



ESYD

BC Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities

Employment Support for Youth with Disabilities: Caregiver Perspective on Gaps, Barriers, and Best Practices

2022 Focus Group Report



Disclaimer

The following report was prepared by the Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities project team at CanAssist at the University of Victoria. It contains summaries of the opinions, experiences, and perspectives of two small groups of caregivers of youth with disabilities from BC who participated in our focus group sessions.

*CanAssist at the University of Victoria
CARSA, PO Box 1700, STN CSC
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2
Phone: 250-721-7300*

Website: <https://www.canassist.ca/EN/main/esyd.html>

Email: youthstratlead@uvic.ca

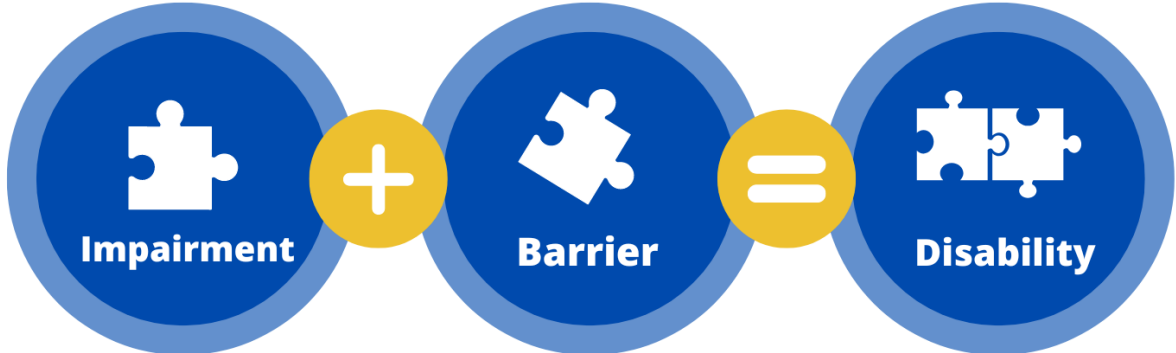
Table of Contents

Definitions	3
Executive Summary	4
Gaps, Barriers, and Best Practices	5
Introduction	6
Caregiver Focus Groups	7
Recruitment and Participants	8
Nominal Group Technique	9
Group 1: What are the top gaps and barriers?	10
Employer Assumptions About Disability	10
Insufficient Support for Youth Beyond Job Search and Maintenance.....	11
Inaccessibility of Services	11
Limited On-the-Job Accommodations.....	11
Lack of Employment Preparation in School System	12
Group 2: What are the best practices?	13
Employment Services.....	12
Facilitated Access to Work Experience Opportunities.....	12
Facilitated Access to Skills Training Opportunities	12
Support and Encouragement from Youth’s Personal Network.....	12
Conclusion	13

Definitions

This section describes key terms, as understood in the context of this report.

Youth with disabilities describes young people between 15-30 who live, learn and work in a variety of community settings across BC. This includes those who attend school or distributed learning programs, vocational training programs, and/or post-secondary education/programs. It also includes those who are employed, underemployed, or unemployed.



Impairment describes a reduction or loss of ability impacting physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory function. Impairments can be permanent, temporary, or episodic.

A **barrier** is an obstacle that prevents someone from accessing and navigating employment support. Barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, and technologies. They are often exacerbated by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Disability means an inability to participate fully and equally in the workforce due to the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. By this definition, mental health and substance use challenges can lead to disability.

A **gap** the absence of something needed for employment support. It also describes the inability to access something needed.

Executive Summary

The Provincial Employment Strategy project team at CanAssist at the University of Victoria is developing the *Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities*. This strategy will provide the framework for a more consistent approach to supporting youth with disabilities in their employment in BC. It will be grounded in a set of guiding principles that highlight best practice for supporting youth-specific needs.

With support and guidance from a Provincial Network of Stakeholders, the project team is consulting the following groups to understand the gaps, barriers, and best practices in the current employment support landscape:

- *Youth with disabilities*
- *Caregivers of youth with disabilities*
- *Employment service providers*
- *Teachers/educators*
- *Employers*

The strategy will address gaps and barriers and highlight best practices.

