

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

An Overview from the CIF Impact Report

COMMUNITIES BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES (CBYF)

Tamarack Institute's Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) is a five-year initiative funded by the Government of Canada's Supports for Student Learning Program* that operates in 20 rural, remote, and/or Indigenous communities across the country. The goal of CBYF is to develop community-wide strategies to support youth (aged 15 – 30) to graduate high school and successfully transition to post-secondary, training or employment. Each CBYF community receives core funding and capacity building support from Tamarack to develop and implement their local action plan.

COMMUNITY INNOVATION FUND (CIF)

CBYF communities are eligible to apply annually for one-year Community Innovation Fund (CIF) grants. These grants enable local CBYF initiatives to achieve “quick wins” on pressing issues while balancing the deep work of addressing the priorities of their community's youth. After the first year of implementing CBYF in communities, six domains emerged to address barriers to academic and employment success faced by youth. The six themes have been structured into six overviews, focusing specifically on the impacts of 58 CIF grants distributed between 2020 and 2024.

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

Youth in rural communities often lack clear pathways from high school to post-secondary education, training programs, or employment. This can be compounded by other barriers including poverty, racism, lack of adult support, and poor mental or physical health. CBYF communities designed initiatives that engaged a diverse range of community members to offer a more holistic array of education options and supports.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Immediate need for more technology to access online school during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Gaps or barriers in accessible and culturally appropriate learning opportunities.
- Gaps or barriers in specialized education plans and one-on-one support from teachers and adult allies.
- Gaps or barriers in pathways from classroom to career such as internships, training programs, and job shadowing opportunities.

While 27 initiatives addressed youth education success, the projects on the following page focused more specifically on success in the secondary school system.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

After the Bell Tutoring

Corner Brook, NL

Youth tutors worked with the school system to provide the community's only free tutoring initiative for students who needed support.

Roving Campus

Portage La Prairie, MB

The Roving Campus initiative redesigned the traditional classroom to accommodate students facing barriers to education success.

Jeunes branchés

Laval, QC

Youth-led technological support for students taking online classes because of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

YK Prep Connect

Yellowknife, NT

Youth tutors and mentors were placed with other youth seeking tutoring and mentorship support. Youth were given a chance to try out their education or employment interests and have access to a range of services through a local service provider.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1 Students in the Roving Campus classroom had all been identified by their school board as unlikely to graduate. At the end of the year, **100% of students** had graduated from high school and 30% chose to go on to further education.
- 2 The Roving Campus pilot project was so successful, the Digby CBYF community chose to replicate the project in 2023.
- 3 Several youth reported that their involvement in the YK Prep Connect tutoring program encouraged them to apply for further education and helped them choose a career path.
- 4 Many students and their parents stated that the After the Bell tutoring support was the reason students were able to pass their classes.
- 5 In an online feedback form created by YK Prep Connect, **100% of respondents** said that the program provided "immediate support for their schoolwork" and that they felt "more prepared to apply for a job".
- 6 The After the Bell tutoring program represented the only free tutoring program in the community. It was so successful in its first year, the number of youth engaged in the program **increased by almost 500%** in the second year.
- 7 For the majority of youth leaders in the Jeunes branchés tutoring project, this was their first job. However, they became so confident during the year, three youth tutors chose to take over the project after the completion of the CIF initiative.

EMPLOYMENT & MENTORSHIP

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EMPLOYMENT & MENTORSHIP

To succeed in a chosen career, youth need a series of opportunities that incrementally increase their capacity for success. These opportunities not only help young people practice their job skills they also enable youth to grow confidence in their own abilities. This makes them more likely to invest in higher education or training programs in the future. While 12 CIF initiatives addressed challenges and barriers to youth employment, the following projects specifically prioritized job opportunities and employment skill-development for youth.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Unclear pathway from high school education to employment.
- Limited options for youth to gain meaningful employment in career paths of their interest.
- Gaps or barriers in free or accessible skill-building opportunities.
- Youth experience structural racism and bias, which affects their employment opportunities.

