental health resources (57% ranked them as #1) and health clinics (57% ranked them as #3).

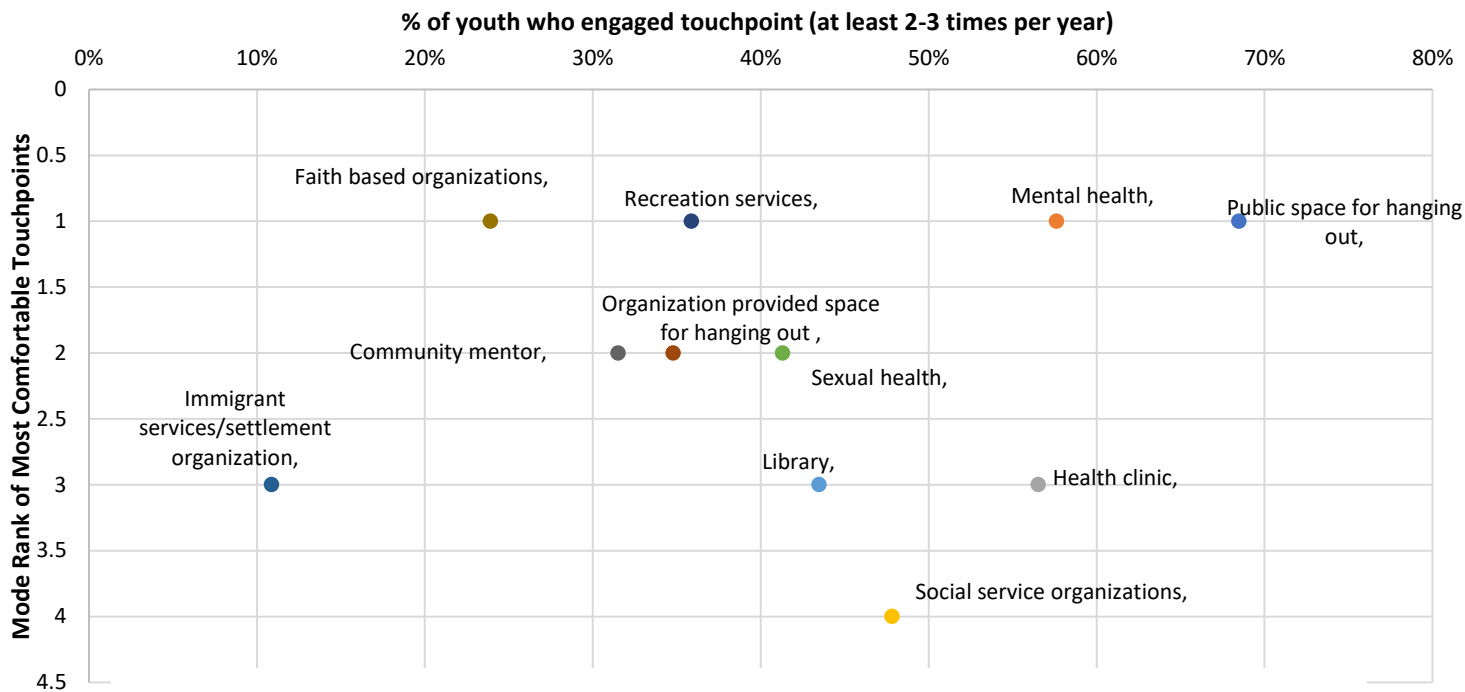
Table 19. Low-income Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are low-income youths most comfortable with in-person services and spaces?

The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by low-income youth. 68% of low-income youth identified public spaces for hanging out and mental health services as a the top (#1) spaces that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, 48% of youth indicated that they feel the least comfortable with social service organizations. Low income youth who also identify as living with addiction and in conflict with the legal system reported less comfort with recreation services.

Table 8. Low-income Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Comfortable?



What are best practices to engage low-income youth in employment services?

Low-income youth ranked their frequent relationships as **most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities**. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and least ranked touchpoints included:

Highest Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Parents/GuardiansRomantic relationshipsSiblingsEducational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Youth groupCare providerSupport workerExtended family

Most creative voice participants were also low-income youth. Some described that in lower-income communities’ information is often shared through word of mouth, social media, and other similar avenues such as online gaming. Online platforms are free and allow youth the choice to decide what they want to engage. The poem below was a creative voice submission by a low-income 2SLGBTQ+ youth, in response to a question asking where they would go to get information about how to get a job:

“We’re out of town elders, I don’t know who’ll listen to what I need. The only strangers I can talk to are vendors, I guess it’s time to try Indeed.”

Several **best practices to engage low-income youth** in workplace and employment services included:

- Provision of small grants or funds that facilitates required tools for engagement with workplace training services and with employers (i.e., for transportation, a cell phone, proper clothing, etc.)
- Consistent accessibility of services for needs such as housing, addition, etc. Youth often aren’t ready to immediately access all services at once, so time/relationship building is important.

Case Study #5: Indigenous Youth

Who is represented in this research?

The survey reached a total of **61** youth who identified as Indigenous. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Do you identify as an Indigenous person?”.

The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the Indigenous youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research.