In the Spring of 2022, the project team hosted focus groups with 12 caregivers of youth with disabilities from across the province. These caregivers were split into two groups of six. One group explored the gaps and barriers that youth with disabilities face in the employment journey and the other explored best practices.

The findings presented in this report informed the development of a larger scale survey that was issued to caregivers of youth with disabilities across the province.



Gaps and Barriers

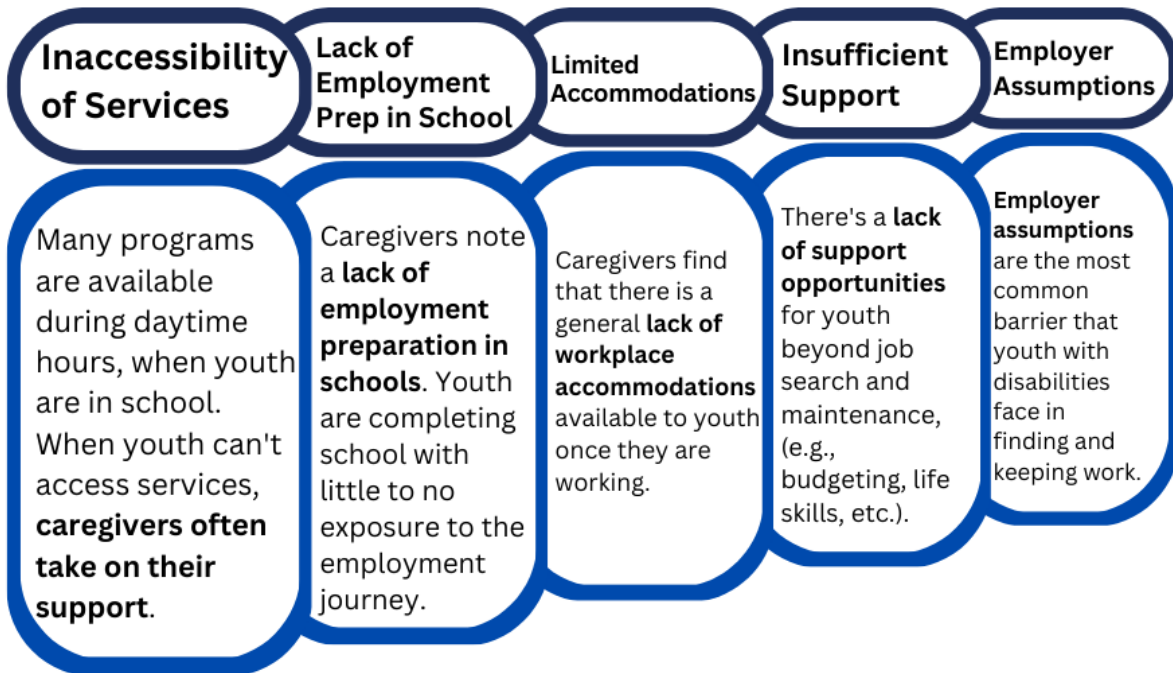


Figure 1: Gaps and barriers experienced in the current employment support landscape from the caregiver perspective

Best Practices



Figure 2: Best practices in the current employment support landscape from the caregiver perspective

Introduction

Youth with disabilities face many barriers to employment. They also struggle to access appropriate employment support. This is because the availability and accessibility of employment programs vary from place to place. Different programs are available in different communities across BC. And each of these programs have different rules for who they can serve based on how they are funded. To further complicate things, most programs are designed for adults, who have different needs than youth. It is difficult for youth with disabilities to get the help they need to find a job and keep it.

There is opportunity to improve employment support for youth with disabilities in BC. A provincial strategy can provide the framework for a consistent approach to support youth-specific needs. It can also highlight best practices to supporting youth with disabilities in their employment. This will help employment programs better serve youth to find and keep jobs.

The BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction has given CanAssist at the University of Victoria funding to develop this provincial strategy. In collaboration with a Provincial Network of Stakeholders (the Network), CanAssist is building the Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities (ESYD).

Approach

With support and guidance from the Network, CanAssist is collecting information from the following groups to understand the gaps, barriers, and best practices in the current support landscape:

- *Youth with disabilities*
- *Caregivers of youth with disabilities*
- *Employment service providers*
- *Teachers/educators*
- *Employers*

With understanding of the support landscape, CanAssist will develop a Strategy that addresses gaps and barriers and highlights best practice.



Caregiver Focus Groups

In the Spring of 2022, CanAssist hosted focus groups with 12 caregiver participants from across BC. These caregivers were split into two groups of six. One group explored the gaps and barriers that youth with disabilities face in the employment journey and the other explored best practices. This report presents themes from both discussions.

The goal of these focus groups was to build understanding of how youth with disabilities experience the employment journey from the caregiver perspective. This understanding informed the development of a larger scale survey that was issued to caregivers across the province.

Recruitment

To recruit focus group participants, the project team compiled a database of disability and youth serving organizations in BC. This database also included accessible learning centres in post-secondary institutions. Team members then telephoned or emailed these organizations to advertise the focus group opportunity for caregivers. Organizations then spread the information through their networks. The project's Network also spread recruitment materials through their distribution lists. Lastly, CanAssist shared materials via social media. Interested caregivers (from those exposed to recruitment materials) contacted the team. These caregivers were sent information about the session. This information included presentation slides introducing the project and the focus group questions. Caregivers were also asked to share any accommodations that they needed for the session.



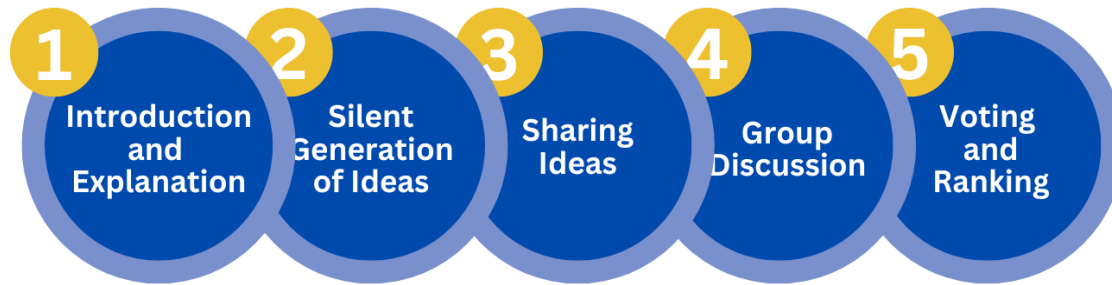
Participants

There were 12 caregivers who participated in these focus groups. All were caregivers to a youth or youths who self-identified as having a disability, mental health and/or substance use challenge. The following regions were represented in the group:

- *Vancouver Island/Coast*
- *Mainland/Southwest*
- *Thompson/Okanagan*
- *Kootenay*

Nominal Group Technique

The focus groups were facilitated online, over Zoom. The 2-hour sessions were conducted using Nominal Group Technique (NGT). There are five steps to this technique:



In step 1, each group was shown a short presentation on the topic. Groups then entered the silent idea generation phase. Here, they were shown questions and prompted to brainstorm their thoughts independently. Groups received the following questions:

- **Group 1:** *What are the top gaps and barriers that you feel youth with disabilities face in employment? (Ordered by ranking, 1=high, 5=low.)*
- **Group 2:** *What are the best practices for supporting youth with disabilities in their employment? (Ordered by ranking, 1=high, 5=low.)*

Groups then entered the idea sharing phase. To encourage participation, participants were offered multiple ways to contribute to the discussion, including verbally (under a pseudonym for anonymity) or using the chat function. When everyone's input was shared, participants voted to determine their highest priority answers.

