

The Students Commission of Canada's The Art of Work Program – Synthesis of Learning & Impact Report as of July 2026



*"This was life changing... I got a
new outlook on life."*

– Art of Work Participant

BELONGING

**CLEARER CAREER
PATHWAYS**

COMMUNITY
**STRONGER
SUPPORT
NETWORKS**

EMPLOYMENT



The Art of Work Program – Synthesis of Learning & Impact

Purpose of this Report

This report examines how The Art of Work initiative has supported youth workforce readiness and employment outcomes, highlights key lessons emerging from implementation, and identifies opportunities to further strengthen supports for youth facing barriers to employment.

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“It’s been about understanding work requirements, what is due and when, while also being creative. They [youth] help us see things that are bigger than what we see ourselves. They bring a Gen Z perspective, like introducing new apps or ways of working. We’ve always been this way, but this has become an important component of an intergenerational workforce.”

– Art of Work Employer



Executive Summary

Over five years of program delivery, the Student Commission of Canada's The Art of Work (AoW) initiative has engaged 179 youth across ten provinces and three territories. Designed to bridge a gap between the goals of employers and those of young people seeking employment, AoW integrates support and training for both employers and youth, interactively addressing expected and unexpected challenges as they arise. Ongoing challenges include communicating and clarifying generational differences of expectations, reducing administrative and reporting burdens, and providing the sufficiently tailored flexibility of time frames and supports that are required for certain populations of youth to succeed in initial employment placements. The objective of AoW is longer term, with early successes that support the development and initiation of a career path for each youth, with a particular focus on young people facing barriers to labour market participation.

Paid work placements are integrated with workshops that combine practical employment preparation, social emotional learning, peer-to-peer connection, and contributing to community, creating spaces where youth can build confidence, expand networks, and strengthen transferrable skills.

This report synthesizes learning, lessons and impact from AoW's first five years. Six factors are driving success.

6 FACTORS

Grounding in Relationships: Outcomes are optimized through consistent communication one-on-one with each youth participant and each employer to understand their experiences, needs and goals.

One-on-One Paired with Group Engagement: One-on-one coaching meets the specific needs of each youth: group engagement assists with soft skills acquisition providing a peer network for confidence building, knowledge exchange and affirmation of their learning and skills.

In-Person Engagement: Meeting AoW staff in person increases participants sense of belonging and motivation. Virtual participants are supported to look for efficient ways to access similar in-person resources and opportunities in community.

Concurrent, Experiential Learning: Completing external AoW workshops during their placements, allows participants to apply and practice new learning and skills in a professional workplace.

National Scope and Perspectives: Awareness of broader national trends, identities and experiences helps broaden youth perspectives beyond their current localized knowledge; youth can identify similarities and differences across specialized populations, assisting in integration into workplace environments.

Supporting Employees and Employers: Training and communication supports employers who are facing challenges working with younger populations, as well as young people themselves who are facing challenges with professionalism, interpersonal and soft skills.

In terms of **meeting challenges**, The Art of Work has effectively utilized the role of community organizations and non-profit employers in meeting the need for tailored supports for hard-to-employ youth. These employers, together with social purpose funders, who understand the longer-term support horizons for attaining and measuring impact, have been critical to sustaining and expanding the program. Addressing gaps in understanding across generations has been met with an emphasis on relation-based communication, employer orientation and support for relieving employers of administrative and reporting requirements from funders related to providing wage subsidies.

Another key to success has been the grounding of the pathways of support in community, building networks, and providing opportunities —before, during, after —the initial work placement. This builds competence and confidence inside and outside the employment experience.



EMPLOYMENT

We help you kickstart your career by guiding you through the process of creating a standout resume and cover letter. Our tips show you how to apply to multiple jobs effectively, ensuring your applications reach the right people. We encourage you to speak directly with managers, not just employees, to make a lasting impression and boost your chances of landing the job.

In addition to job applications, we emphasize the value of volunteering, learning new skills, and practicing interviews to sharpen your abilities. Whether you're looking to enter the workforce or pursue self-employment, we provide the resources and confidence to take charge of your future and create your own career path.

Voice Collection: Stories of Impact

The SCC utilized its Sharing the Stories (StS) research platform to gather data that helps capture changes over time, document individual experiences, and generate insights about program implementation and outcomes. Qualitative data is collected through workshop notes, onboarding and off-boarding calls, and supplemental calls throughout the experience, as well as through qualitative surveys at events and activities. Onboarding calls are hosted when youth join the program and usually include the youth and employer. Off-boarding calls are one-on-one without employment supervisors. Calls also occur prior to workshops, placement, and significant one-on-one supports. Employers are also interviewed at the end of their program placements. Quantitative data is completed at three time points. This emphasis on reflection and learning supports ongoing program enhancement while ensuring youth perspectives remain central to evaluating impact.