Geographic Representation

- Ontario (17)
- Nunavut (13)
- Northwest Territories (11)
- British Columbia (6)
- Nova Scotia (3)
- Quebec (3)
- Saskatchewan (2)
- Yukon (2)
- Alberta (2)
- Manitoba (1)
- Newfoundland/Labrador (1)



Region Size

- Large urban (25)
- Medium urban (5)
- Small urban (71)
- Rural area (7)
- Prefer not to respond (4)



Indigenous Self-Identification

- First Nations (26)
- Inuit (20)
- Métis (11)
- Non-affiliated (1)
- Ojicree (1)
- Inuvialuit (1)



Gender Identification

- Female (33)
- Male (21)
- Nonbinary (2)
- Two Spirit (5)
- Prefer not to respond (1)



Employment Status

- Employed (21)
- In training (10)
- Self Employed (2)
- Unemployed (20)
- Prefer not to respond (8)



Age Range

- 15-20 (20)
- 21-30 (40)

Table 20. Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Indigenous Youth

Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristic	Number (n) of Indigenous Youth	(%) of Indigenous Youth
Low-income	32	52%
2SLGBTQ+	26	43%
Immigrant Youth	13	14%
Disabled Youth	19	31%
Youth With an Addiction	20	33%
Youth With Unstable Housing	42	69%
Youth Involved in Legal System	15	25%

Who are Indigenous youths' key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by Indigenous youth.

Below are relationships Indigenous youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Siblings
- Friends
- Parents/Guardians
- Romantic Relationships
- Cousins
- Employers

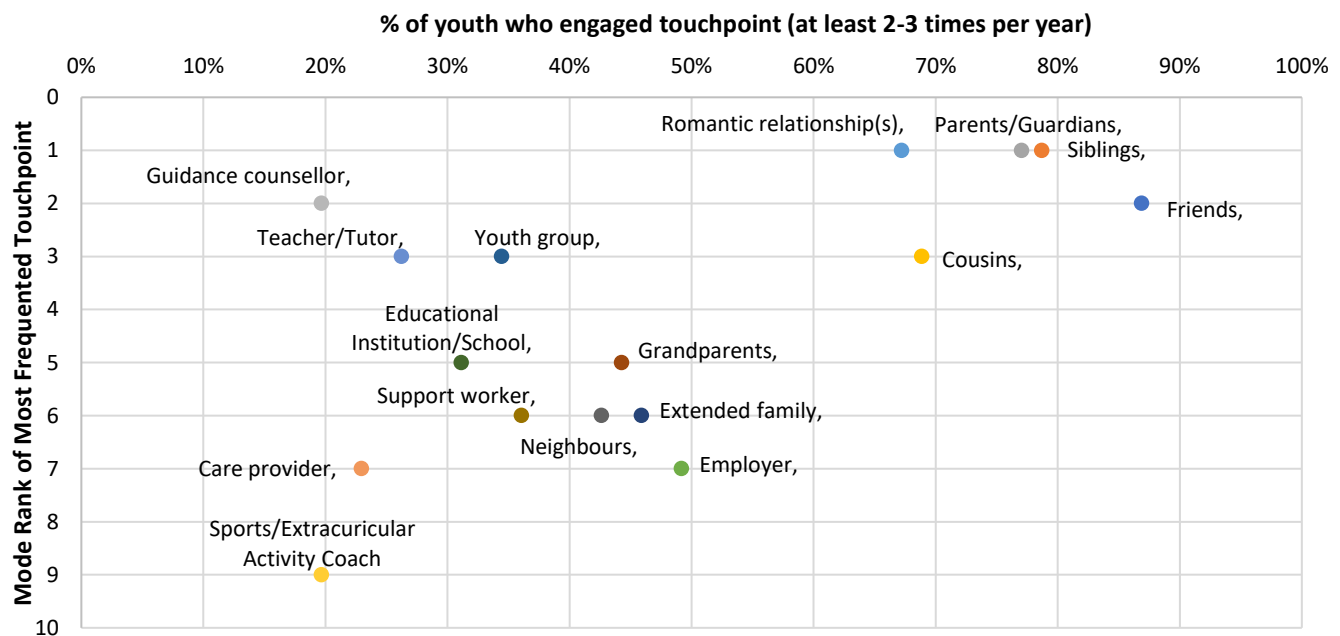
Below are relationships Indigenous youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Care providers
- Sports/ Extracurriculars
- Support Workers

Although support workers were not often engaged by Indigenous youth, those who were low-income or living with addiction were more likely to frequent this touchpoint. Additionally, Indigenous youth who also identified as 2SLGBTQ+ indicated being less likely to engage with teachers and guidance counsellors, and more likely to engage Elders or community mentors.

Visual Depiction of Relationships. The survey findings were stratified to identify which relationships were engaged most frequently by Indigenous youth. The figure below depicts what percentage of Indigenous survey respondents identified engaging with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 87% of Indigenous youth identified their friends as their key touchpoints, and most responded their siblings were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint, followed by their parents/guardians.

Table 21. Indigenous Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are Indigenous youths' most frequented services and spaces in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by low income youth.

Below are services and spaces Indigenous youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month). Overall few youth indicated frequent engagement with spaces each month.

