



## Best Practice: Mobile Vocational Support for At-Risk Youth

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**CITY: TORONTO**

**POLICY AREAS: SOCIAL SERVICES; WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

### BEST PRACTICE

The Social Development, Finance and Administration Division of the City of Toronto established the Youth Employment Toronto (YET) program to provide mobile vocational planning support to youth in the community who are out of school and unemployed. The main target group is youth aged 16-29 years old with less than a high school diploma, with little or no work experience and who are facing personal and/or systemic barriers to accessing employment, education and training opportunities.

### ISSUE

Many youth who have not completed high school or are dealing with other systemic barriers have greater difficulty obtaining work. In addition, these youth are often unaware of the various resources and services available to assist them in making the transition from school to work. The current unemployment rate among youth with less than a high school diploma or those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds face unemployment rates in the double digits, between 10 and 15%. When the period of unemployment continues over a protracted period of time, youth begin to lose hope and other issues can arise that create further barriers to employment, such as family conflict, homelessness, addictions, criminal involvement, pregnancies, and poor mental health. Youth want to be contributing members of society, but may not have the networks, personal resources or knowledge to go about this. As a result, it is critical to assist youth as early on in this transition period as possible.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the YET program are to:

- Provide mobile vocational counseling services to youth in the community who are in the age range of 16-29 years old, and are unemployed and out of school
- Assist unemployed youth in identifying their interests and skills, as well as the barriers that prevent them from reaching their immediate and long term goals and to secure the resources they need in order to mitigate barriers
- Streamline access for youth to the most appropriate vocational resources and opportunities, which will ultimately lead them to achieving their desired vocational goals
- Ensure that youth are not lost in the array of resources available and are receiving the required, appropriate opportunities through on-going case management for as long as needed by the youth

### IMPLEMENTATION

There are six mobile staff who are responsible for a designated geographic community in the City of Toronto. Staff meet youth in locations where they congregate such as drop-in centers, recreation facilities, ethno-specific organizations, hostels, government subsidized housing communities, and the City's Social Services Offices where youth may apply for financial assistance. Youth also hear about this service through "word of mouth" from their peers. All areas of the city have an assigned YET staff member. Each week the staff focuses on different parts of their designated communities to connect with youth.

Staff members meet with youth individually and carry out a brief vocational assessment session, establish a plan of action and identify the available resources and services that can assist the youth in reaching this plan. In order to provide youth access to the various community resources available, the program staff takes advantage of the strong partnerships they have built with a comprehensive network of service providers in the Toronto area. Staff are extremely well versed on start dates of programs



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and the expected wait time on waiting lists. Staff members also carry referral forms with them for the array of options available to youth so that a referral can be carried out immediately after an assessment and an action plan have been developed.

Immediate action is often critical for youth in order to maintain their interest and motivation. The staff then provides follow up support until a youth is fully integrated into the activity they have chosen.

The YET program is very effective at providing youth with vocational counseling in their communities. Staff are non-judgmental and establish an understanding of each young person's unique set of circumstances. They are effective at injecting a sense of hope and this helps young people develop the motivation they need to take the necessary actions towards their personal goals.

### COST

The annual budget is 559,568 CAD (Canadian dollars), approximately \$535,882 USD. The federal government contributes 411,874 CAD (approximately \$394,440 USD) and the City contributes \$147,693 CAD (approximately \$141,441 USD).

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The program's successes are measured by the number of positive outcomes that the youth have achieved on an annual basis. The objective is to assist youth in obtaining employment or further education and/or training. Approximately 600 of 748 youth succeeded in entering training or education options (22%), in participating in pre-employment preparation programs (20%) and in finding employment (38%) in a 12-month period spanning from 2008 to 2009.

### TIMELINE

The program is evaluated each year by both the federal and city governments. It is has now been approved for another year of operation through 2012.

### LEGISLATION

N/A

### LESSONS LEARNED

It is essential to maintain strong partnerships with the agencies who provide the resources and services to youth participating in the YET program. Additionally, it is important to communicate youth's perceived barriers with service providers to ensure that the best possible experience occurs for youth when they engage with these service providers.

Through the delivery of this program the City is able to assess where gaps in service exist in regard to helping youth achieve their vocational goals.

### TRANSFERABILITY

This is a very transferable service to any large metropolitan area where there is an array of services and resources that need to be navigated to youth.



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### CONTACTS

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners, Inc.