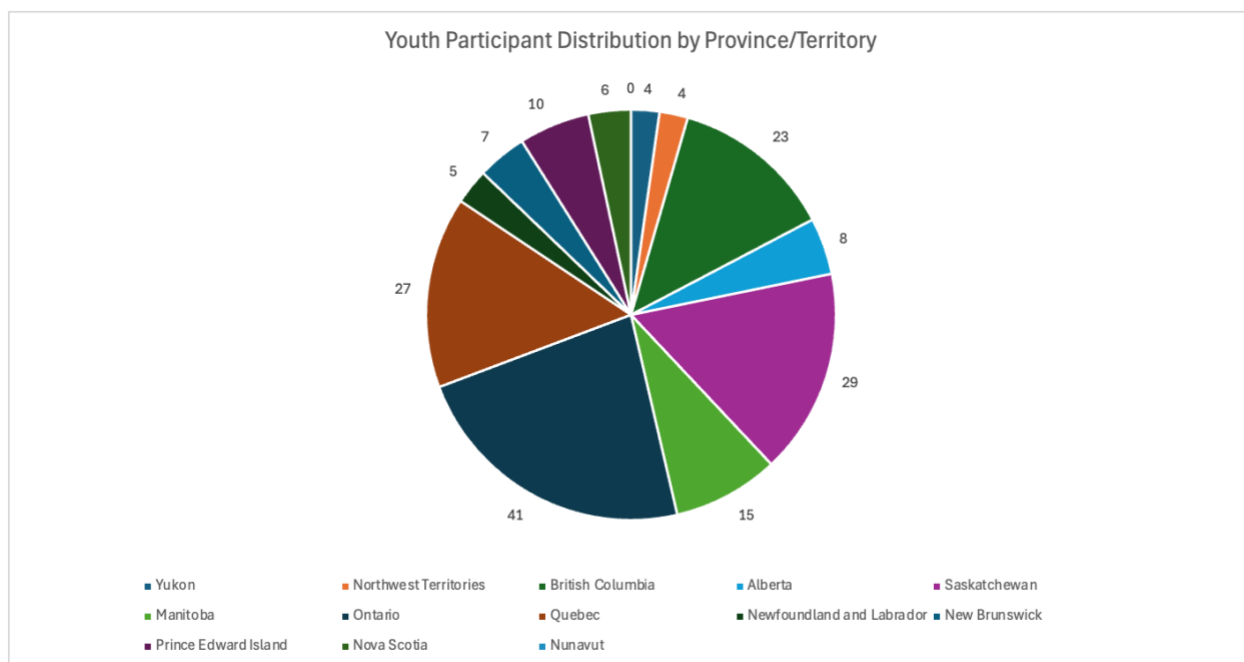
Participant Profile

Youth Participants

As of end of July 2026, AoW has served 179 youth participants across Canada. Young women comprise 62.5% of participants, with young men comprising 31.25%. Gender-diverse youth represent 3.75% of youth participants, with 2.5% not disclosing gender. AoW has engaged Indigenous youth (25%), racialized youth (34%), youth with disability (19%), 2SLGBTQI+ youth (19%), and newcomer youth (14%).

Youth participants represent almost every province and territory, with 21% residing in rural, remote, Northern, and fly-in communities. Twelve percent of participants are part of an official language minority community.

Of the participants who have completed the AoW program to date, only five have not continued in employment or returned to education. These success rates demonstrate the efficacy of AoW.