- Public spaces (i.e., malls, beaches, etc.)
- Health clinics
- Mental health resources
- Organizational spaces

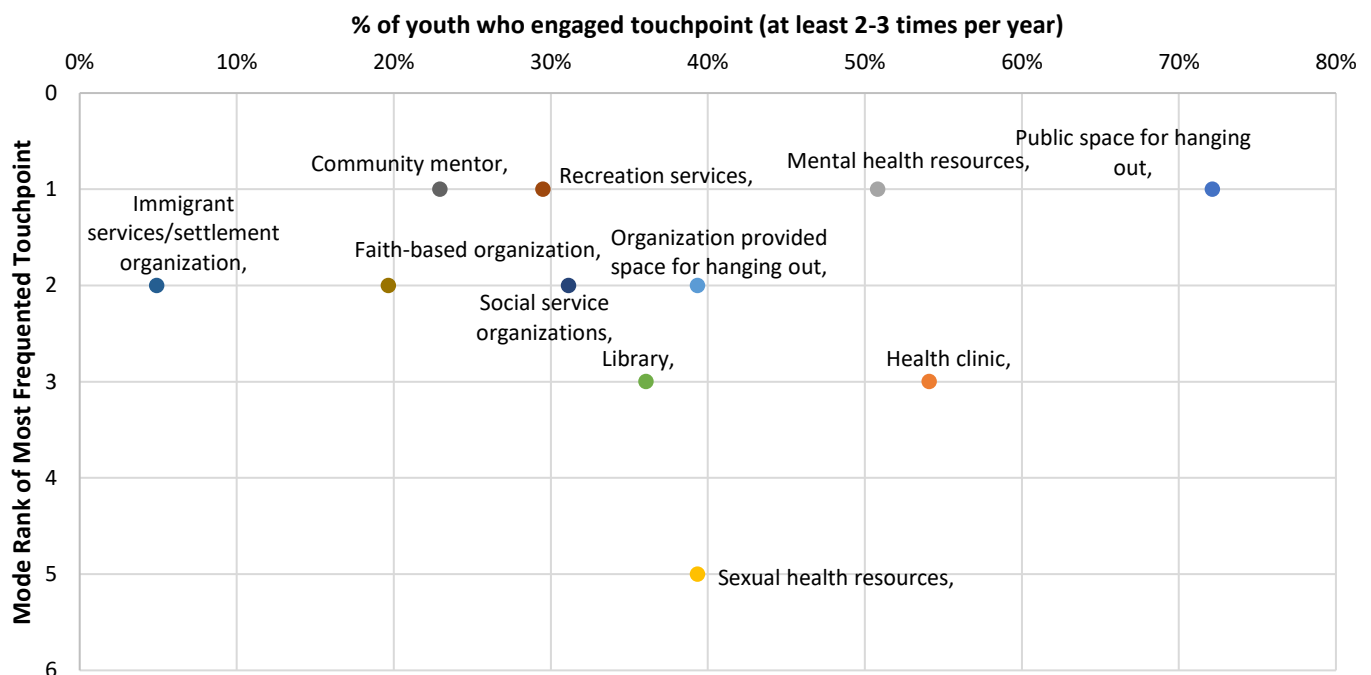
Below are services and spaces low income youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Immigrant services
- Community mentors
- Faith-based organizations
- Social services (i.e., shelter, food banks)

Indigenous youth who have been in conflict with the legal system were much more likely to engage with health clinics, with those who use this service ranking it most often as their #1 touchpoint. Those who also identified as living with an addiction were more likely to engage with faith-based organizations, but much less likely to attend them often compared to Indigenous youth without an addition.

Visual Depiction of Community Spaces and Services. 72% of Indigenous youth identified public spaces for hanging out as a key space that they engage with and most responded that this is their top (#1) space that they engage with, followed by mental health resources (51% ranked them as #1) and health clinics (54% ranked them as #3).