Next was the discussion phase, where participants shared their thoughts and asked questions about the highest priority answers. After this, participants were asked to rank these answers on a scale from 1-5 based on how prominent they were in the lives of their youth(s) (1 being Not Prominent and 5 being Very Prominent). The following pages summarize key learnings from these discussions.

Group 1: What are the top gaps and barriers that you feel youth with disabilities face in their employment?

1. Employer Assumptions about Disability

Employers with low understanding of the unique strengths and capabilities of youth with disabilities was a top barrier cited barrier. Caregivers shared how difficult it is for their youth to get a job and keep it when employers have assumptions about what they can and cannot do. They touched on the fact that many employers have



assumptions about ability that stop them from seriously considering candidates with disabilities. Caregivers also touched on a misconception that many employers have that hiring an employee with a disability necessitates a large investment of time, money, and resources. These preconceived notions stop employers from bringing youth with disabilities into their workplaces.

Assumptions and misconceptions also impact youth on the job. Caregivers shared that when youth with disabilities are hired, employer assumptions impact their work experience and opportunities. For example, many youths are given menial or repetitive work and are not given opportunities to grow within the company. And oftentimes, there is poor communication between the employer and the youth. This can lead to the youth feeling uncomfortable in discussing their needs and goals with their employer.

2. Insufficient Support for Youth Beyond Job Search and Job Maintenance

Caregivers identified lack of support opportunities beyond job search and maintenance as a major gap. They shared that services are needed to ensure youth can bridge the gap between finding work and planning for the future. For example, supports are needed to teach youth what it means to have a job, make and manage money, and set life goals.