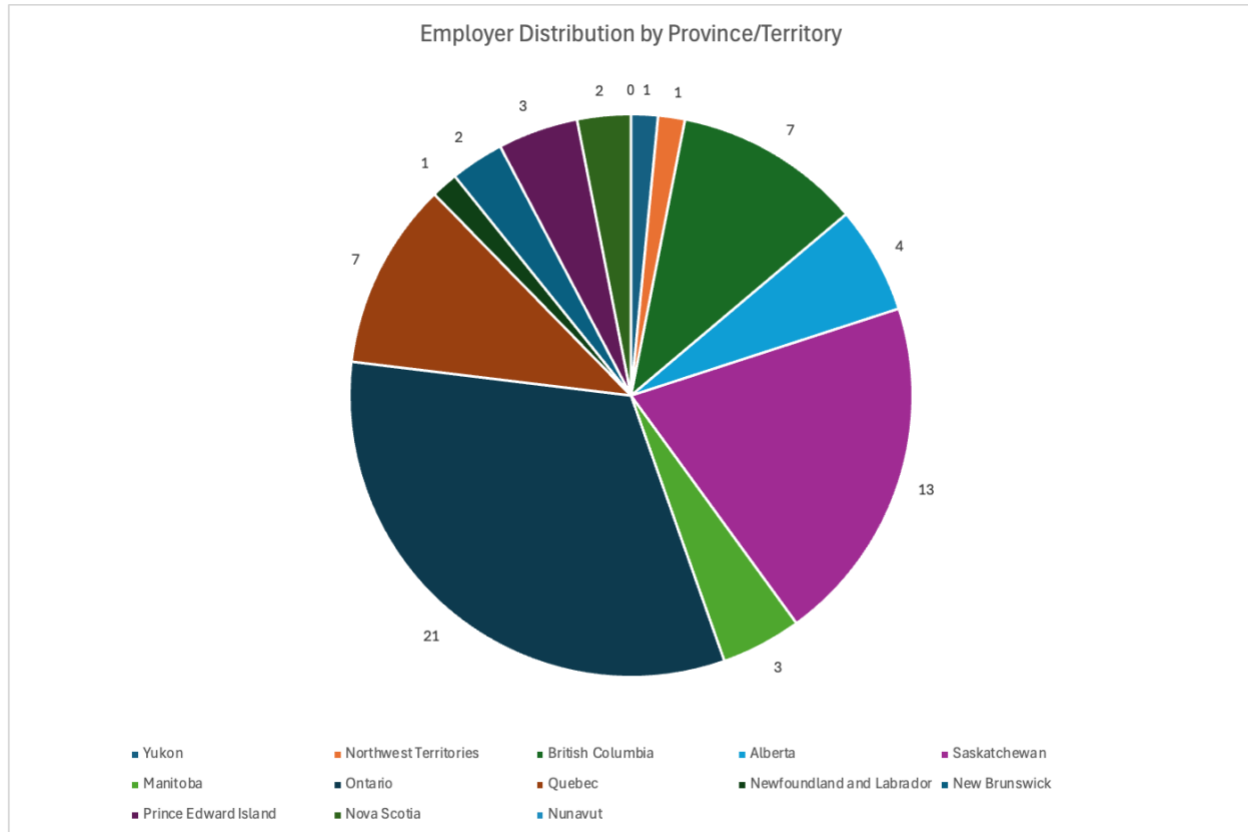


Employers AoW employers comprise primarily nonprofit organizations, youth-serving agencies, community service providers, and social-impact groups. Many focus on youth development, mentoring, employment readiness, leadership training, family support, Indigenous community programs, education, food security, and wellness. Examples include organizations such as BYTE, BGC Saskatoon, YMCA Newfoundland, Y4Y Québec, Next Gen Men, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, and Big Brothers Big Sisters

The remainder of the employers include a mix of small businesses, private-sector employers, and public/community institutions, including construction, engineering, manufacturing, finance, agriculture, food service, and real estate. Overall, the employers represent a strong blend of the nonprofit/social services sector, youth and community development organizations, and local private businesses, with a particular emphasis on organizations that create opportunities for young people through employment, mentorship, education, and community engagement.

“The opportunity to bring him on in a stable work arrangement really opened some doors for him. Because he was working regularly and full time for a period, it gave us the opportunity to build a stronger relationship and observe what was going on in his life. He ended up disclosing some personal struggles that he

likely would not have shared otherwise. We had known him for a long time, but having this third space, with the expectation of professional responsibility and accountability, allowed us to get a much clearer picture of his situation and implement supports elsewhere in his life.” - Art of Work Employer



Program Profile

The *Art of Work* initiative, developed by The Students Commission of Canada (SCC), is a national workforce readiness program designed to support young people as they transition from the education system into stable and financially secure adulthood. Created in response to persistent barriers facing youth in the transition from education to employment, the initiative seeks to strengthen pathways to workforce participation, economic security, and long-term career development for youth between the ages of 15-30 years old across Canada. Rooted in SCC’s youth and adult partnership model, the initiative provides a progressive continuum of supports, learning opportunities, and paid work experiences that build essential skills, confidence, and meaningful connections needed for labour market success.