While 25 initiatives addressed youth employment success, the projects on the following page focused most specifically on this theme.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING EMPLOYMENT & MENTORSHIP

Ambition Incubator

Chatham-Kent, ON

This intensive project taught youth hands-on employment skills while running a professional kitchen. The initiative also connected youth with mentorship and internship opportunities with local businesses.

Makerspace YK

Yellowknife, NT

This project connects youth with a woodshop, a digital lab, and an arts space to help them develop their small businesses. Youth were paired with mentors and business leaders to help them succeed in their entrepreneurial efforts.

Portage Innovation Centre

Portage La Prairie, MB

The PIC is a makerspace designed to help youth entrepreneurs start new small businesses and connect with local employers and mentors.

Pépinière d'innovation

Laval, QC

This program serves as an innovation incubator, allowing youth the chance to try out different interests and career options.

Miskwaawaak Carpentry Program

Sudbury, ON

Local Indigenous youth had access to a carpentry training program that incorporated traditional cultural teachings and projects with the support of Indigenous elders.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1 **Over 1,500 youth** had the opportunity to build their resumé and gain professional references because of their involvement with CIF initiatives.
- 2 Youth leaders of **nine CIF initiatives** specifically reported that their leadership experience with the project had resulted in either successful applications to further education or jobs in their desired field.
- 3 Youth in at least three communities were able to apply for ID cards that would enable them to work and access other benefits because of CIF leadership support.
- 4 **54 young people** had the opportunity to use laser cutters, 3D printers, woodshops, and other services through the Portage Innovation Centre and Makerspace YK initiatives with 24 youth developing a functioning business over the course of the one-year project.
- 5 **All 16 youth participants** of Chatham-Kent's employment bootcamp were successfully employed in jobs related to their interests, with 10 being paid more than minimum wage.
- 6 Community partners of the employment bootcamp reported that they completely reassessed their understandings of youth leadership capacity and independently collaborated on further mentorship programs for local youth.
- 7 Youth leaders of the Pépinière d'innovation initiative engaged over **1,200** majority low-income and 1st or 2nd generation Canadian youth in leadership and training programs.
- 8 **100% of participants** in the Miskwaawaak carpentry program (majority Indigenous women) reported that it inspired them to choose carpentry as their profession.

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

Canada 

HOLISTIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

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HOLISTIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

Almost all CIF initiatives engaged youth experiencing food insecurity, insufficient housing, or other issues securing basic needs. Across the board, when CIF projects addressed these gaps in basic needs, youth had more energy to focus on graduating from school and transitioning into further education or employment. These supports may have required small investments in innovation, funds or time but had significant impacts on youth success when offered in conjunction with education and employment initiatives.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Poverty and systemic barriers negatively affect the food and housing security of youth.
- Gaps or barriers in access to holistic, culturally appropriate, mental health resources.
- Gaps or barriers in cultural connection and traditional healing practices, especially for Indigenous youth.

While 53 initiatives addressed holistic health and wellbeing, the projects on the following page focused most specifically on this theme.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING HOLISTIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

Channeling Youth Voices

Chilliwack, BC

Chilliwack youth worked together to create a documentary about their experiences of poverty, homelessness, and mental illness. Youth had the opportunity to speak as experts on their own experiences to local changemakers.

Youth Accessing Digital Devices

Prince Albert, SK

The majority Indigenous youth participants in Prince Albert received various beading, self-care, and mental health workshops to help connect them with support from Elders and local service providers.

Kanien'kehá:ka Traditional Food Cooking Program

Kahnawà:ke, QC

This project promoted land-based learning and taught hands-on food preparation and cooking skills to youth using Kanien'kehá:ka traditional foods to pass down this important aspect of Kanien'kehá:ka identity, culture, and way of life.