Table 22. Indigenous Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged

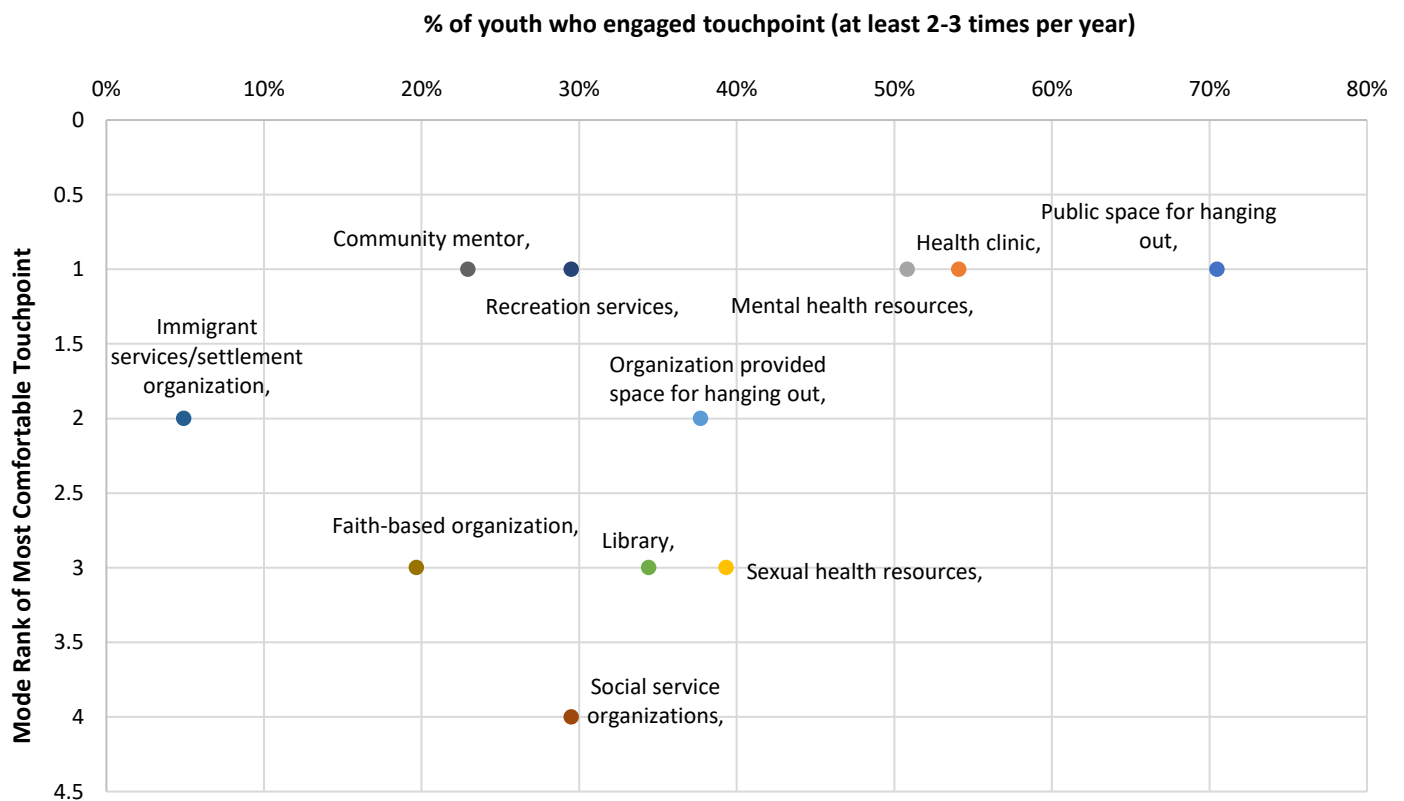


Where are Indigenous youths most comfortable with in-person services and spaces?

The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by Indigenous youth. 70% of youth identified public spaces for hanging out and health clinics as a the top (#1) spaces that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, 30% of Indigenous youth indicated that they feel the least comfortable with social service organizations.

Indigenous youth who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and with unstable housing are more likely to report that they feel comfortable with social service organizations (46%, ranked as #2 compared to 30%, ranked them as #4). Although Indigenous youth who attended health clinics mostly rated it #1 on their ranking of comfortable spaces, those who identified as involved in the legal system, living with addiction, or in unstable housing did not report the same level of comfort and ranked it much lower in comparison.

Table 23. Indigenous Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Comfortable?



What are best practices to engage Indigenous youth in employment services?

Indigenous youth ranked their frequent relationships as **most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities**. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and least ranked touchpoints included:

Highest Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/Guardians • Romantic relationships • Siblings • Friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach for sports/extracurricular • Employer • Care provider • Neighbours

Indigenous youth who participated in the Creative Voice Activity described different facets about how they would like to learn about work and employment opportunities and what types of spaces make them feel productive. Some of the key themes are reflective in the story below from a young Indigenous women living with a long-term physical disability. She shares how a community mentor in her life influenced her trajectory to engage in training and employment, and how the outdoors is a space that makes her feel productive and inspired. The story was slightly redacted to ensure confidentiality.

The Impact of Community Mentors

A place that inspires me and makes me feel most productive is being on the lake, out in nature. Oftentimes, life can be overwhelming. When I am on the water or on hiking trips, I feel very much at peace and inspired. My most creative ideas are when I am outside in the woods just reflecting on thoughts and ideas. Being close to mother earth is super important. Being an Ojibway, our lands mean a lot to us. They ground us. Give us a balance. It allows me to be open to ideas of different types of employment and focus on the ideal career path I'd like to take. I'm allowed to be open and honest with myself to what I want to do in life career wise. In the past, I haven't had the greatest support by peers or family members regarding the career path I wanted to pursue. However, when I'm out on the land, by the water, I can reflect freely without any criticism.

There is this one person in my life who I consider like a father to me. He is a wonderful person. He is a red seal carpenter. I've been given the opportunity to work with him in the past [...]. I learned basic skills of a carpenter and was fascinated by the types of work I was able to be a part of. Some people in life have jobs at a desk where they are still important, but they can't see the work they've done. In carpentry, you always see the work you're doing. It's kind of historic. Being a part of something you can reflect on from years later. I find it incredibly amazing. After speaking to [my community mentor] more about the steps to take to become a carpenter, I enrolled in a college course that would allow me to build the knowledge and skills to better understand this work. I am very grateful to have such an empowering and inspiring mentor like such. He has helped me find my passion for career life.