Various funders support the initiative, including the Government of Canada’s Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS), overseen by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), The Cooperators Group, Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada in partnership with Northpine Foundation, RBC Foundation and additional private foundations. The initiative directly aligns with national goals to reduce employment barriers, increase equity, and strengthen youth transitions into the workforce. Many

participants face challenges such as financial hardship, discrimination, racism, neurodiversity, disabilities, mental health barriers, or limited work experience. The Art of Work initiative responds with individualized supports, safe and affirming adult and youth relationships, personalized coaching, and learning experiences that help youth build confidence, set goals, and navigate structural barriers that may otherwise impede their progress.

Through a combination of training, mentorship, coaching, employer engagement, and paid work placements, The Art of Work initiative helps youth gain practical experience, strengthen employability skills, and build meaningful connections that support long-term workforce participation and economic inclusion. The program also provides wage subsidy funding to employers, enabling the creation of a safe, inclusive, and healthy work environment where youth can develop workplace competencies and gain valuable hands-on experience.

The Art of Work is distinguished by its integrated approach to workforce readiness, combining meaningful paid employment, employer capacity building, individualized youth and employer support, and ongoing learning opportunities within a single program model. Rather than focusing solely on job placement, the program is designed to support both youth and employers throughout the employment journey, creating conditions for longer term success in the workplace and beyond.

Since launching in 2021, the Art of Work initiative has continued to evolve through ongoing learning, participant feedback, and implementation experience, strengthening SCC's ability to support both youth and employers across diverse communities and contexts.

Weekly Training Topics

- Workplace Stress Management
- Mental Health in the Workplace
- Thriving in Uncertainty
- Financial Literacy Essentials (taxes, savings, budgeting)
- Sustainable Development Goals & Career Pathways
- Resume Lab
- Job Search 101 & Applicant Tracking Systems
- Setting Boundaries & Conflict Resolution
- LinkedIn Training
- Youth Leadership in Outdoor Spaces
- Kitchen Table Conversations (peer-led community solutions)

FINANCE

Your Social Insurance Number (S.I.N) is a vital part of your financial profile, serving as your insurance and identity in the financial world. Just like you would protect your social media accounts, it's crucial to keep your S.I.N safe and never share it with others. It's important to understand that your S.I.N is linked to your financial records, so protecting it is key to preventing identity theft and financial fraud. When it comes to saving and managing your money, aim to set aside at least 25% of your paycheck, especially as a young worker. Put your savings in an account that earns interest, allowing your money to grow over time rather than just sitting idle. Starting early can help you avoid debt later on, especially when dealing with university costs and other major expenses. Opening three bank accounts—one for savings, one for chequing, and one for emergencies—is a smart way to keep your finances organized and secure. Lastly, understanding tax deductions on your paycheck and learning how to fill out both federal and provincial tax forms will help you stay on top of your finances and be financially responsible.



Outcomes: Youth Workforce Readiness and Employment

Knowledge and Skills Development

Through the Voice Collection activities, youth participants shared how The Art of Work increased their transferable skills, professionalism, and understanding of workplace dynamics. Supervisors validated these positive changes, naming that youth demonstrated reliability, creativity, eagerness to learn, and adaptability.

Participants identified that their understanding and navigation of employment systems and practices improved, including recruitment and hiring. Young people shared that they better understood strategies for successful resume building, including adapting resumes for each employer application. One youth participant highlighted the differences between today's job search landscape and that of previous generations, noting that the process of finding and applying for jobs has changed significantly over time. They emphasized that the expectations placed on job seekers are no longer the same as they once were and that the labour market has evolved considerably, creating new challenges and requirements for young people entering the workforce. AoW supported youth participants to navigate these changes, with youth reporting improved job search skills. For example, prior to AoW trainings, youth participants were not aware of applicant tracking systems being used by employers and after attending AoW workshops, participants reported

optimization of these systems, becoming aware that they need to update their resumes each application.

Particularly related to the paid placement, participants identified improved understanding of workplace dynamics and expectations. For many, AoW provides an introductory professional experience, providing young people an opportunity to learn workplace norms and practices, expectations and professional behaviours, and deliver high-quality employee outcomes.

“This was my first professional role... I learned how a company functions online.” – Art of Work Participant

“It’s been about understanding work requirements, what is due and when, while also being creative.” – Art of Work Employer

“I really enjoyed it. I thought my connection with Art of Work would end, but it gave me a better understanding of what work-life balance is like while studying and being able to work toward everything....” – Art of Work Participant

Networks and Opportunities

Young people have identified that the national scope of the project has allowed youth to develop diverse and supportive peer networks. Through workshops, focus groups, and other SCC programming opportunities, youth participants encounter peers that are diverse in identity and experience, but face shared challenges and goals. This builds a sense of community among youth participants.

