CAREGIVER SURVEY REPORT

PROVINCIAL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

ESYD

CanAssist

University of Victoria

Canada

BRITISH COLUMBIA

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Raven with the Sun by Joslyn Williams, 2023. Ink on paper.

The CanAssist Land Acknowledgment was a collective effort of staff members self-locating and appreciating Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land. The central design of *Raven with the Sun* was created by local visual artist and female carver Joslyn Williams for the CanAssist Land Acknowledgment.

DISCLAIMER

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DEFINITIONS

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

Impairment is 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 and 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 describes 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.

Impairment + **Barrier** = **Disability**

A **gap** is the absence of something that is needed to access and navigate employment and employment support.

Youth/youth with disabilities describes a young person between of 15-30 who lives in British Columbia.

Caregiver describes any parent or guardian living in British Columbia whose dependent is a young person between the ages of 15-30 who identifies as having a disability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CanAssist at the University of Victoria is developing the Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities (ESYD). This strategy will provide the framework for a consistent provincial approach to supporting youth with disabilities in their employment. Using a set of guiding principles, the strategy will highlight best practices for supporting this demographic throughout the employment journey.

With support and guidance from a Provincial Network (project advisory group), 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
- and Employers

The strategy will address gaps and barriers while highlighting best practices.

In May of 2022, the project team launched the Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities in BC: Caregiver Survey. Survey questions were designed to capture caregiver perspectives on their youth's experiences with employment and employment support programs. The survey was open to caregivers of youth who:

- were between the ages of 15 to 30
- resided in BC
- self-identified as having a disability (including mental health and substance use challenges)

Over three months, 133 responses were collected. The following are key findings from the survey:

1. Most youth with disabilities had not accessed an employment program due to limited awareness and eligibility barriers. The eligibility requirements of employment programs for youth with disabilities often exclude youth with mental health challenges, which the majority of caregivers indicated were the

challenges their youth face. As a result, many caregivers believe their youth was ineligible for programming. When youth had accessed an employment program, it was typically through a community organization rather than school, despite the connection youth have to the school system and the career learning that happens in education. This highlights an opportunity to leverage the school system to raise awareness and provide a clearer accessible pathway to employment programs for more youth with disabilities. Youth with disabilities from rural and remote areas were more likely to access employment support because even though there are typically less services available, they know how and where to access them.

2. When youth with disabilities accessed an employment program, the support was well received. Caregivers emphasized how many barriers youth with disabilities face in the job search process. This included the youths' ability to find an accommodating workplace. These barriers made it hard for youth to find a job, let alone one that was satisfying and accommodating. Caregivers highlighted how important employment programs were to address these added barriers. Though they were generally satisfied with employment programs, they highlighted opportunities for improvement. These included supporting youth to develop life skills and helping youth cope with mental health challenges.

3. There was a gap in communication between youth with disabilities and employers, leading to difficulties expressing needs and abilities on both sides. It was reported that employers did not thoroughly understand the skills, abilities, and needs of their young employees leading to incorrect assumptions and unrealistic expectations. Youth with disabilities had challenges effectively communicating their skills, abilities, and needs exacerbated these challenges. Both youth and employers would benefit from strategies and approaches to better engage with one another.

The following **four recommendations** were created to increase the access to employment support and minimize the barriers to employment for youth with disabilities.

To improve employment program access for youth with disabilities:

1.   Develop **clear and direct pathways to employment programs** for youth with mental health challenges and youth with disabilities who are part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, utilizing the school system as an entry point to services.

2.   Create an immediate and **low-barrier type of employment** support that is highly accessible to youths with disabilities.

To improve employment program experiences for youth with disabilities:

3.   **Expand on the current supports** that are offered through employment programs by adding life skill building, job-specific skill building and mental health support. In addition to this, support needs to become more personalize to the individual recipient as well as on going, including post-job placement.

To support youth to navigate the complex employment journey:

4.   **Minimize the intimidation and difficulties** surrounding the job search by focusing on supporting youth throughout this process. Personalize the job search process to the individual receiving support to ensure they find a job suitable for their skills, desires and capabilities. Focus support on helping youth and employers communicate with one another to ensure job placements are a positive fit for both.

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. Further, 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 supporting the needs of this demographic. 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 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, CanAssist is building the *Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities (ESYD).*

APPROACH

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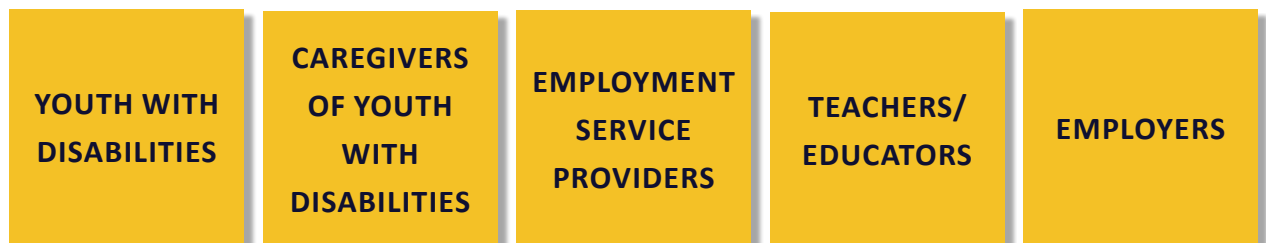
With understanding of the support landscape, CanAssist will develop a Strategy that addresses gaps and barriers and highlights best practice.

SURVEYS

In May of 2022, the project team released the Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities in BC—Caregiver Survey. The survey was open to caregivers in BC who cared for youth dependents who met the following criteria:

- Between 15 and 30 years old
- Self-identified as having a disability (including mental health and substance use challenges)

The survey questions explored caregiver perspectives on the gaps and barriers their youth face, as well as best practices that help them navigate BC's employment support landscape. Questions also addressed the potential impact of COVID-19 on these experiences.

The survey was open from May 15 to July 15, 2023. Over three months, 133 responses were collected. Responses were received from caregivers of a diverse range of youth with disabilities, including those who identified as belonging to the following equity-deserving groups:

- LGBTQIA2S+
- Indigenous
- Newcomer/refugee
- Racialized/POC
- Youth with experience in government care
- Youth with experience in the youth justice system

Data Analysis

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was imported into the open-source data analysis software, R. Using this software, relationships between groups of respondents and different survey themes were analyzed (e.g., top barriers to employment support access for youth of caregivers living in a certain region of BC). Relationships were coded and analysed based on the percentage of caregivers from a specific category who had chosen each answer.

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Recruitment

To ensure a representative number of survey responses were received, an incentive was offered to all respondents. Caregivers who took the survey were entered into a draw to win one of five $50 Amazon gift cards.

The following strategies were used to recruit caregiver respondents:

1. Network Distribution
2. Social Media Campaign
3. Purchased Responses

Provincial Network Distribution

The project's Provincial Network members represent different employment service agencies across BC. Members were asked to distribute the survey through their personal and organizational networks. They helped recruit caregiver respondents whose youth were connected to community and/or employment supports.

Social Media Campaign

Due to eligibility criteria, most youth connected to employment support agencies have a diagnosed developmental disability. Youth with mental health and substance use challenges were thus under-represented after the first recruitment strategy—as employment services usually require a formal developmental disability diagnosis for service access. To successfully target caregivers of youth with mental health and substance use disabilities, it was necessary to reach them with a different approach. Social media advertisements were used to recruit caregivers of youth with these disability experiences.

Purchased Responses

Guaranteed responses from SurveyMonkey were purchased to ensure further representation of caregivers of youth with mental health and/or substance use challenges who were not connected to any kind of support system. These responses helped to engage caregivers of youth who had never heard of or accessed employment services.

Participants Overview

133 eligible respondents completed the survey. All respondents were caregivers to youth between 15-30 who resided in BC and self-identified as having a disability.

Disability Type

Caregivers were asked to identify the type of disability their youth experienced. The following is a breakdown of responses:

Substance use
challenges
23%

Mental health
challenges
61%

Disability
49%
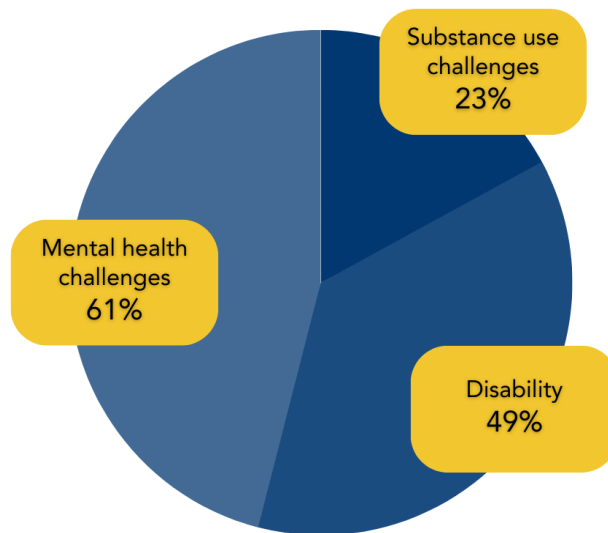
Age

All respondents cared for youth who were between 15 and 30. Below is a breakdown of respondents' age:

Ages 24 - 30
20%

Ages 15 - 18
50%

Ages 19 - 23
22%
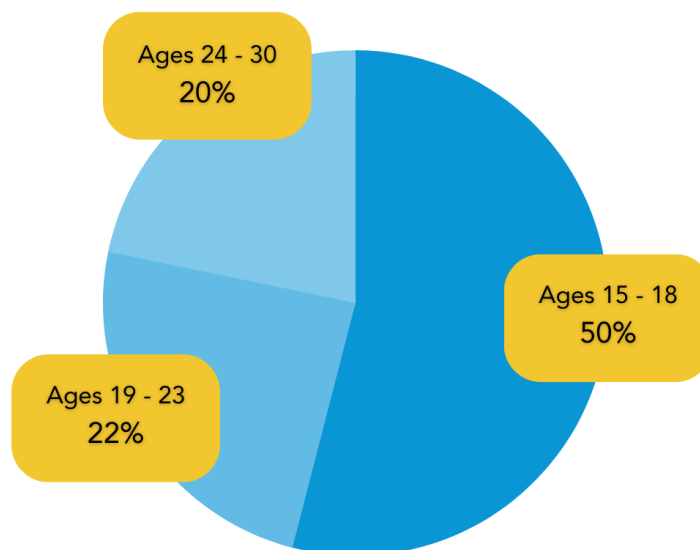
Provincial Region

Survey responses were received from five regions across the province:

- Most responses received were from caregivers living in Mainland/Southwest
- There were no responses received from caregivers living in North Coast, Nechako, or the Northeast

The following is a regional breakdown of responses:

0%

0%

0%

5%

13%

7%

2%

74%

Nechako

Northeast

North Coast

Cariboo

Thompson/ Okanagan

Kootenay

Mainland/ Southwest

Vancouver Island/ Coast
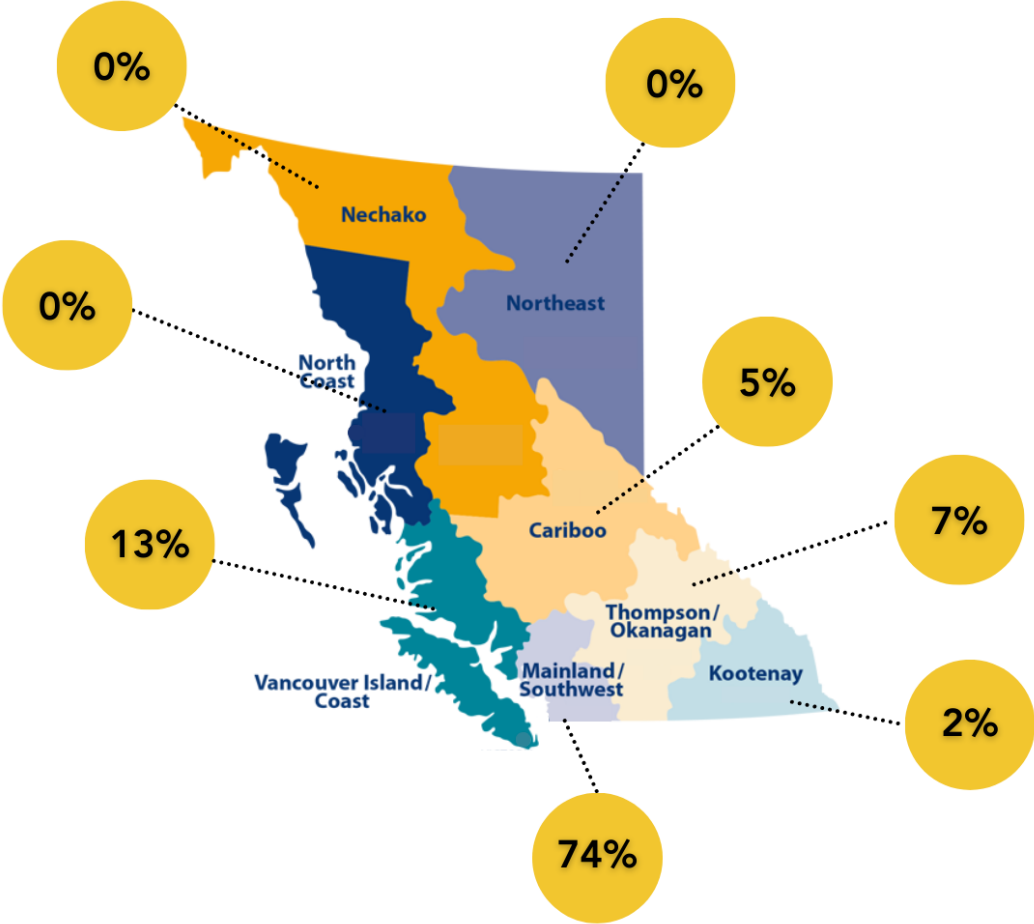
Representation of Equity-Deserving Groups

Many caregivers identified that their youth belonged to one or more equity-deserving groups. The following is a breakdown of this representation:

Experience in government care — 26%

Racialized/POC — 20%

LGBTQIA2S+ — 15%

Experience in the justice system — 14%

Indigenous — 11%

Newcomer/Refugee — 2%
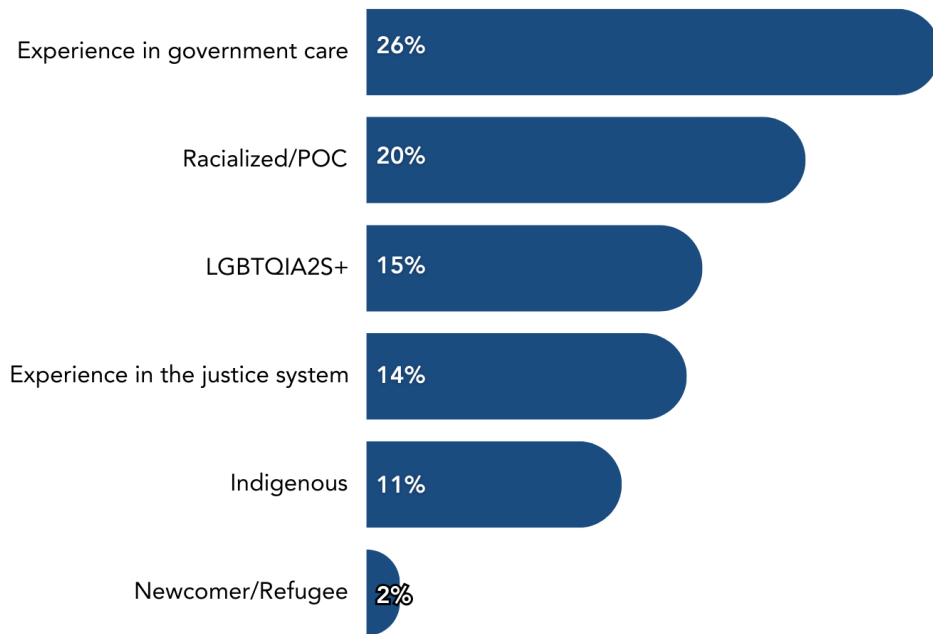
Youth Employment Status

Respondents were asked about their youth's employment status:

- About half of youth were working
- About half of youth were not working

The following is a breakdown of responses:
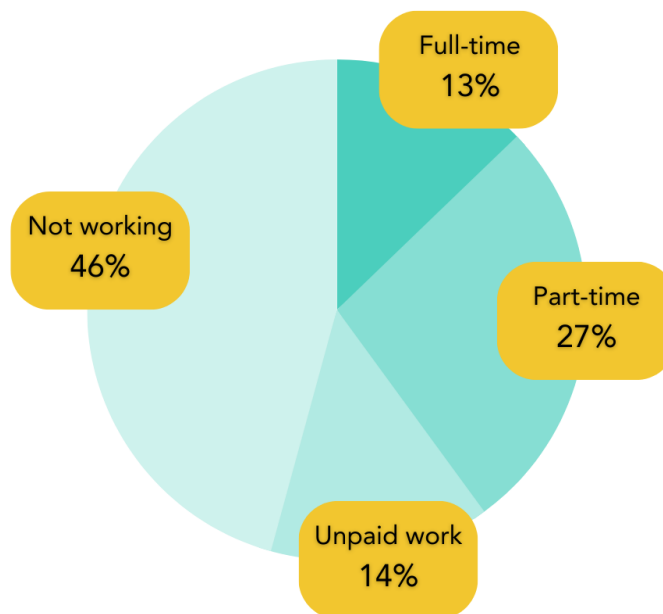
Full-time 13%

Part-time 27%

Unpaid work 14%

Not working 46%

Disability Type

Employment status differed with disability type:

- Youth with mental health challenges were the most likely to be working
- Youth with substance use challenges were the least likely to be working

Below is a breakdown of employment status by disability type:
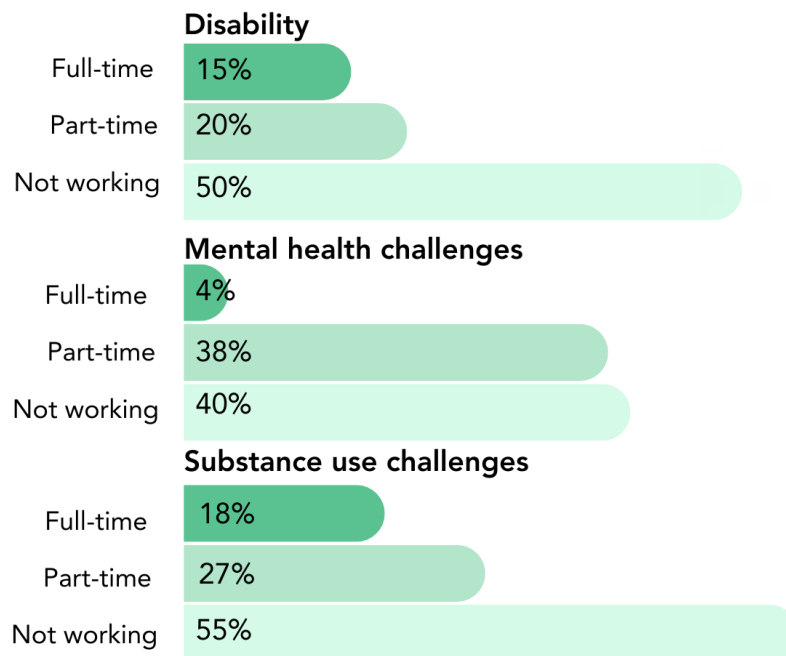
Disability

Full-time	15%
Part-time	20%
Not working	50%

Mental health challenges

Full-time	4%
Part-time	38%
Not working	40%

Substance use challenges

Full-time	18%
Part-time	27%
Not working	55%

Age

Employment status differed between age groups:

- Youth between 19 and 23 were the most likely to be working
- Youth between 15 and 18 were the least likely to be working

Below is a breakdown of employment status by age group:

15-18

Full-time	12%
Part-time	21%
Not working	54%
Unpaid work	13%

19-23

Full-time	10%
Part-time	43%
Not working	30%
Unpaid work	17%

24-30

Full-time	18%
Part-time	30%
Not working	41%
Unpaid work	11%
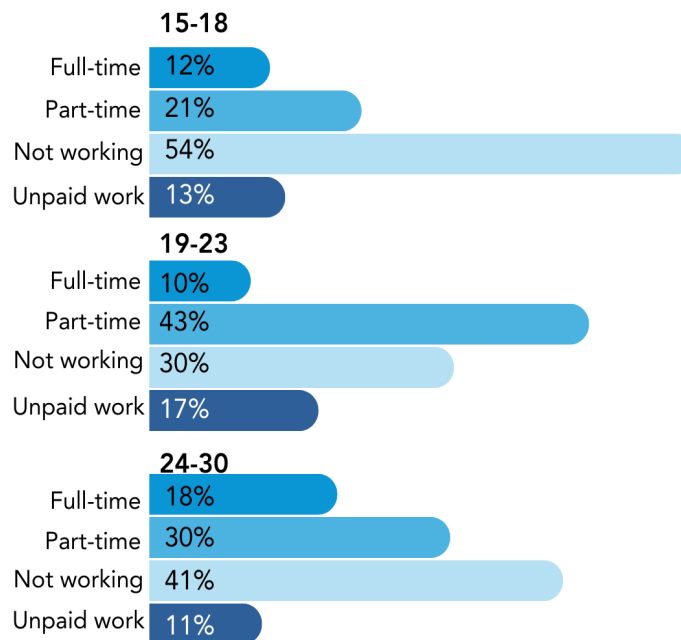
Data Spotlight: Across all age groups, youth were significantly more likely to be working part-time than full-time.

Provincial Region

Employment status varied across regions:

- Youth of caregivers living in the Kootenay region were the most likely to be working
- Youth of caregivers living in the Vancouver Island/Coastal region were the least likely to be working

The following is breakdown of employment status by provincial region:

N/A

N/A

N/A

Full-time 33%
Part-time 33%

Full-time 22%
Part-time 22%

Full-time 12%
Part-time 24%

Full-time 11%
Part-time 27%

Full-time 0%
Part-time 67%

Nechako
Northeast
North Coast
Cariboo
Thompson/Okanagan
Vancouver Island/Coast
Mainland/Southwest
Kootenay
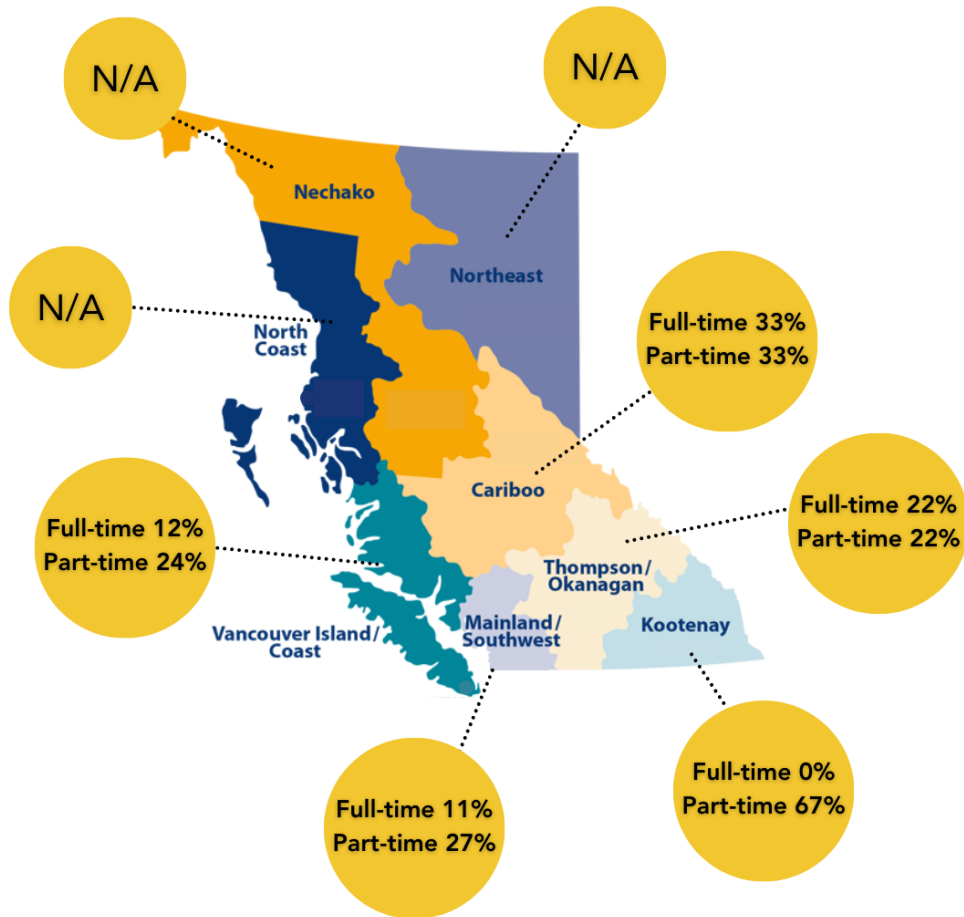
Data Spotlight: No youth of caregivers living in the Kootenay region were working full time.

Equity-Deserving Groups

Employment status varied between equity-deserving groups:

- Indigenous youth were the most likely to be working
- LGBTQIA2S+ youth were the least likely to be working

The following is a breakdown of employment status for each equity-deserving group:

Experience in government care

Full-time	10%
Part-time	30%
Not working	40%

Experience in the justice system

Full-time	50%
Part-time	0%
Not working	50%

Indigenous

Full-time	0%
Part-time	50%
Not working	38%

LGBTQIA2S+

Full-time	8%
Part-time	38%
Not working	54%

Newcomer/Refugee

Full-time	0%
Part-time	0%
Not working	100%

Racialized/POC

Full-time	8%
Part-time	33%
Not working	42%
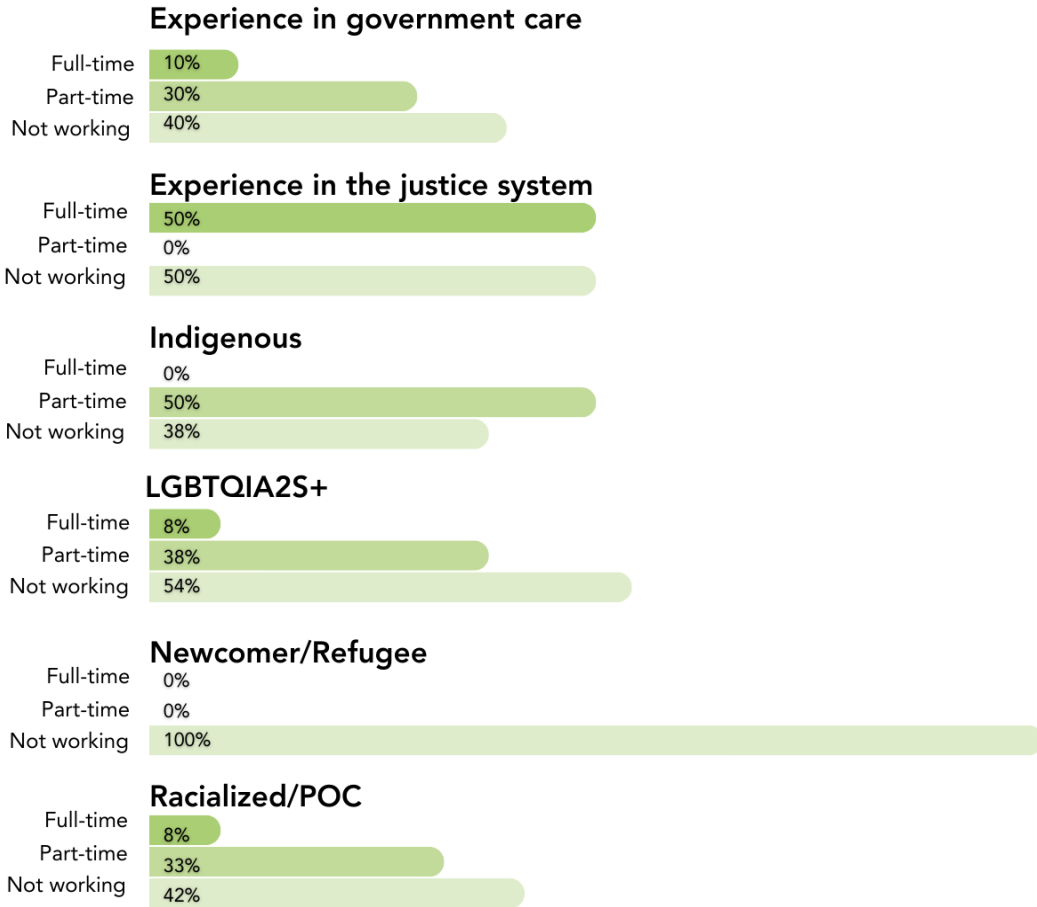
Important to Note: Although no newcomer/refugee youth were employed, the number of responses collected from this demographic (n=2) was too low to be representative of the population. For this reason, this data was not valid and could not be included in the overall analysis.

Data Spotlight: Although Indigenous youth were the most likely to be employed, no respondents were working full-time.

PART 1: EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ACCESS

PROGRAM ACCESS

To better understand who is accessing employment support across the province, respondents were asked if their youth had taken part in an employment program. About one-third (35%) of caregivers' youth had stated they participated in at least one employment program.