- Indigenous youth living with a physical disability, Age 17-20 (Creative Voice)

Organizations that serve Indigenous youth discussed **several best practices to engage this group in services**. In particular, considerations included:

- Provision of relationship-based programs very important, as well as cultural, wraparound, accessible, and intergenerational programming
- Many barriers for youth to succeed in this type of program comes from systematic and racist structures and its important to qualify this through a colonial lens
- Need for flexibility and strengths-based approaches to what organizations can do with funding or grants to support youth with employment services
- Meaningful consultation to create workforce training services is needed as opposed to consenting to a training or program has been pre-planned

Case Study #6: Immigrant Youth

Who is represented in this research?

The survey reached a total of 27 youth who identified as Immigrant. This group was identified as having responded “Yes” to the question “Did you or your parents/guardians immigrate to Canada in the past 5 years? (Including through Refugee/Asylum Seeker resettlement pathways)”.

The following section portrays a snapshot of intersectionality of the Immigrant youth who responded to the survey and are therefore represented in this research.



Geographic Representation

- British Columbia (5)
- Alberta (4)
- Saskatchewan (4)
- Quebec (3)
- New Brunswick (3)
- Nova Scotia (3)
- Manitoba (2)
- Ontario (1)
- Nunavut (1)



Gender Identification

- Female (18)
- Male (8)



Age Range

- 15-16 (1)
- 17-20 (5)
- 21-24 (11)
- 25-30 (10)



Region Size

- Large urban (10)
- Medium urban (4)
- Small urban (8)
- Prefer not to respond (5)



Employment Status

- Employed (10)
- In training (4)
- Self Employed (3)
- Unemployed (9)

Table 24. Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Immigrant Youth

Intersecting Socio-Demographic Characteristic	Number (n) of Immigrant Youth	(%) of Immigrant Youth
Low-income	15	56%
2SLGBTQ+	2	7%
Racialized Youth	20	74%
Disabled Youth	3	11%
Youth With an Addiction	2	7%
Youth With Unstable Housing	15	56%
Youth Involved in Legal System	3	11%

Who are immigrant youths' key relationships?

Survey findings were stratified to identify relationships engaged by immigrant youth.

Below are relationships immigrant youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Employers
 - Siblings
 - Parents/Guardians
- Romantic Relationships
 - Educational Institutions
 - Friends

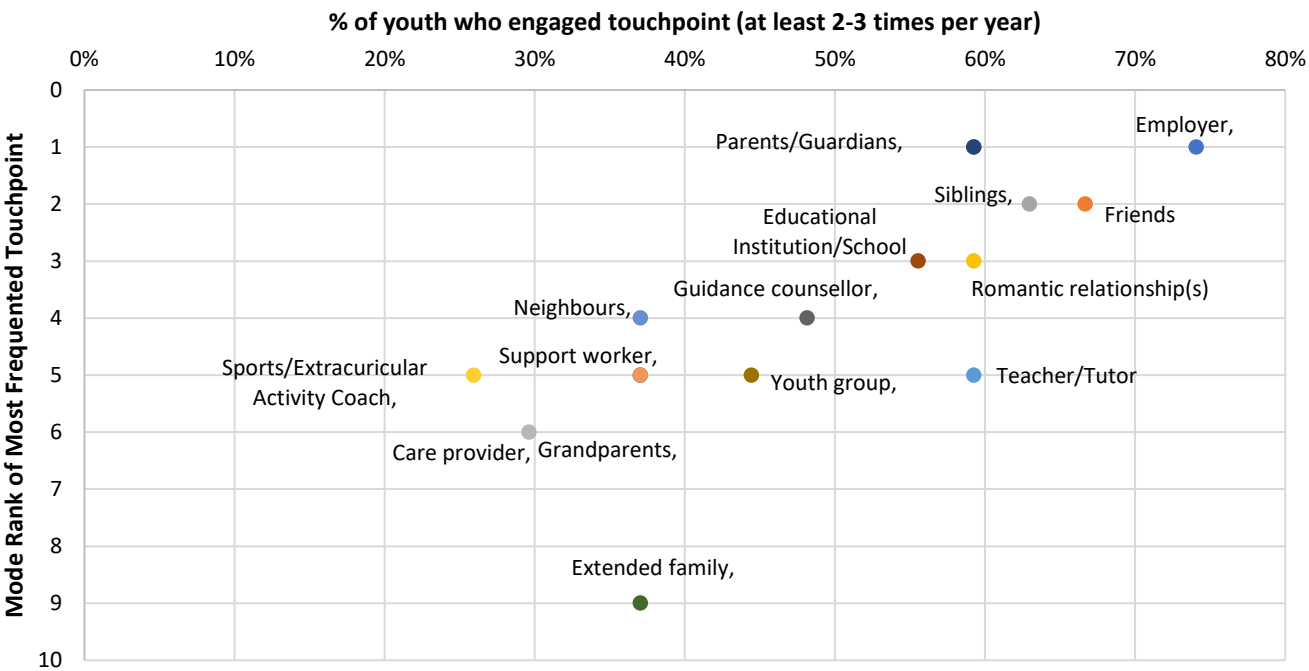
Below are relationships Indigenous youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Care providers
 - Romantic Relationships
- Grandparents
 - Sports/Extracurriculars

Low income immigrant youth in particular indicated increased engagement with support workers, teachers/tutors and with school in general compared to other immigrant youths.