Within this community, participants are exposed to diverse viewpoints. Through intentional, facilitated conversations, participants can surface both differences and similarities within differences, building a nuanced understanding of the youth and employment landscapes in Canada.

“... There was also a lot of learning from youth across Canada and seeing how they would help and support one another....” – Art of Work Participant

“Agreed, it’s been really valuable hearing the different viewpoints. It’s really easy to fall into the individualist mindset or clique that you procured in school, interesting to see the wider viewpoint and nuances between them.” – Art of Work Participant

*“It’s been interesting to hear how we are at some point all related no matter how different we are... like how similar placements are and what comes out of it.” –
Art of Work Participant*

“I realized I’m not alone in what I’m going through.” – Art of Work Participant

For participants in AoW, skills, knowledge and networks are built and strengthened in additional opportunities and activities. Youth participants and employers are invited to engage in national, regional, and local programming, such as the SCC’s Hearing Unheard Moments project or Be the Program Healthy Relationships Project. Many are able to attend SCC and partner events. In November 2025, for *Take Our Kids to Work Day*, AoW youth participants attended a special “*Career Live!*” event and two youth spoke on a Youth Employment Opportunities panel about their journeys. Youth also attended important community and sector gatherings, including a *Canadian Media Directors’ Council* event in Toronto, a youth engagement and cultural exchange event in Saskatoon, and an in-person training in Montreal on navigating polarizing conversations. Seventeen AoW youth participants and fourteen employers experienced the SCC’s *Make Your Mark 2025 Conference*, while seven AoW youth participants and 12 employers attended the SCC’s *#CanadaWeWant 2026 (#CWW 2026) Conference*. These national gatherings bring together youth, adult allies, and elders from across the country to engage in dialogue around pressing issues. During these conferences, youth select thematic areas they want to explore and contribute to, such as youth (un)employment, polarizing (nonpolarizing) conversations, digital wellbeing, healthy relationships, Sustainable Development Goals, global citizenship, democracy, substance use, and mental health. Drawing on their AoW experiences, youth participants shared with peers what positive employment practices and healthy work environments can look like.

Two AoW youth participants and five AoW employers attended the SCC’s *Against the Current: Knowledge Exchange 2026* (May 2026) in Toronto, Ontario. The event brought together youth, practitioners, community partners, and other stakeholders from across Canada to explore the theme, “Raise or Raze: How do our systems shape youth futures?” and engage in discussions on creating environments where young people can thrive.

These opportunities were offered to complement other AoW activities and helped foster a greater sense of community, an awareness of their capacity to contribute and collaborate while supporting meaningful dialogue on systems of change. SCC Staff observed growth among youth who became increasingly involved in SCC programming. Events and activities included helping at youth centres, representing SCC programs and initiatives in their communities, and supporting other young people in their communities. Through these opportunities, AoW participants, both youth and employers, built and strengthened networks, gained skills, knowledge and resources, and found meaning through contributing to their work and communities.

Many youth described deep growth in confidence, communication, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. They shared how they learned to pause before reacting, how to express themselves

more clearly, and how to understand different learning styles in the workplace. Some youth participants identified building greater capacity to adapt – responding and reacting to changes as they surface, practicing flexibility.

Confidence

“One of the biggest things I've gained is confidence. I've always been pretty introverted. Networking and talking to new people used to make me uncomfortable. Even something as simple as ordering groceries myself instead of using a delivery service felt stressful. Since getting involved, I've really come out of my shell. I've become much more comfortable talking to people, making connections, and putting myself out there. It's been nice to look back on that growth in a positive way.” – Art of Work Participant

Leadership

“I'm looking forward to our youth who have participated in our program to paying it forward. To give them a platform and a place where it matters at the decision-making table. So, when they become big people, like hiring managers, supervisors, they become great leaders.” – Art of Work Employer

Communication

“...I really liked the training sessions, especially the workplace scenarios and conflict resolution activities that focused on how to handle those situations.” – Art of Work Participant

Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation

“I'm getting better at adapting to changes.” – Art of Work Participant

“Being diagnosed with ADHD and autism, this program helped me be less rigid.” – Art of Work Participant

“For me, learning to be flexible and less anxious...one day at a time.” – Art of Work Participant

Critical Thinking

“It's cool to have something related to person[al] hobbies outside of work, not financial literacy, not directly related to work and what we do. It's cool to learn outside of such critical thinking.” – Art of Work Participant

“I’ve learned to take a step back... I’m usually action oriented.” – Art of Work Participant

Resilience

“If someone can take a bad situation and turn it into something good, so can I.” – Art of Work Participant

Employer/Organizational Change

Employers consistently expressed appreciation not only for the financial and administrative support provided through the program, but also for the coaching and ongoing guidance offered by the SCC. Many noted that the individualized staff support allowed them to build capacity to communicate and problem solve with youth participants. Wage subsidies allowed employers, particularly smaller ones, to address labour shortages and financial stresses, while continuing to provide quality services.