Of the youth who had accessed employment programs, most had done so through community organizations rather than through their school. Below is a breakdown of where programs were accessed:

Community organizations	41%
School programs	26%
Community and school	33%
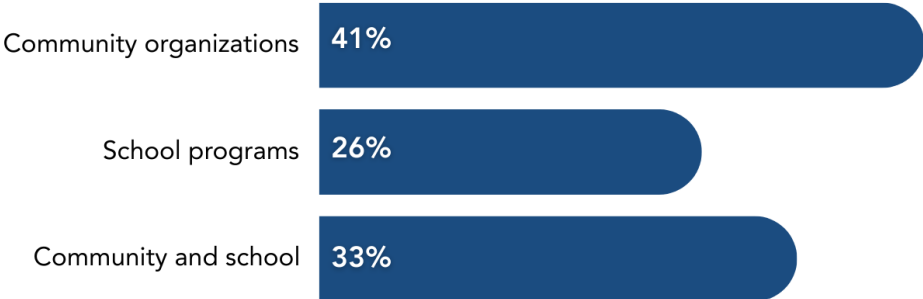
Program Access and Disability Type

Youth with certain disability types were more likely to have accessed employment programs than others:

- Youth with disabilities were the most likely to have accessed employment programs
- Youth experiencing substance use challenges were the least likely to have accessed employment programs

Program Access and Equity-Deserving Groups

Youth who belonged to certain equity-deserving groups were more likely to have accessed employment programs than others:

- Youth with experience in the justice system were the most likely to have accessed employment programs
- LGBTQIA2S+ youth were the least likely to have accessed employment programs

Program Access and Provincial Region

Youth of caregivers living in certain provincial regions were more likely to have accessed employment programs than others:

- Youth of caregivers living in the Cariboo region were the most likely to have accessed employment programs
- Youth of caregivers living in the Thompson/Okanagan region were the least likely to have accessed employment programs

The following is a regional breakdown of employment program access:
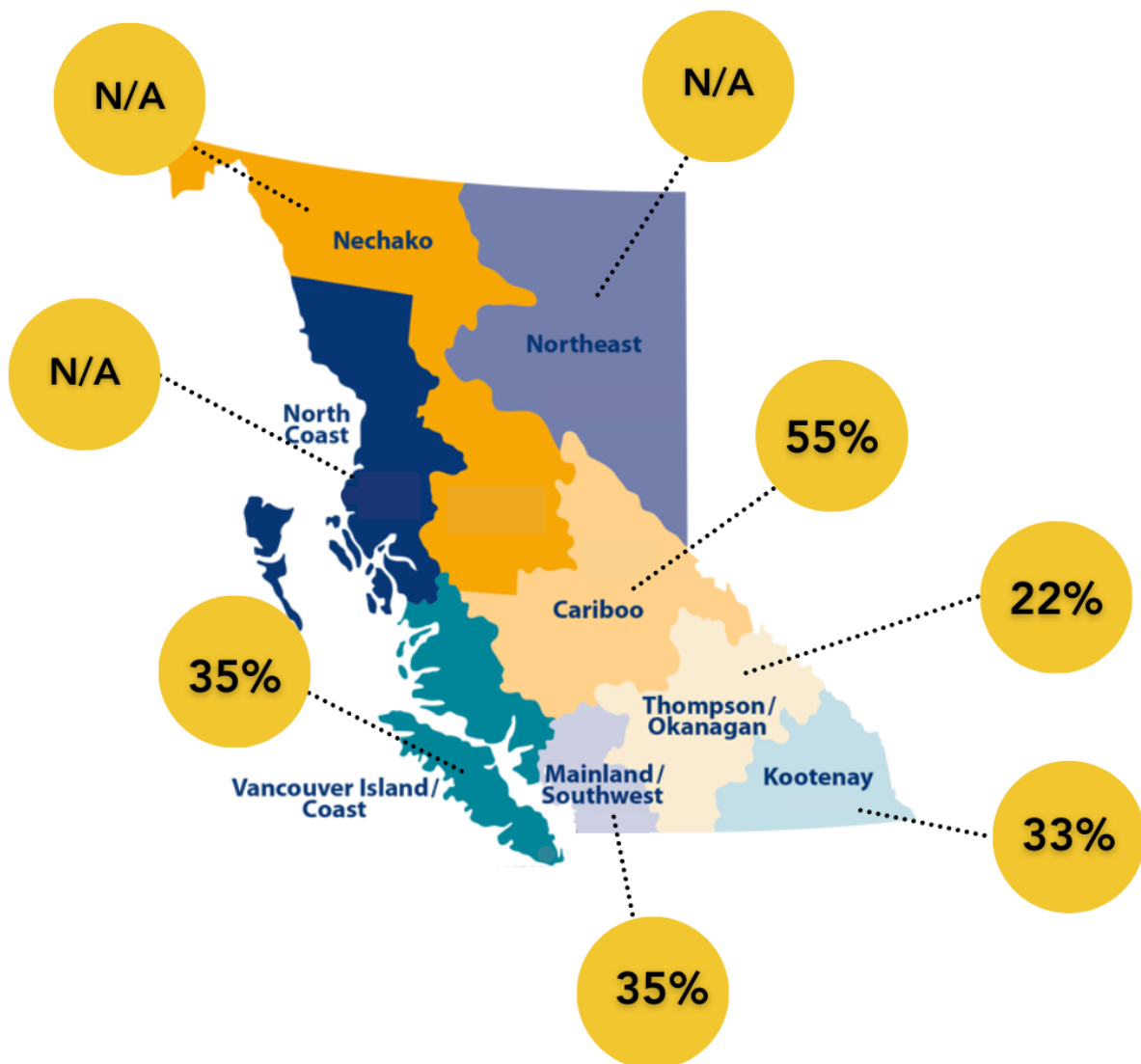
There were also differences in the location of employment program access across provincial regions:

• Youth of caregivers living in the Mainland/Southwest region were the most likely to have accessed employment programs through community organizations

• Youth of caregivers living in the Kootenay region were the most likely to have accessed employment programs through their school

• Youth of caregivers living in the Thompson/Okanagan region were the most likely to have accessed employment programs through both community organizations and through their school

The following is a breakdown of the location of employment program access by provincial region:

Respondents who accessed support did so…	Cariboo	Kootenay	Mainland/ Southwest	Thompson/ Okanagan	Vancouver Island/ Coast
…through **community**	0%	0%	18%	0%	6%
…through **school**	18%	33%	6%	0%	18%
…through **school & community**	17%	0%	10%	22%	12%

Data Spotlight: Although youth of caregivers living in the Cariboo region were the most likely to have accessed an employment program, they were among the least likely to have accessed the program through a community organization.

There were also differences in rates of employment program access between rural/remote and urban areas:

• Youth of caregivers living in rural/remote regions of the province were more likely to have accessed employment programs

The following graph shows employment program access by region type:

43% Rural/Remote   **34%** Urban
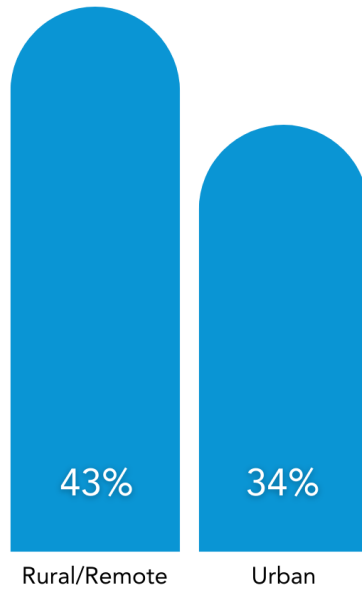
Program Access and Education

Employment program access differed between certain education levels:

- Youth who had completed a university degree were the most likely to have accessed an employment program
- Youth who had completed some high school education were the least likely to have accessed an employment program

Below is a breakdown of employment program access by education level:

University degree **69%**
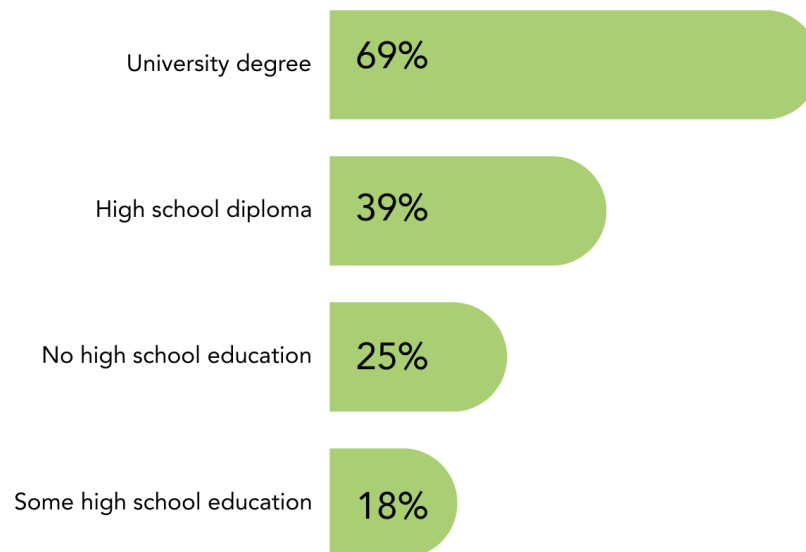
High school diploma **39%**

No high school education **25%**

Some high school education **18%**

BARRIERS TO PROGRAM ACCESS

To better understand why youth had not accessed employment support, caregivers of youth who had not taken part in an employment program were asked to identify the barriers their youth faced. Most caregivers responded that their youth was not aware that employment programs existed. Here's a breakdown of the barriers youth faced to accessing employment programs:

Barrier	Percentage
Unaware of employment programs	68%
Ineligible for employment programs	20%
Transportation challenges	14%
Scheduling challenges	12%
No employment programs in my area	8%
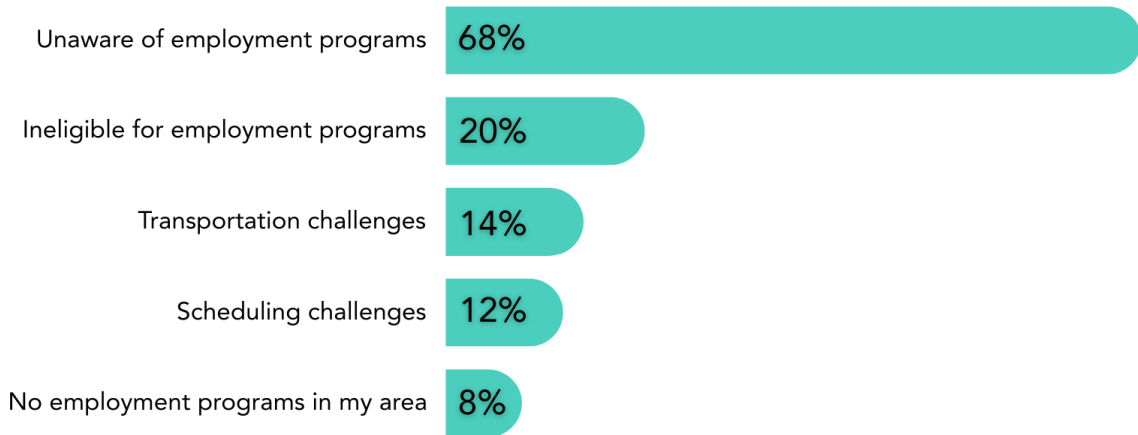
Additional Barriers

When asked if there were any additional barriers youth faced to accessing employment programs, caregiver responses highlighted the following themes:

1. Personal capacity limits a youth's ability to access employment programs

2. Employment programs are inaccessible

3. Caregiver lack of information about employment programs

Personal Capacity of Youth

Many caregivers expressed that their youth had fears, anxieties, assumptions, or reservations about accessing employment programs. Some caregivers shared that their youth struggled with internalized ableism and believed there was stigma attached to accessing support. Others responded that their youth did not desire or feel motivated to participate in employment programs.

The following quotes from caregiver respondents fit under this theme:

"My youth feels that they will be embarrassed because of their disability."

"Mental illness is still [taboo] and [my youth] thinks if he tells people doors will close automatically."

"My youth does not want to be identified as a person with a mental disability."

Inaccessibility of Programs

Caregivers highlighted that it can be challenging for youth to access employment programs in their community. Lack of available accommodations and transportation support, inaccessible program locations, and scheduling constraints all pose barriers to program access.

The following quotes expand on these challenges:

"Many programs are full time and seem too overwhelming."

"We live an hour away from a main centre."

"My youth needs a sign language interpreter for programs."

Lack of Information

Caregivers responded that their own lack of knowledge about employment support impacted their youth's ability to access programs. Many were unsure of where support was available and what type of programs were offered. Some were unaware that employment programs existed.

The following quotes illustrate caregivers' limited knowledge about employment programs:

"I am unaware of any employment programs available."

"I was unaware that employment programs existed."

"I do not know enough about employment programs."

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many employment programs to change the way they offered support. Respondents whose youth had accessed an employment program during the pandemic were asked about the impact of these changes:

- About half of caregivers' youth found it **harder** to access employment programs
- Just under half of caregivers' youth found it **easier** to access employment programs
- A small percentage of caregivers' youth felt **no impact** on their ability to access employment programs

The following is a breakdown of the effect that COVID-19 had on youth's ability to access employment programs:

Pandemic made it harder	49%
Pandemic made it easier	43%
Pandemic did not change	8%
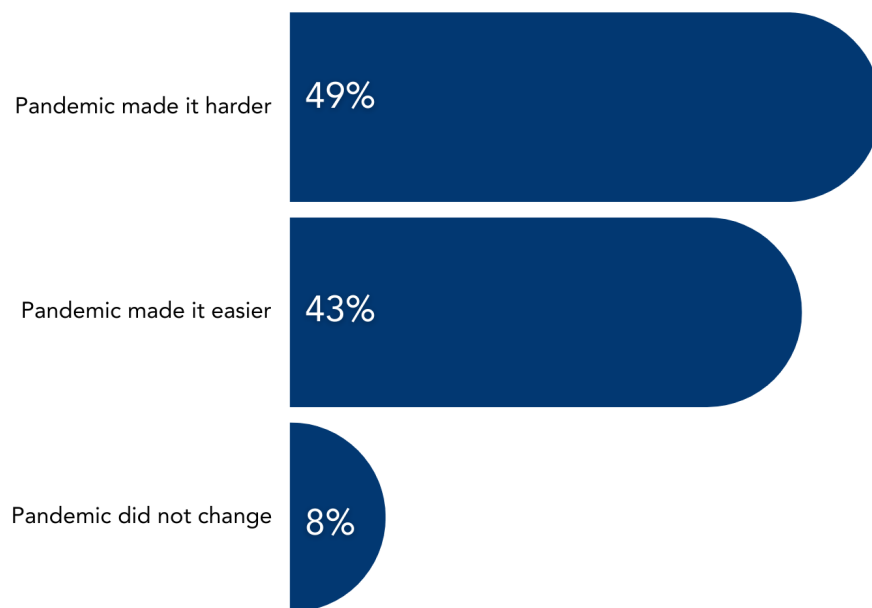
Caregivers were asked to elaborate on the COVID-19-related factors that impacted their youth's ability to access employment programs. Responses centered around the following themes:

1. Fear, anxiety, and lockdown barriers

2. Increased virtual programming

3. Negative impacts on mental health

Fear, Anxiety, and Lockdown Barriers

Many caregivers shared that health-related fear, anxiety, and barriers associated with lockdown impacted their youths' ability to access support. Things like social distancing and lockdown policies, increased anxiety from isolation, and fear of contracting the virus made it difficult for youth to take part in programs.

The following quotes highlight these themes:

> **"Until recently so many programs were shut down. The pandemic also isolated my youth in the last years of high school which made it very difficult to get out of the house or meet any people because she had such a long stretch of seeing no one."**

> **"Isolation and concerns about being unvaccinated and catching covid [sic]."**

> **"It has made [my youth] more afraid of crowds and being unmasked in public."**
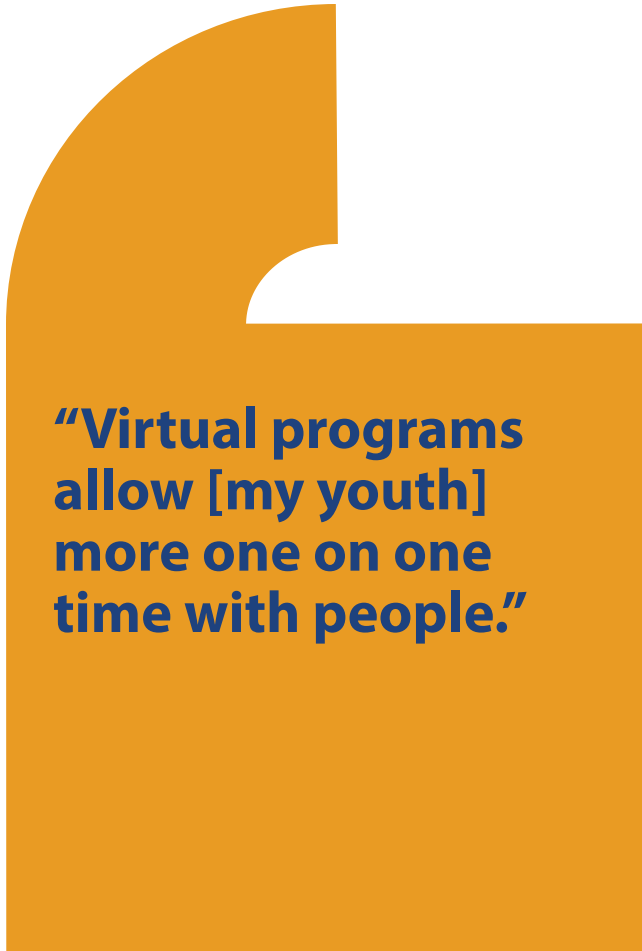
Increased Virtual Programming

Due to lockdowns and social distancing, many employment programs were only able to offer virtual support. While some caregivers said this made it easier for their youth to access programs, others shared the opposite.
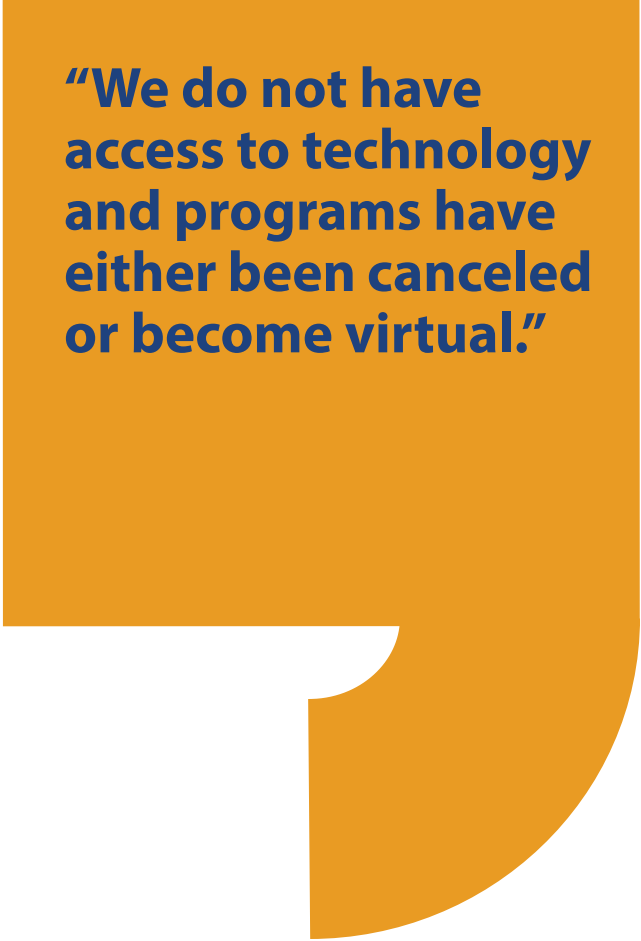
The following quotes fall under this theme:

"Many programs were not in person and online doesn't work for my youth because they can't keep engaged."