Visual Depiction of Relationships. The survey findings were stratified to identify which relationships were engaged most frequently by Indigenous youth. The figure below depicts what percentage of low-income survey respondents identified engaging with a particular touchpoint (x-axis) by the mean value of their overall rank of how often they interact with that touchpoint (y-axis). For example, 74% of Immigrant youth identified their employers as their key touchpoints, and most responded their employers were their top (#1) frequented touchpoint, followed by their parents/guardians.

Table 25. Immigrant Youth: Which Relationships Are Most Frequently Engaged



Where are immigrant youths’ frequented services and spaces in the community?

Survey findings were stratified to identify spaces and services engaged by low income youth.

Below are services and spaces immigrant youth most often identified engaging frequently (at least 2-3 times per month).

- Public spaces (i.e., malls, beaches, etc.)
 - Immigrant services
 - Libraries
- Health clinics
 - Recreation organizations
 - Faith-based organizations

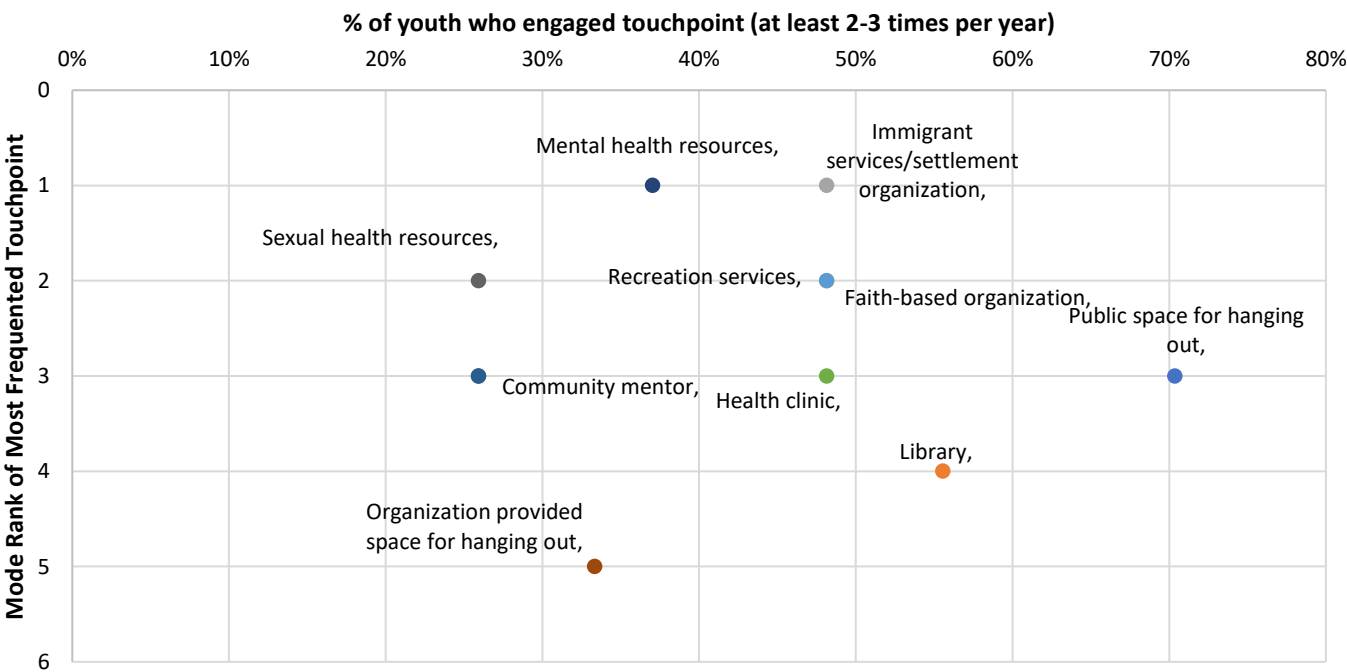
Below are services and spaces immigrant youth most often identified as never engaging or not applicable.

- Sexual health services
 - Community mentors
- Social services (i.e., shelter, food banks)
 - Mental health services

Low-income immigrant youth in particular were found to engage more frequently with faith-based organizations and less with immigrant-specific services.

Visual Depiction of Services and Spaces. The figure below depicts immigrant youths’ frequency of engagement within the community. 48% of immigrant youth identified immigrant services organizations as a key space that they engage with and most responded that this is their top (#1) space that they engage with, followed by mental health resources (37% ranked them as #1) and public spaces for hanging out (70% ranked them as #3).