An employer from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan highlighted the benefits of supporting youth in the workplace, strengthening their coaching and leadership abilities, and contributing to the development of the next generation of workers. Another noted that the additional staff provided through AoW allowed them to meet the needs of their community.

“It’s been a successful experience. It came at a time when service augmentation, through the addition of staff, strengthened our capacity to deliver critical work for youth and supporting families. ... As demand continued to grow and more youth required support, we needed additional hands to meet those needs.” – Art of Work Employer

“It’s been about understanding work requirements, what is due and when, while also being creative. They [youth] help us see things that are bigger than what we see ourselves. They bring a Gen Z perspective, like introducing new apps or ways of working. We’ve always been this way, but this has become an important component of an intergenerational workforce. – Art of Work Employer

EDUCATION

We are dedicated to providing resources that help make education more accessible and affordable for students. We offer guidance on federal financial aid programs such as the **Canada Student Financial Assistance Program (CSFA Program)**, which includes the **Canada Student Loans Programs (CSLP)**, **Canada Student Grant (CSG)**, and the **Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP)** to support students throughout their academic journey.

Additionally, for students in Ontario, we provide information on the **Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)**, ensuring they have access to the necessary financial aid to pursue their education with confidence. Our goal is to equip students with the knowledge and resources they need to succeed in school without financial barriers.



Key Lessons

What Drives Impact: Core Elements of The Art of Work Successes

Through ongoing evaluation and 35 years of experience and evidence, the SCC has identified core elements of the AoW program that drive impact.

Grounding in Relationships

AoW is grounded in relationships, with youth, employers, and youth serving organizations that are seeking employment supports and placements for their clientele. The SCC spends time one-on-one with each youth participant and employer, understanding their experiences, needs and goals. Placements are thoughtful and intentional, attempting to meet each party's employment objectives. Outcomes are optimized when relationships are shaped and maintained through consistent communication and engagement, both through one-on-one and group experiences.

One-on-One Paired with Group Engagement

Beyond building relationships, one-on-one coaching supports are paired with group engagement and provide dual opportunities for youth. Group engagement opportunities support peer relationship building alongside gaining knowledge and skills; at the same time, one-on-one supports provide tailored coaching and guidance. For example, youth participants benefit from resume writing trainings as well as individualized one-on-one sessions to identify key skills and to craft resume language and formatting. One-on-one engagement sessions also support post-

secondary school applications, scholarship applications, navigating and accessing support services, and other unique education and employment goals. These supports are often delivered virtually; however, the SCC ensures virtual experiences are punctuated with in-person connection.

In-Person Engagement

SCC staff members travel extensively throughout Canada to visit workplaces, gather documentation in remote communities with limited internet connectivity, onboard youth participants, engage with employers, and strengthen community and employer partnerships. Youth consistently emphasize that meeting staff in person increases their sense of belonging and motivation. Youth also express need for efficient ways to access resources in community.

“It helps to have someone physically present. It makes you feel more connected.” – Art of Work Participant

SCC and partner programming and events provide additional in-person opportunities for relationship building, experiential learning, and belonging. Conferences in particular offer experiences of diversity, with national youth populations sharing local experiences and co-creating solutions. Close relationships are formed and often continue beyond the closing of events, sustained through continued virtual engagement.

Concurrent, Experiential Learning

AoW programming, complemented by additional SCC and partner programs and events, offers experiential learning opportunities. Youth participants participate in interactive trainings and workshops, which include opportunities for practice. Youth participants are encouraged to contribute programming, including leading workshops for their peers, and co-creating tools and resources with SCC staff. For example, the Kitchen Table Workshop is an experiential, youth-facilitated workshop that creates a welcoming and interactive space for young people to share perspectives, explore community issues, and learn from one another. Previous youth participants facilitate the workshop and take on leadership roles by guiding discussions, facilitating activities, and encouraging peer-to-peer engagement, helping participants build confidence, communication skills, and a sense of ownership over the learning process. Another example is the Budgeting workshop where youth gain experience making financial decisions, setting priorities, and working through realistic budgeting scenarios that strengthen financial literacy and problem-solving skills.