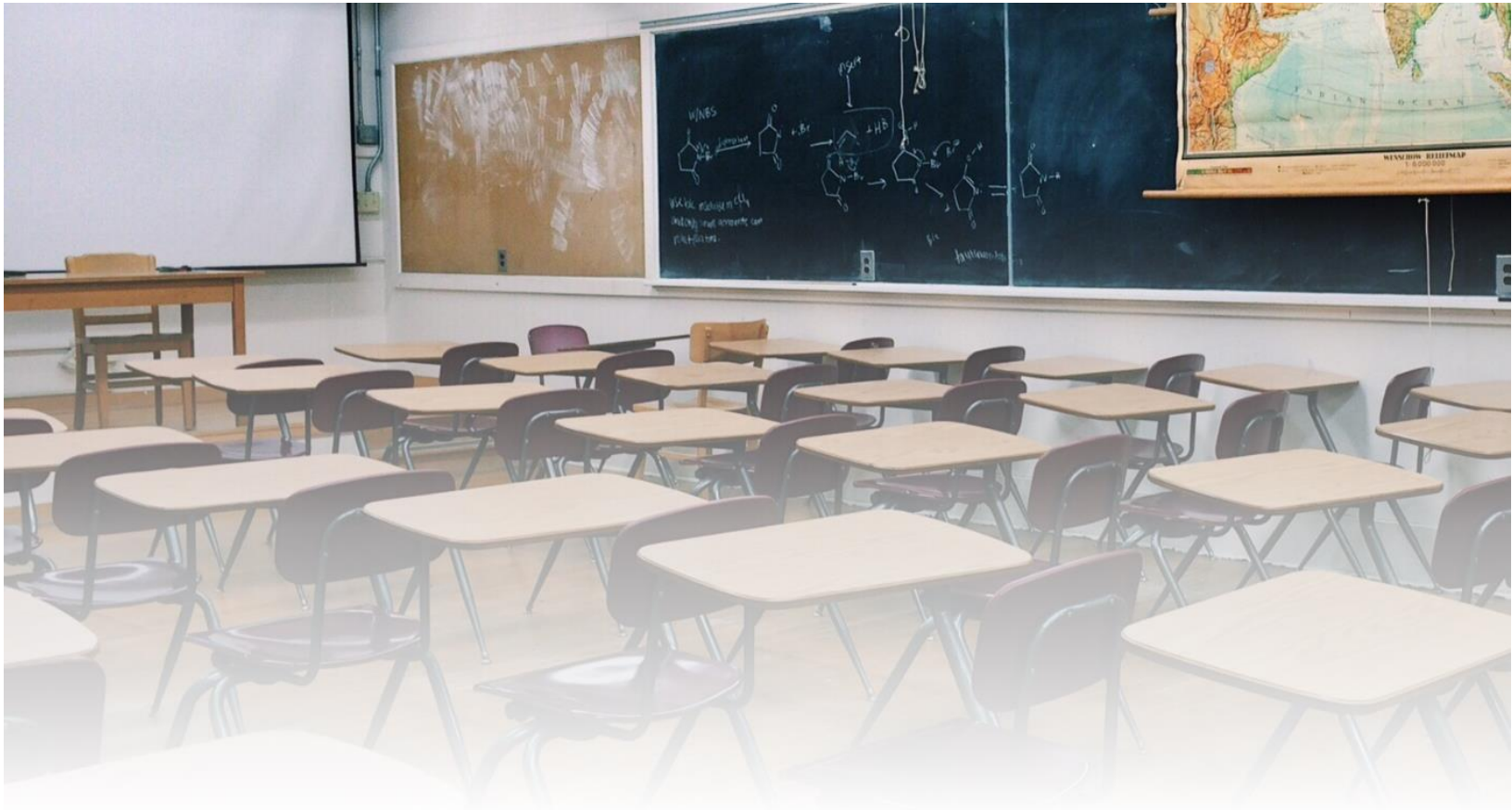


3. Inaccessibility of Services

Another major gap is the fact that many employment services are offered during daytime hours, when many youths are in school. Caregivers also identified a lack of programs specifically catered to youth who are in school or trying to hold down a part-time job. Programs are often not available for the many situations that youth find themselves in. When services are inaccessible, the burden often falls on the caregiver to fill the gaps and support their youth to find and keep a job.

4. Limited on-the-job Accommodations

Caregivers shared that there is a lack of job accommodations available to youth once they secure a job. For example, some youth need shorter shifts, a flexible schedule, extra training to learn how to read social situations and body cues on the job, etc. Without these accommodations, many youths will not be able to successfully sustain employment.



5. Lack of Employment Preparation in School System

Caregivers noted a general lack of employment preparation in the school system. One caregiver shared that their youth is not motivated to work because they have limited understanding of what it means to have a job and make money. Other caregivers shared that their youths had never received information in school about how work could benefit them. This lack of awareness, exposure, and understanding of work is a major barrier to youth with disabilities pursuing employment. Caregivers agreed that many youths' lack a general understanding of the "big picture" of what it means to work.

Group 2: What are the best practices for supporting youth with disabilities in their employment?

1. Employment Services

Caregivers agreed that employment services offering the following are highly valuable:

- Training to build skills needed for employment (e.g., resume writing, interview skills, navigating stress, etc.)
- Continuous, on-the-job support to help youth during employment
- Support to help youth learn new skills for professional development towards careers of interest

Caregivers also expressed appreciation for grants and funding that help youth earn a living wage while searching for employment.



2. Facilitated Access to Work Experience Opportunities

Work experience opportunities were cited by caregivers as another best practice for youth. Facilitated opportunities for practical experience are helpful for youth with little to no experience or exposure to different work environments.



3. Facilitated Access to Skills Training Opportunities

Caregivers highlighted access to skills training opportunities as another best practice. It is important that these opportunities are free for youth.