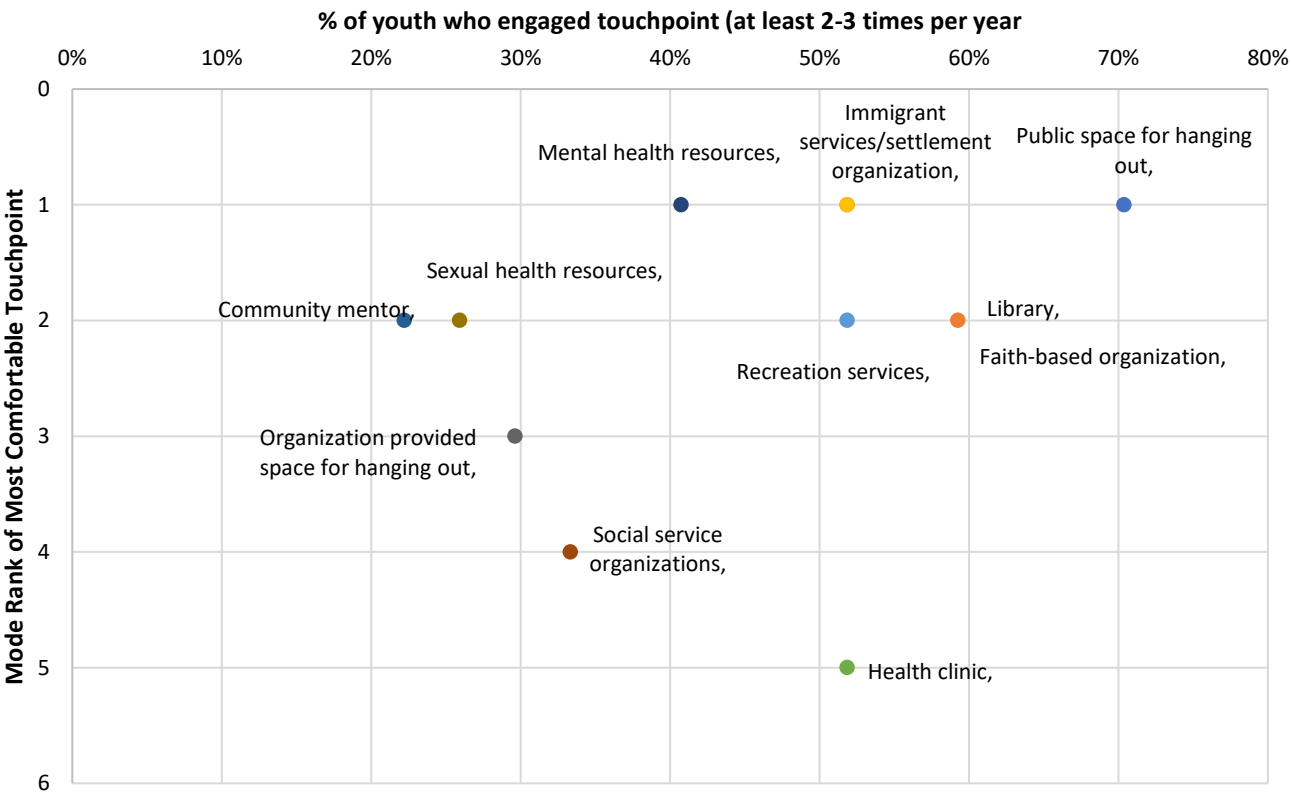
Table 26. Immigrant Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Frequently Engaged



The survey findings were stratified to identify which in-person services and spaces were identified as most comfortable by immigrant youth. 70% of immigrant youth identified public spaces for hanging out and immigrant services organizations as a the top (#1) spaces that they feel most comfortable. On the other hand, 52% of immigrant youth indicated that they feel the least comfortable with health clinics.

Findings showed low-income youth felt less comfortable engaging in immigrant services (40%, ranked #3 compared to 52%, ranked #1), but felt more comfortable in recreation services (33%, ranked #1 compared to 52%, ranked #2); whereas immigrant youth without stable housing felt less comfortable with organizations that provided space for hanging out (20%, ranked #6) compared to 30%, ranked #3.

Table 8. Immigrant Youth: Which Community Services and Spaces Are Most Comfortable?



What are best practices to engage Immigrant youth in employment services?

Immigrant youth ranked their frequent relationships as most to least influential on their perspectives of career, work, and training opportunities. Of those who engaged a particular touchpoint, their top and least ranked touchpoints included:

Highest Ranked	Lowest Ranked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer • Educational institutions • Romantic relationships • Teacher/tutor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandparents • Cousins • Extended family • Youth group

Most Immigrant youth who responded to the Creative Voice activity shared they would be most likely to get information about employment and training opportunities from a community organization, either faith-based or social services. The two quotes below illustrate unique concepts that apply to immigrant youth seeking employment opportunities: consideration of personal cultural values and needs, and how to foster a sense of community and security when arriving in Canada.

“The only place where i would prefer to go if i need some information related to job is mosque, as i am a muslim and thats the only place where most of the people from my community would go 5 times a day even on friday, womens also come to offer prayers and after that its a great place to socialize in the community and if need guidance we can go to mosque [...] and help you out in different ways like introducing you in community help you in finding jobs or what jobs are in the market.”