Youth participants can complete workshops during their placements, allowing participants to apply and practice new learnings and skills in a professional workplace. Workplace experiences can also influence and inform workshops and other opportunities; youth participants are encouraged to provide feedback and needs in group and one-on-one sessions. The AoW team aggregates this feedback to identify new and refined resources for the AoW program.

National Scope and Perspectives

SCC's national scope fosters engagement across several diverse variables, including geography, language, ethnicity, and cultural identity. Thoughtful, facilitated conversations and programming offer opportunities for youth participants to exchange experiences, knowledge, and opinions. Awareness of broader national trends, identities and experiences help broaden youth perspectives beyond their current localized knowledge; youth can identify similarities and differences across populations.

Evaluation of the national dataset is being disaggregated to tell stories of impact, challenge, and change across diverse variables, including geography, race, ethnicity, and other demographic variables. Making meaning of this data allows the SCC to design and refine relevant programming, identify integral partners to collaborate for participant and employer outcomes, and mobilize key learnings for nonprofit and forprofit sectors, government, and the general public.

Supporting Employees and Employers

Through AoW, the SCC supports both youth participants and employers on the employment journey. In addition to workshops, one-on-one supports, and network building offered to youth participants, employers are provided coaching on administrative and operational tasks, supervision of youth staff, and problem solving with young staff. At present, many employers are facing challenges working with younger populations, who themselves are facing challenges with professionalism, interpersonal and soft skills. Communication between employer and employee can be challenging, with many young people avoiding communication particularly when it becomes difficult. SCC team members mediate difficult situations, facilitate conversations and support decision-making that benefits both employer and employee.

Challenges and Opportunities for Program Improvement

AoW has proven effective, providing youth participants with skills, knowledge, and valuable work experience. Employers have shared positive experiences hiring and working alongside vulnerable young people, including professional growth and enhanced services for their clientele. However, the diverse needs of young people and the ever-changing job market require continual adaptation and refinement of AoW services.

Serving Vulnerable/NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment, Training) Youth

Finding employment as a young person is difficult, especially for those who face barriers to employment and/or are vulnerable to being NEET. Within these broad categories of 'youth facing barriers' and 'vulnerable youth', there is nuance and factors that exacerbate barriers. The SCC has been working with these youth populations and assisting employers to do so as well; it is challenging to find adequate resources to support the human resources necessary to meet diverse and intersectional needs. The SCC has worked with refugee youth, youth without proper identification, and youth in and exiting the child welfare system. These youth, among others, have unique needs that must be met to ensure they can sustain themselves while building skills and improving employability. One-on-one supports, including referrals, are critical to their success,

alongside group trainings and network building. Tailored supports for these youth populations can require more staff time, meaning staff are sometimes stretched thin delivering youth supports.

Challenges are in part being met by leveraging entry-level employment placements within organizations with the social purpose, knowledge and skill sets dedicated to serving these populations. Several funders also understand and are funding the longer time frames and extra resources required. The AoW partnership with the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, with generous support from Northpine Foundation, is delivering a stream of AoW specifically for youth in and exiting care. This program considers the unique circumstances and enhances supports. AoW team members commit extra time to build rapport, develop an employment plan to meet distinct needs, allow for longer transitions into the program and provide, following placement, on-going support for the next step in their journey. A key component of this work is partnering with existing community organizations that already provide specialized supports to these young people. By working collaboratively with organizations that have established relationships and services in place, SCC helps ensure that youth receive comprehensive wraparound supports from multiple angles, addressing employment needs alongside other social, emotional, educational, and practical supports that contribute to long-term success.

Aligning the level of funding to account for the population's lived realities ensures that the youth participants receive the right services and resources required for effective long-term transition into stable employment. A goal of AofW is to demonstrate and communicate the increased long-term impact of the longer time frames and tailored supports for each specific population in order to increase the numbers of employers and funding sources available for these longer timeframes for both wages and extra supports.

Addressing Evolving Knowledge and Skills Gaps

Both employers and youth participants note a gap in understanding across generations, specifically within employer/employee relationships. Professional or workplace expectations are not necessarily communicated across this gap; some employers assume that youth share or know workplace expectations. Some youth participants identify growing discomfort and anxiety in workplaces when they feel they don't know what they're supposed to know.