"We do not have access to technology and programs have either been canceled or become virtual."

"Virtual programs allow [my youth] more one on one time with people."

Negative impacts on mental health

Many caregivers responded that their youth's mental health deteriorated throughout the pandemic. Lack of motivation and inability to take part in programs due to mental health challenges made support more difficult to access.

The following quotes fall under this theme:

"The pandemic pushed [my youth] back home with mental stress and anxiety."

"Having to stay at home has made [my youth's] social anxiety even worse."

"Anxiety to partake in anything outside of the home due to isolation from covid [sic] restrictions."

PART 2: EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

To understand the experiences of youth accessing employment support in BC, caregivers of youth who had taken part in an employment program were asked if the program was helpful. Most caregivers responded that the program helped their youth.

Additionally, of the youth who had accessed an employment program, a greater percentage were working full-time – when compared to youth who had not accessed a program. The following graphic shows youth employment status and program access:

Had accessed

Full-time   37%

Part-time   29%

Not working   30%

Had not accessed

Full-time   24%

Part-time   37%

Not working   35%
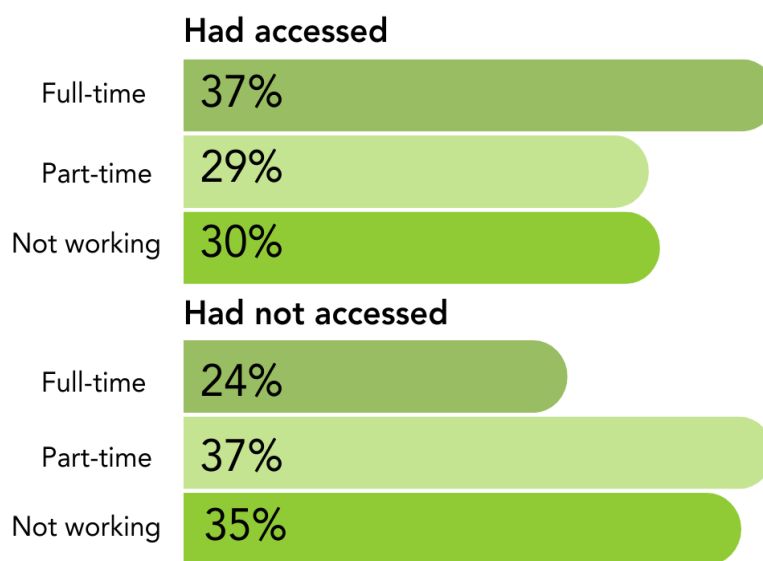
Program Experiences and Disability Type

Caregivers of youth with certain disability types were more likely to have responded that employment programs were helpful. Here is a breakdown of employment program helpfulness by disability type:

Disability

Helpful 84%

Not helpful 16%

Mental Health Challenges

Helpful 100%

Not helpful 0%

Substance-use Challenges

Helpful 76%

Not helpful 24%
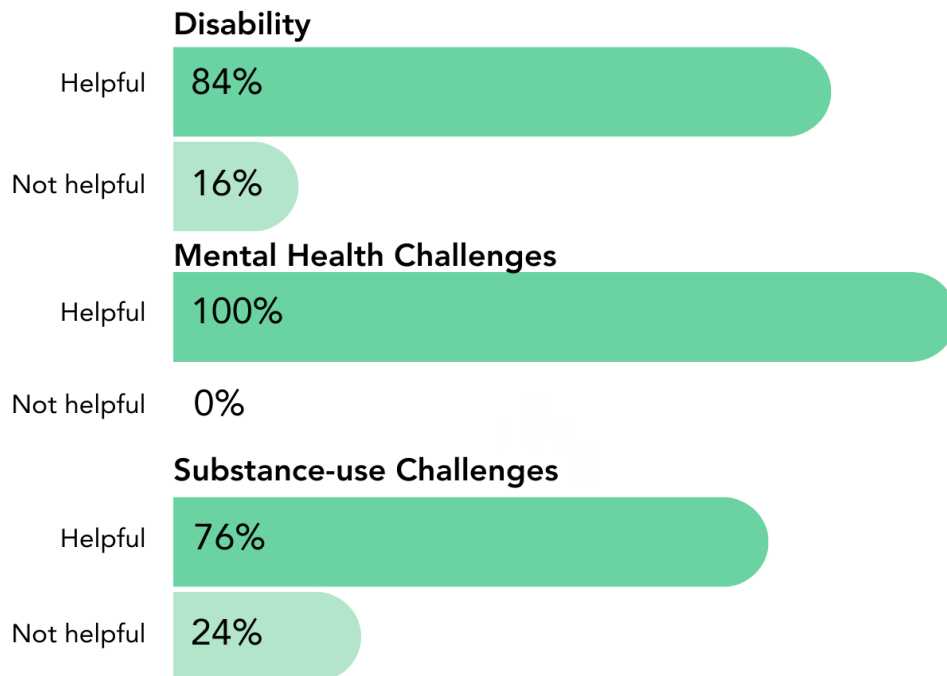
Program Experiences and Equity-Deserving Identities

Caregivers of youth belonging to certain equity-deserving groups were more likely to have responded that employment programs were helpful. On the next page is a breakdown of employment program helpfulness by equity-deserving group:
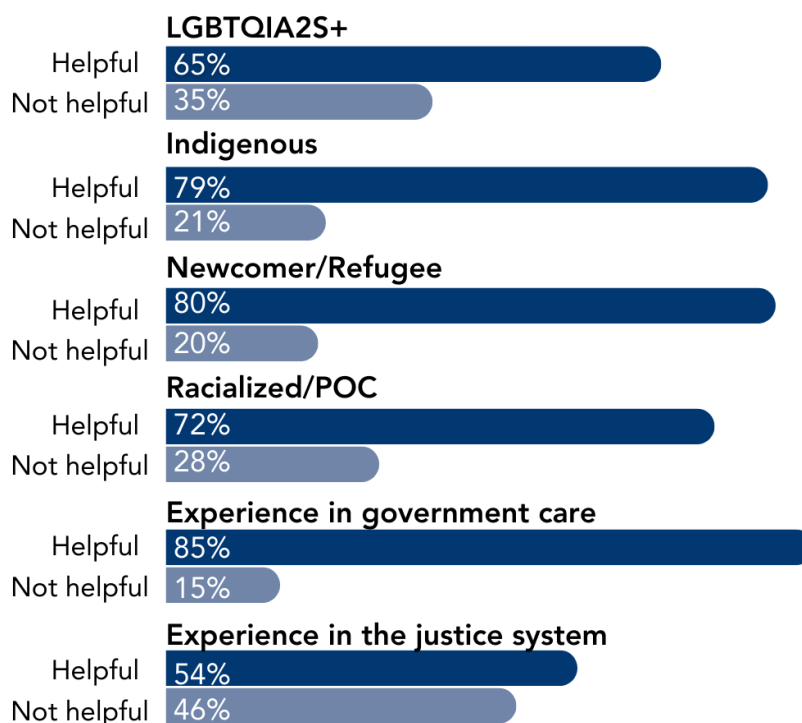
LGBTQIA2S+
Helpful 65%
Not helpful 35%

Indigenous
Helpful 79%
Not helpful 21%

Newcomer/Refugee
Helpful 80%
Not helpful 20%

Racialized/POC
Helpful 72%
Not helpful 28%

Experience in government care
Helpful 85%
Not helpful 15%

Experience in the justice system
Helpful 54%
Not helpful 46%

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Program Experiences and Geography

Caregivers living in certain regions of the province were more likely to have responded that employment programs were helpful. The following is a breakdown of the responses that indicated programs were helpful to youth, by region:
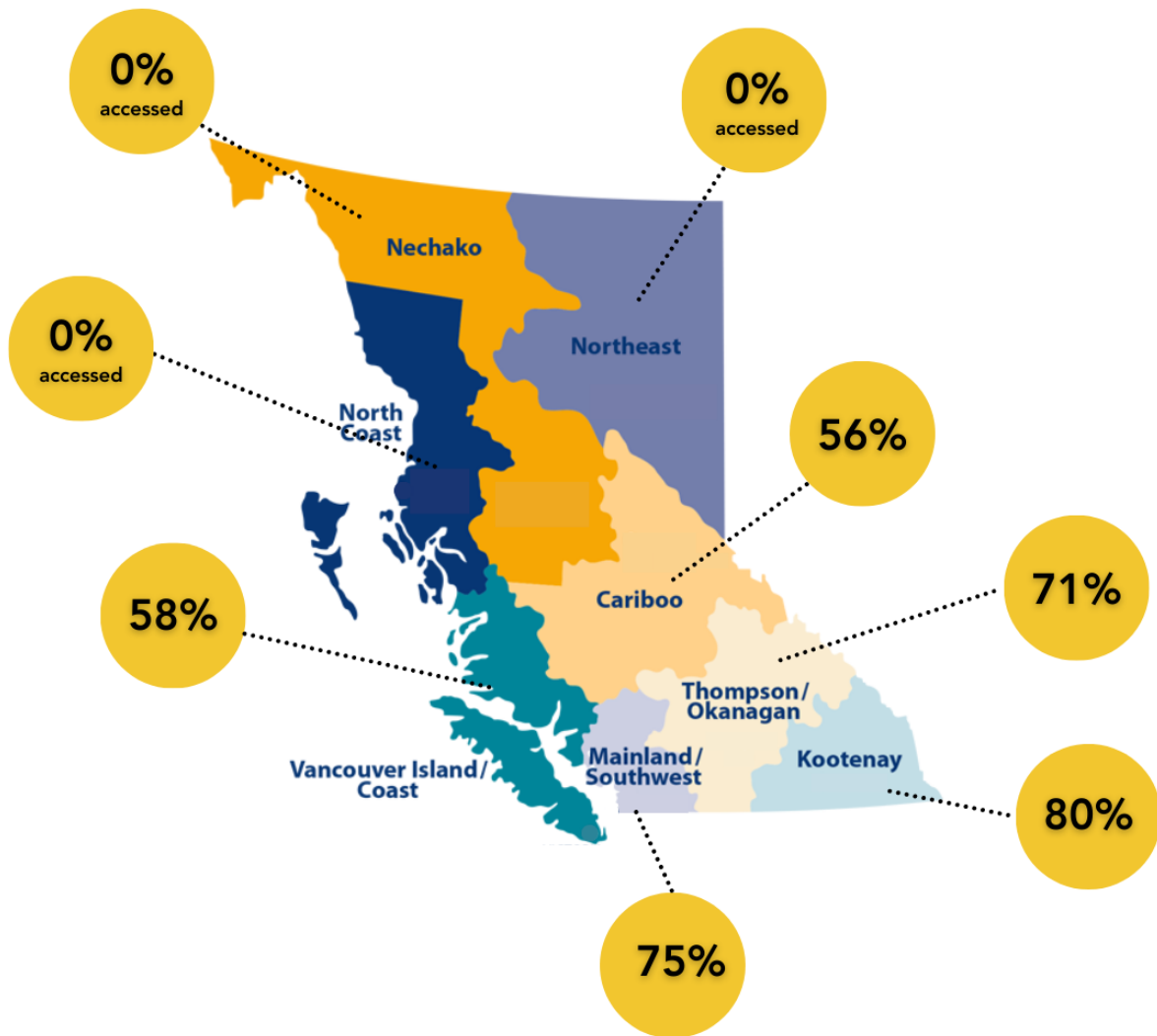
BEST PRACTICES IN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