Healing Through Performance Art

Kahnawà:ke, QC

Kanien'kehá:ka youth designed and attended workshops that provided peer and adult support while teaching about painting, public speaking, theater, and powwow dancing among others.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1 2,249 youth** had the opportunity to meet one or more basic needs through their involvement with CIF initiatives.
- Youth experiencing addiction and mental health struggles in Prince Albert reported feeling stigmatized in traditional services. Through the CIF project, **52 youth** were able to connect with Indigenous elders and more accessible services.
- One young person was able to achieve and maintain sobriety because of his connection with an elder made through the Prince Albert CIF initiative.
- 4 34 youth** in Chilliwack facing many systemic barriers gained the confidence to advocate for themselves and their peers to service providers and local government officials.
- The Kanien'kehá:ka Traditional Food Cooking Program engaged **215 Kanien'kehá:ka youth**, helping them develop and/or maintain powerful familial and community relationships built on the sharing of food, something that has been historically marginalized by colonial laws and actions.

SERVICE NAVIGATION & ACCESS TO SUPPORTS

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SERVICE NAVIGATION & ACCESS TO SUPPORTS

Accessing services can be a stigmatizing and emotionally vulnerable experience for youth, compounded by the fact that many young people do not know what services are available to them. CIF initiatives focused on integrating existing service providers, mental health supports, and adult mentors to create holistic ‘webs of support’ that helped youth overcome multiple barriers to success.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Youth don't know what services are available or don't know how to access them.
- Gaps or barriers in adult support and advocacy while navigating the system.
- Accessing services may bring up trauma from youth or stigma from service providers.

While 18 initiatives addressed service navigation, the projects on the following page focused most specifically on this theme.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING SERVICE NAVIGATION

Future North

Sudbury, ON

Youth in Sudbury designed a website that connected youth with local service providers in their area, including information about how to access each one. In a second CIF initiative, youth leaders travelled to nearby areas to share their learnings with other young people.

Channeling Youth Voices

Documentary

Chilliwack, BC

Chilliwack youth worked together to create a documentary about their experiences of poverty, homelessness, and mental illness. Youth had the opportunity to speak as experts on their own experiences to local changemakers.

Transportation Project

Digby, NS

Provided funding for youth to travel to school and work as transportation is a significant access barrier in the community.

Pihtikwe: Beyond the Doorstep

Prince Albert, SK

Youth leaders increased the accessibility of youth-focused services by filming interviews with local service providers and including information on how to access each service. In a second CIF initiative, youth leaders incorporated their learnings into an app.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1,642 youth** across 18 initiatives worked to improve service access for youth in their communities.
- Over 2,700 youth** engaged directly with local service providers and other changemakers or became changemakers themselves because of CIF projects.
- 404 youth** were able to access education, employment, and local services because of the Digby Transportation Project.
- Youth in Chilliwack who had prior negative experiences with local services were able to use the supportive relationships they found within Chilliwack's CIF project to successfully re-engage with those services.
- All 58 CIF initiatives** involved direct community engagement including local mentors and service providers. Each community continued to build supportive relationships with youth after the one-year funding window.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

CBYF leadership teams acknowledge that youth are the ultimate subject matter experts. Youth have strong opinions on what initiatives and services they want and are much more likely to participate when their feedback is genuinely respected. Leadership opportunities in a CIF project often served as a stepping stone for youth, helping them gain relevant job experience and encouraging them to take up further leadership positions.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Youth feel disengaged, disconnected, and disenfranchised in their communities.
- There are gaps or barriers in accessing youth-friendly spaces, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Youth don't feel their leadership is utilized or their voices are listened to by the community.

While 58 initiatives addressed youth engagement and leadership, the projects on the following page focused most specifically on this theme.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Youth Pathways to Leadership

Whitehorse, YK

The Yukon team reached out to rural communities in Yukon to support youth leadership and build community capacity. As a result, 75 young people directly influenced the creation of the Yukon Territorial Youth Strategy in 2022.

Digby Area Youth Space

Digby, NS

Youth leaders provided fun and educational online programming for other young people during the pandemic restrictions while teaching about budgeting, job-searching, mental health care, etc.