"I think it's important to understand how youth are thinking about work today. A lot of young people aren't necessarily looking for traditional, long-term jobs anymore. They're often focused on survival, flexibility, and finding work they're passionate about. ...Today's youth are more likely to speak up when something isn't right and ask questions about workplace culture and respect. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. Young people want workplaces where they feel valued, respected, and treated fairly." – Art of Work Participant

Communicating these expectations and feelings, which can impact work experiences and performance, has surfaced as a priority. As a response, at the *Make Your Mark 2025 Conference*, youth participants created a brochure outlining what young workers want from employers. It

addresses supportive supervision, opportunities to grow, racism, inflexibility, and lack of guidance. It calls for workplaces that offer learning, mentorship, and realistic expectations. The brochure is now imbedded into future employer onboarding engagement meetings.

“I really like it; it hits the mark.” – Adult Ally

Across workshops, focus groups, and one-on-one discussions, AoW participants continue to surface learning needs. Youth participants have requested trainings to build writing skills, from emails to grant proposals. Adaptation is necessary to ensure relevance and impact of the program. As a result of culminative feedback, SCC implemented additional weekly training discussion topics. Workshops include:

- Grant Writing
- Understanding the Labour Market & Job Search Strategies
- Resume, Cover Letter, & Application Lab
- LinkedIn, Personal Branding & Professional Online Presence
- Interview Skills, Mock Interviews, & Networking
- Workplace Readiness & Professionalism
- Essential Soft Skills
- Workplace Safety & Employee Rights

Building Pathways of Support

Employability is a broad outcome, with unique young people and different populations requiring different types of services and resources to achieve success. Youth participants have identified that it can be difficult to find and access the optimal resources at the right moment.

“The fact that generations are different, some employers are more old school when some kids have learned differently, we haven’t learned the same things and kids have more anxiety and feel out of place like they don’t know where they’re going. It’s not talked about, we only learn the basics, and we need to have it changed to learning about specific jobs.” – Art of Work Participant

“One thing I think organizations need to focus on is visibility. There are so many incredible services available, but they’re not always reaching young people. Many organizations still rely heavily on Facebook and LinkedIn, but younger people are spending more time on platforms like TikTok and other social media. Posters are helpful, but we’re living in a digital age. We need to be more aggressive and intentional about getting information in front of people where they’re already spending their time.” – Art of Work Participant

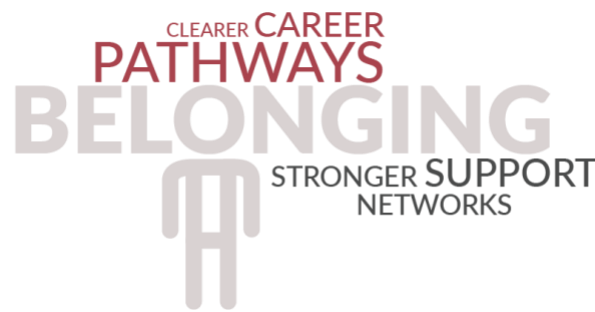
AoW is building out networks of support services in different communities with the aim of referring youth participants to local service providers to meet the needs and goals that the SCC cannot

adequately support. As young people share needs, the SCC continues to seek out partners to meet those needs. This extends beyond direct services to practical items that young people need to work in remote and in-person workplaces.

“More funding for things like laptops, Art of Work swag, more resources and funding.” – Art of Work Participant

Employer Capacity

Serving as an employer for work placement programs can come with rigid administrative and reporting requirements. These can pose resource challenges, particularly for the smaller organizations and companies that benefit from placement programs such as AoW. It has become clear that SCC must provide additional administrative and reporting support when funders require it for these companies and employers who are ideally suited to provide the most effective work placements for the youth populations most in need. Employee placement programs and funding requirements that place less burden on, or alternatively provide additional resources to support, small employers could further enhance their impact.



Conclusion

Art of Work is not only about preparing youth for employment; it is helping them understand who they are, what they care about, and how they can contribute to their communities. Youth leave the program with more confidence, stronger support networks, clearer career pathways, and a deepened sense of belonging. If they desire it, youth continue their connections with SCC and local partners through ongoing programming, check ins, workshops, leadership opportunities, and community activities, ensuring that they remain supported, heard, and empowered well beyond their placements.

Art of Work is intentionally structured as a responsive and adaptive initiative, with continuous feedback from youth participants serving as a key driver of decision making. This commitment to continuous learning and improvement ensures that the program remains relevant, youth centred, and responsive to emerging needs while strengthening its potential for life-time impact.