To better understand what type of support is most helpful for youth, caregivers whose youth had accessed an employment program were asked to rate the helpfulness of different types of support. The following illustrates caregiver responses:

Support	Percentage
Support with resume writing and interview skills	50%
Support with the job search process	45%
Support with setting employment goals	31%
Support understanding the rights of employees with disabilities	25%
Support learning job specific skills	23%
Personalized support from a job coach	23%
Access to job/career fairs	22%
Support finsing an internship or co-op	21%
Ongoing support from a job coach once empoyment has been found	19%
Customized employment development/job carving	15%

Caregivers whose youth had not accessed an employment program were asked to identify which supports would be most helpful. The following graph illustrates these responses:

Support	Percentage
Support with resume writing and interview skills	60%
Support with the job search process	59%
Support with setting employment goals	57%
Support understanding the rights of employees with disabilities	50%
Support learning job specific skills	39%
Personalized support from a job coach	18%

Data Spotlight: Regardless of whether youth had accessed an employment program, caregivers rated the following as the top three most helpful employment supports:

- Support with resume writing and interview skills
- Support with the job search process
- Support with setting employment goals

Additional Best Practices

Caregivers were asked if their youth received any other helpful supports from an employment program. Responses highlighted the following types of support:

1. Personalized, on-going support

2. More support with job search process

3. Job-specific skill development

Personalized, On-going Support

Many caregivers highlighted the value of support that is responsive to their youth's individual needs. They shared the importance of support that can adapt to each youth's strengths and goals. They also highlighted the value of on-going support once employment is found.

The following quotes fit under this theme:

"Learning skills to recognize and work with their challenges as opposed to having [their challenges] work against them."

"Help adapting to the job and following up. I think continuous training and updating is important."

More Support with the Job Search Process

Although "support with the job search process" was a response option in the question that asked caregivers to rate the helpfulness of different types of support, caregivers brought this theme up again in their written responses. Comments touched on the value of skill development and support to seek out/ pursue appropriate jobs.

The following quotes fit under this theme:

"Job placements for individuals [with employers] that are understanding of specific issues."

"[Support to] identify their strengths and skills, and to determine what jobs would be a good fit for them."

Job-Specific Skill Development

Respondents highlighted support with job/industry-specific skill development as helpful.

The following quotes fall under this theme:

"Access to information technology programs."

"Support with business development to enhance their business ability and increase their work experience."

GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Although most caregivers whose youth had taken part in an employment program found the program helpful, they felt that some supports were missing. These supports highlight opportunities for programs to better meet the needs of youth with disabilities. Here is a breakdown of these opportunities:

Support	Percentage
Support navigating mental health challenges at work	57%
Learning life-skills	37%
Job shadow	33%
Learning job-specific skills	33%
Support obtaining certifications	31%
On-going support once employment is found	29%
Culturally sensitive support	27%
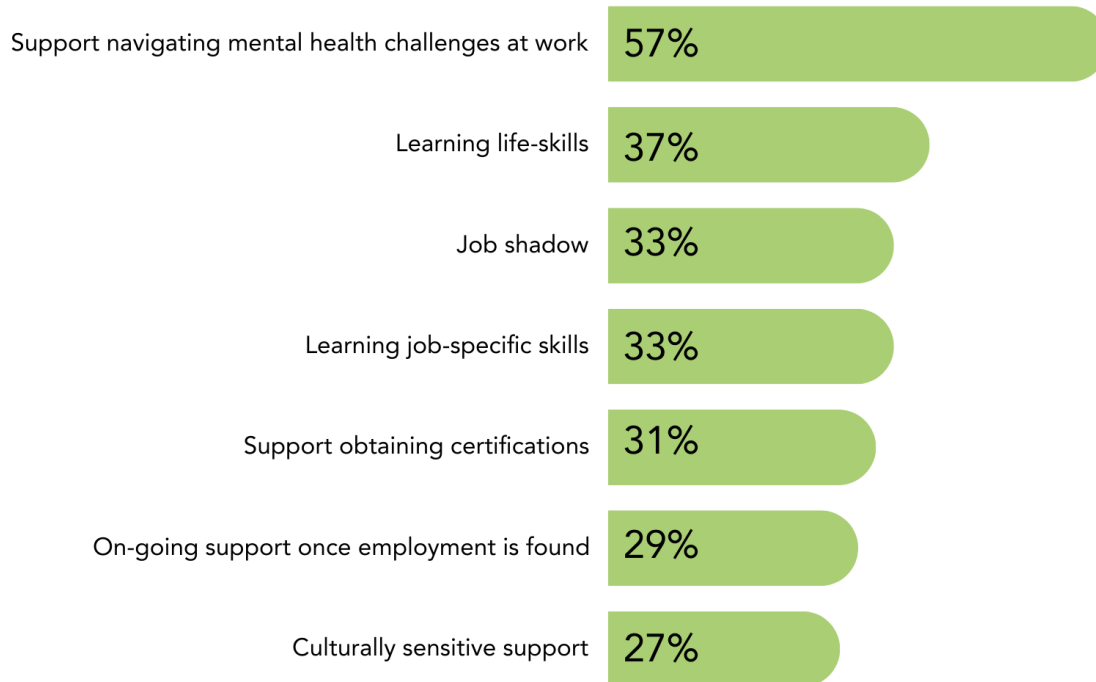
Data Spotlight: Caregivers identified "Support navigating mental health challenges at work" as the top support missing from employment programs.

PART 3: JOB SEARCH AND EMPLOYMENT

BARRIERS

To better understand the types of support that youth with disabilities need throughout the employment journey, caregivers were asked to identify the job search and workplace barriers their youth face. These barriers highlight opportunities for employment programs to cater support to the needs of this demographic.

Job Search Barriers

The following graphic illustrates the top barriers that caregivers identified for their youth during job search:

Barrier	Percentage
Intimidated by the job search process	66%
Difficulty finding an accommodating job	57%
Difficulty with the job search process	46%
Unable to find diversity/inclusion statements	32%
Unsure where to go for employment support	25%
No motivation to work	20%
Lack of reliable transportation	14%
Experiencing barriers due to gender identity	5%
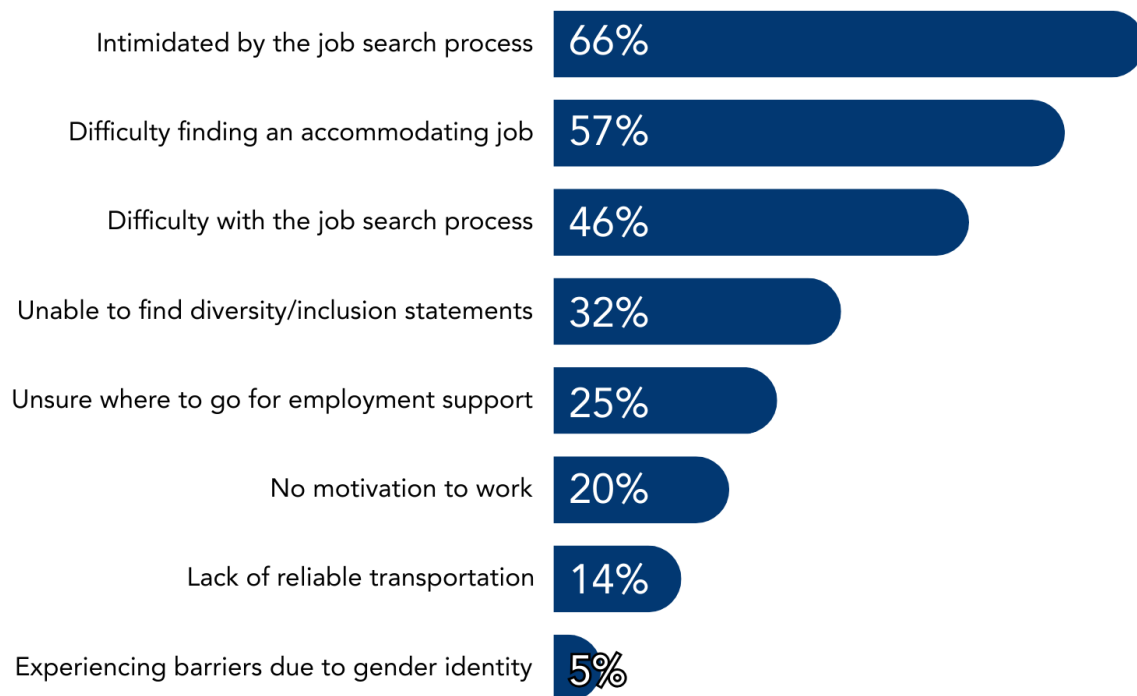
Caregivers were asked to describe any additional barriers their youth face during job search. Responses centered around the following themes:

1. Anxiety
2. Discrimination
3. Caregiver Assumptions

Anxiety

Many caregivers talked about the anxiety their youth feel around searching for jobs, going to interviews, and communicating with employers. This anxiety poses challenges throughout the job search process. The following quotes fall under this theme:

"[My youth] gets very anxious when I start talking about jobs that are available."