Youth Action Society

Grande Prairie, AB

Youth leaders designed micro-grants to support education or employment for local young people.

Pihtikwe: Beyond the Doorstep

Prince Albert, SK

Youth in Prince Albert reported that they didn't know what services were available to them and weren't sure how to access them. To remedy the problem, youth reached out to local services and created a video documentary that included information about each service and how to access them.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1 Over **9,900 youth** had opportunities to practice their leadership skills while making meaningful impacts on their communities through CIF initiatives.
- 2 **1,561 youth** were engaged in CIF projects as designers and developers.
- 3 **75 youth** in rural Yukon had the opportunity to directly influence the territory's Youth Strategy by sharing their experiences and feedback.
- 4 **Almost 60% of CIF project leaders** who engaged with local systems wrote about how the experience profoundly increased youth leaders' confidence and understanding of their own capacity.
- 5 CIF projects supported **over 2,700 youth** to engage with local leaders, politicians, business owners, and other community members, greatly increasing their capacities for leadership and community engagement.
- 6 The Covid-19 pandemic made engaging vulnerable youth populations even more difficult. Despite these significantly challenging conditions, youth leaders in Digby were able to bring together **60 young people** for fun and informative social time online.
- 7 Youth leaders in Sudbury and Prince Albert shared how significantly their projects increased not only their access to services but their confidence in interacting with service providers and other community leaders. One young person from Prince Albert shared, "my confidence has increased hugely... I'd just call people, even though I was a bit anxious. I'm very proud of myself".



IDENTITY & SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

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IDENTITY & SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Young people need to feel like valued and respected members of a community to realize their potential in education and employment. Opportunities for social connection and cultural identity are so important for youth because supportive adult allies and peer mentors can increase youth confidence and help them prepare for new challenges in the future.

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

- Many Indigenous youth lack cultural connection or access to supportive elders.
- Youth lack confidence that comes with a strong community of adult and peer mentors.
- Youth experience stigma and discrimination based on their identities that affects their sense of belonging in community spaces.

While 23 initiatives addressed identity and social connections, the projects on the following page focused most specifically on this theme.

INITIATIVES ADDRESSING IDENTITY & SOCIAL CONNECTION

After School Hangout

Chilliwack BC

This intensive project taught youth hands-on employment skills while running a professional kitchen. The initiative also connected youth with mentorship and internship opportunities with local businesses.

Youth Accessing Digital Devices

Prince Albert, SK

This project connects youth with a woodshop, a digital lab, and an arts space to help them develop their small businesses. Youth were paired with mentors and business leaders to help them succeed in their entrepreneurial efforts.

Kanien'kehá:ka Traditional Food Cooking Program

Kahnawà:ke, QC

The PIC is a makerspace designed to help youth entrepreneurs start new small businesses and connect with local employers and mentors.

Hazhó Ełexè Łets'eèzhe

Yellowknife, NT

This program serves as an innovation incubator, allowing youth the chance to try out different interests and career options.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF THE CIF PROJECTS

- 1,380 youth** received opportunities for greater connection with adult allies and local services because of their involvement with CIF initiatives.
- 4 projects'** final reports specifically mentioned that CIF initiatives represented the greatest or only connection youth had to their Indigenous identities.
- Leaders of the Chilliwack After School Hangout watched the over **70 youth participants** gain mentors, learn social-emotional skills, and gain confidence over the course of the year, leading to 29 youth being employed or engaged as project leaders.
- Youth involved in the Hazhó Ełexè Łets'eèzhe initiative shared how much they missed social connection and connection to nature after a year of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. CIF leaders shared the profoundly positive effects the program had on mental health for the **197 youth participants**.
- 18 CIF projects** provided Indigenous cultural teachings and mentorship from elders for over **1,155 Indigenous youth**.
- The Kanien'kehá:ka Traditional Food Program provided a channel for **215 youth** to connect with their identities in powerful ways, which had an immediate effect on them. Leaders wrote, "students with behavioural issues were actually some of the most involved and attentive participants in the cooking classes".