- Immigrant youth, Age 25-30 (Creative Voice)

“[...] the people [at the community organization I engage] help me alot after my arrival in saskatoon from job finding to participate in community event [...] from the country where i belongs don't have volunteers concept, I understand how volunteering help me enhancing my career goals and how to achieve it. Above all i had a language barrier and [was] not to tech oriented person- this place helps me polishing that skill. Our coordinator's help us in every skill and help us how to do the things right and its not limited to only class if we stuck we can always message them and they respond us back as soon as possible”

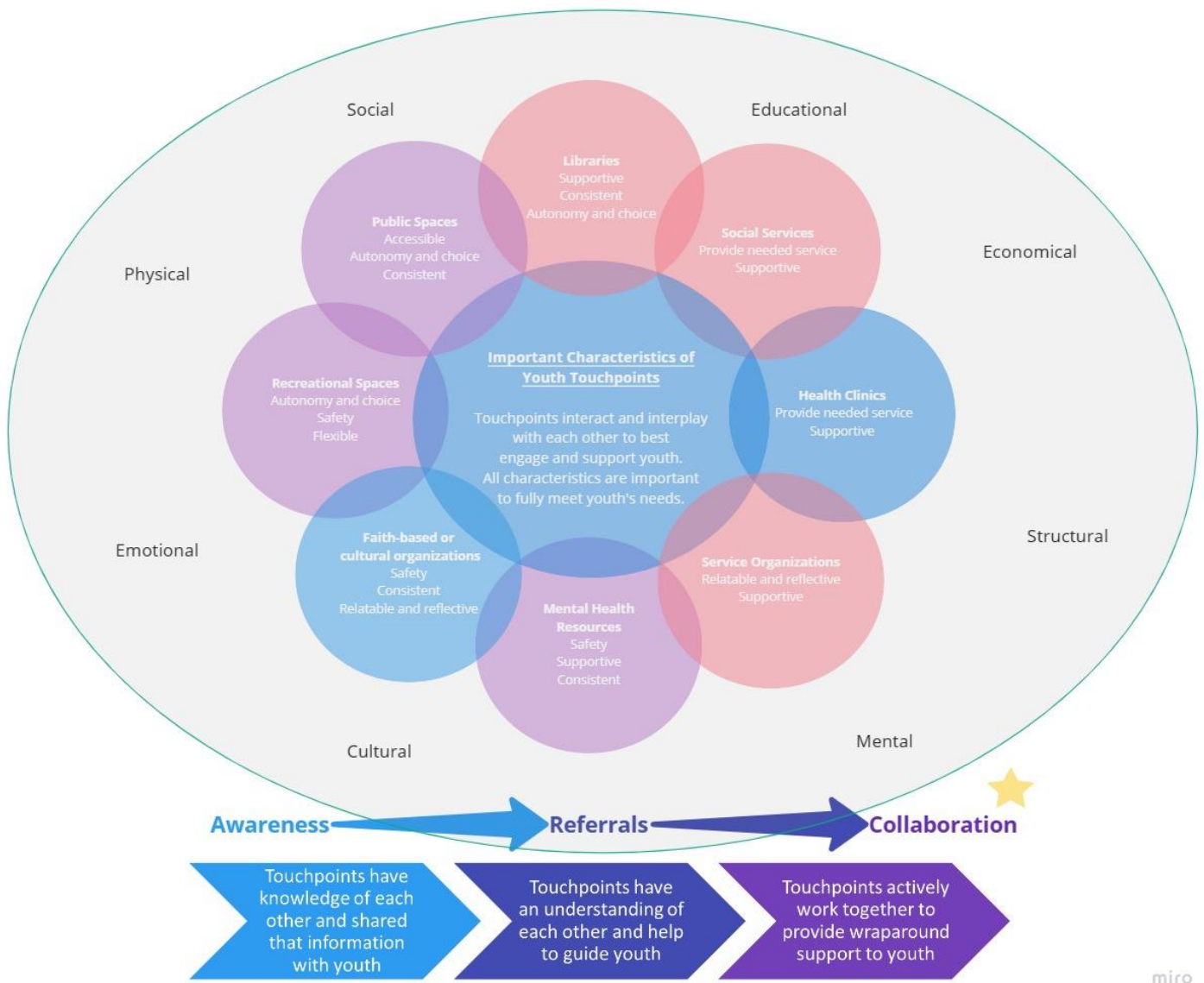
- Immigrant youth, Age 25-30 (Creative Voice)

Organizations that serve Immigrant youth discussed several best practices to engage this group in employment and training services. In particular, some unique considerations for this group included:

- Be aware of social and structural systems that youth face when applying for work in Canada. Many employers can be bias towards newcomer and racialized youth, which creates unfriendly and harmful settings for youth looking to engage the labour market. Obtaining a job from someone in their same community can help reduce exposure to work environments that may be racist or unsupportive.
- Employ staff with shared experiences, backgrounds, and languages with the newcomer youth.

Appendix 6. Conceptual Framework

The framework intends to be a visual representation of the complexities and interconnectedness required for youth touchpoints to provide holistic and wraparound services. Youth have multi-faceted needs such as those represented on the inside of the circle (i.e., social, educational, economical, physical, cultural, mental, and structural) which can be met only through a collaborative perspective from multiple youth touchpoints. However, for spaces and services to be impactful these touchpoints need to embody a variety of characteristics that are meaningful to youth such as being supportive, consistent, autonomous, safe, accessible, reflective, and relatable. Often these traits are not found within one space but can be leveraged and provided through several of youth's collaborative touchpoints to help best support youth in a way that is comfortable and empowering to them. The scale at the bottom suggests several ways touchpoints interplay to interact with and engage youth in these spaces, with collaborative being the most effective to employ wraparound supports.



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