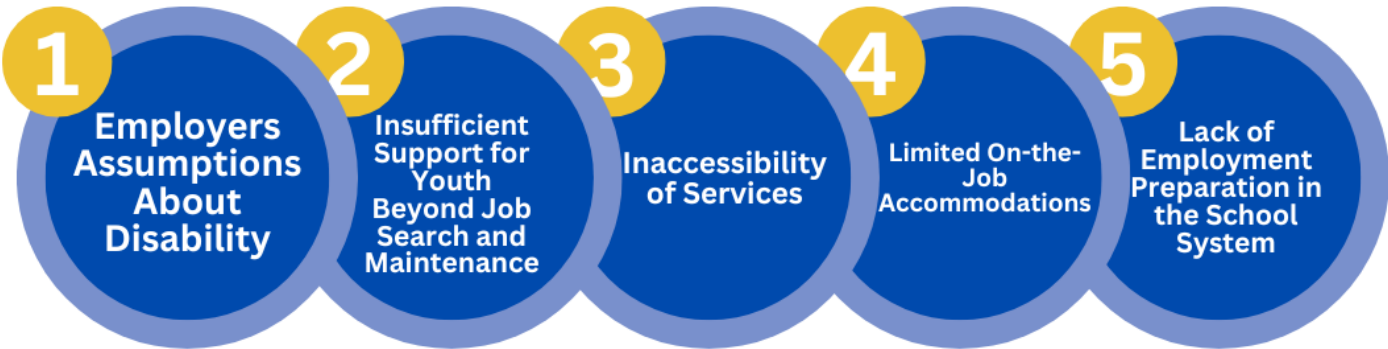
4. Support and Encouragement from Youth's Personal Network

Lastly, caregivers shared that youth need support and encouragement from their family, friends, schools, and professionals throughout their employment journey.

Conclusion

As noted, the key learnings from these focus groups informed the development of a larger scale survey. This survey was designed to delve further into the following themes:

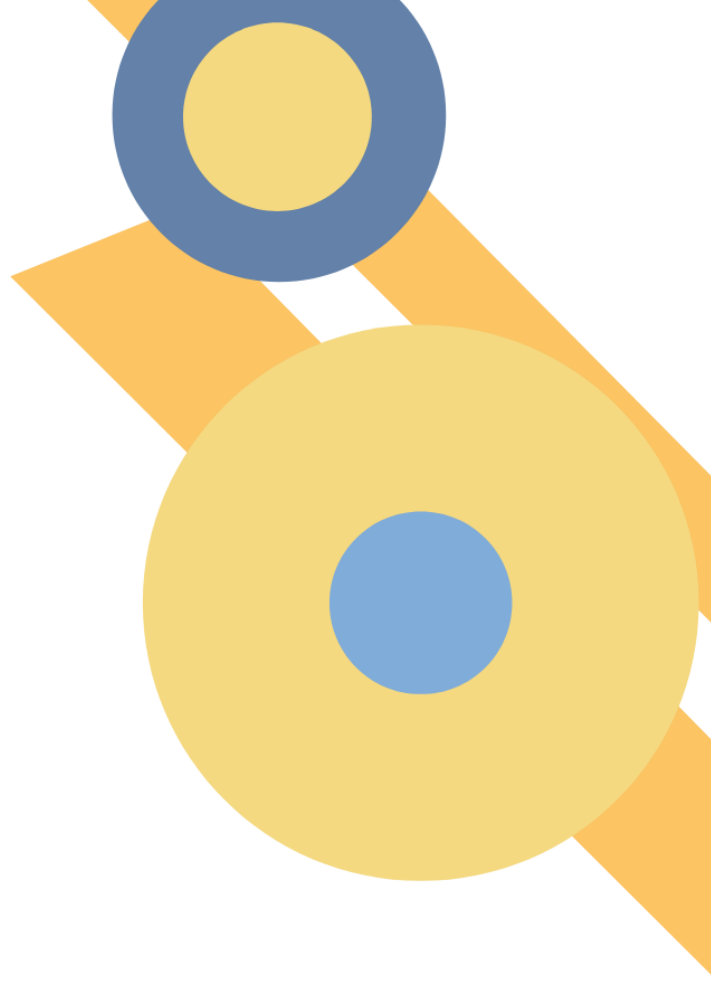
Gaps and Barriers



Best Practices



The report for the provincial survey will be released in the Spring of 2023.



Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge our Network and all the youth serving organizations in BC that helped us recruit participants for this focus group. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our 14 focus group participants for their important insights.

This project is funded by the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR). Funding is provided by the Government of Canada through the Canada British Columbia Workforce Development Agreement.