"[My youth] doesn't know where to start or what job they can do."

Discrimination

Caregivers also responded that discrimination from potential employers causes added stress for youth during job search. Here are some quotes that speak to this theme:

"Discrimination is prevalent because they have an invisible disability."

"Employers don't want to give [my youth] a chance."

Caregiver Assumptions

Some responses revealed caregiver perceptions that could impact how youth navigate job search and pursue employment. The following quotes highlight this theme:

"[My youth] is not capable of handling difficult tasks."

"[My youth] would be unable to keep up with a work environment."

Workplace Barriers

This following graphic illustrates the top workplace barriers that caregivers identified for their youth:

Barrier	Percentage
No workplace accommodations	41%
Feeling unappreciated at work	38%
Employers making assumptions about disability	30%
Feeling unincluded at work	30%
Unsure where to go for employment support	25%
No motivation to work	24%
Inadequate workplace training	21%
Lack of reliable transportation	18%
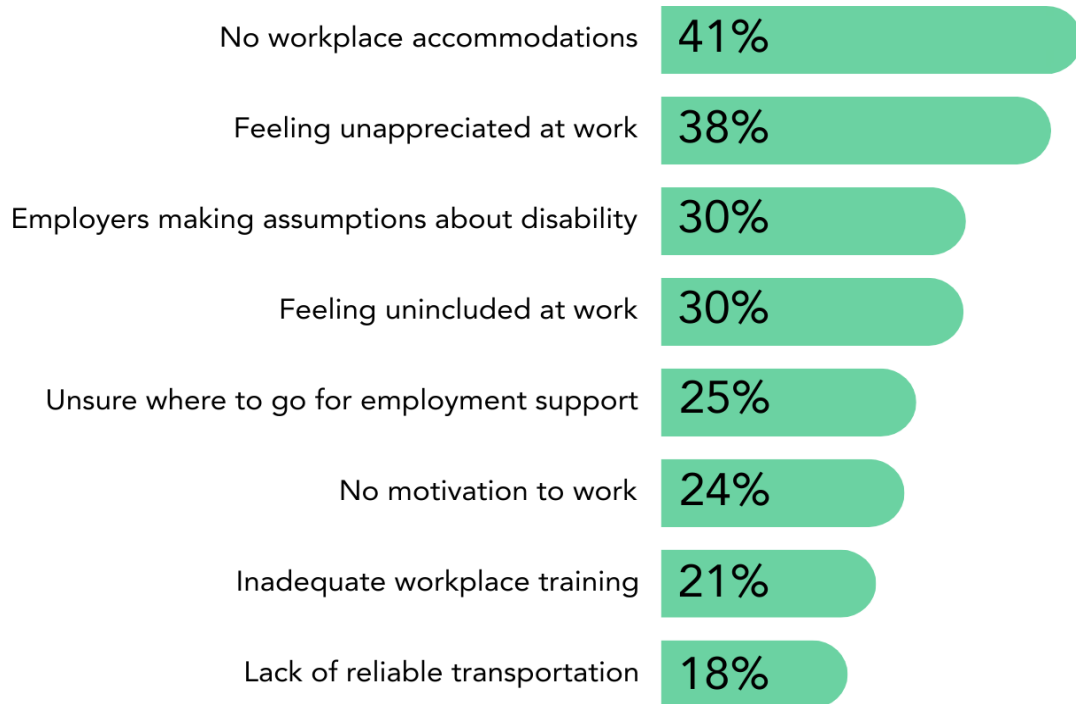
Caregivers were also asked to describe any additional barriers their youth face in the workplace. Responses centered around the following themes:

1. Disconnect between youth and employers
2. Anxiety
3. Employer expectations

Disconnect Between Youth and Employer

Many responses spoke to a disconnect between youth and their employer – often leaving youth misunderstood at work. These quotes highlight this theme:

> **"[My youth's] bosses don't understand his disability."**

"Employers do not understand what [my youth] can do and what they cannot."

"[My youth] has anxiety and disassociates frequently, this can be seen as having an attitude or as if she doesn't care about the task/people."

Anxiety

Many caregivers shared how their youth's anxiety poses barriers that make it difficult to navigate the workplace. Here is a quote that speaks to this theme:

"My youth is anxious and has panic attacks. They were too afraid to ask questions because the managers had little patience. They weren't clear on what shifts were scheduled and were too afraid to ask. They missed a shift, then showed up to the wrong shift and ended up getting fired."

Employer Expectations

Caregivers shared how employers can have expectations that make it challenging for youth to participate fully and equally in the workplace. Here are some quotes from this theme:

"Youth tend to be left out of future planning in organizations."

Not having access to the right technology or employers assuming youth can use the technology without training or instruction."

Data Spotlight: Although the additional workplace barriers fell under three main themes, there were similarities across all three. Each theme spoke to a communication gap between youth and employers. Youth faced challenges effectively expressing their views and needs to employers. Employers held unrealistic expectations and demonstrated a lack of understanding towards youth.

HELPFUL SUPPORTS

Workplace Supports

To better understand the employment support needs of youth with disabilities, caregivers whose youth had experience working were asked to identify the workplace supports that were most helpful for their youth. The following is a breakdown of their responses:

Support	Percentage
Flexible hours	54%
Supportive & accommodating employers	53%
Supportive co-workers	44%
Mental health days	36%
Professional development opportunities	36%
Employers who understand disability	29%
Access to reliable transportation	26%
Workplace mentor	20%
Continuous on-the-job training	20%

Caregivers whose youth did not have experience working were asked to identify the workplace supports that would be most helpful for their youth. Here is a breakdown of what they shared:

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Support	Percentage
Flexible hours	67%
Supportive & accommodating employers	66%
Mental health days	63%
Employers who understand disability	52%
Supportive co-workers	48%
Professional development	41%
Reliable transportation	33%
Continuous on-the-job training	28%
Workplace mentor	17%
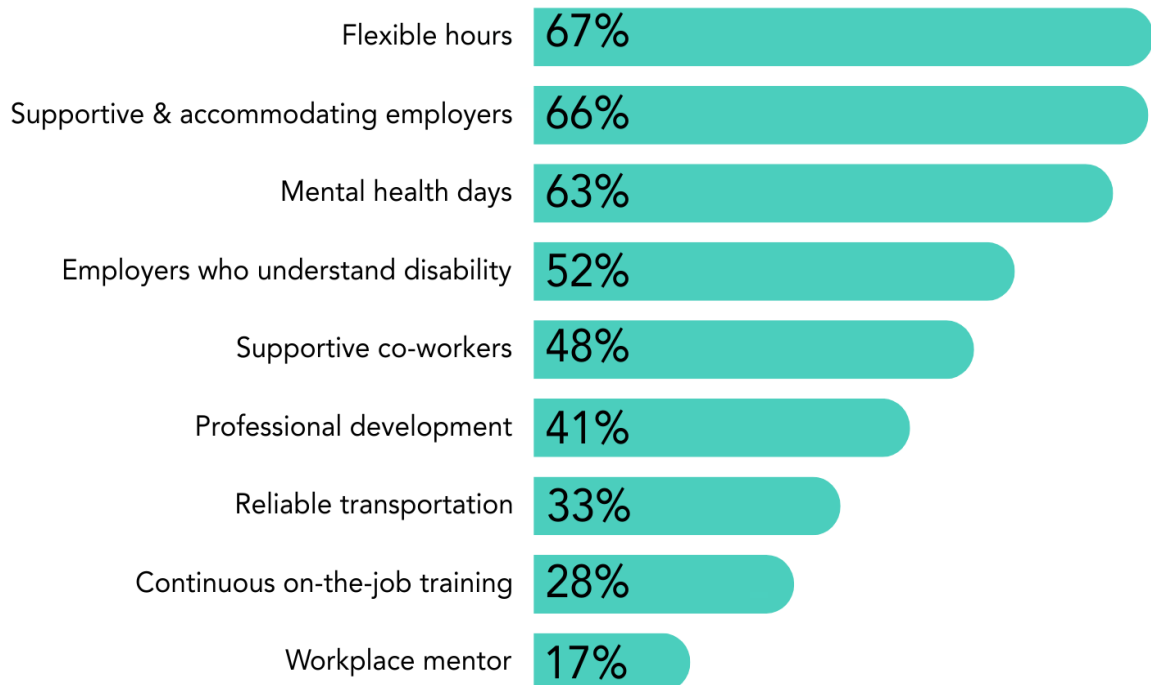
Data Spotlight: Regardless of whether their youth had worked, caregivers rated the following as the most helpful workplace supports:

- Flexible hours
- Supportive and accommodating employers

Caregivers were also asked to describe any additional supports that had helped/ would help their youth at work. Responses centred around the following themes:

1. Supportive work environments
2. Knowledge about disability in the workplace
3. Supports outside the context of employment

Supportive Work Environment

Many caregivers shared that a supportive work environment is helpful. They highlighted the positive impact of supportive and compassionate supervisors/ colleagues and an employer that understands their youth's needs. Here are some quotes from this theme:

"Mostly just the feeling that they would be accepted and more compassion from the employers."

"[My youth] has great mentors at work and the support of her coworkers. We have been very lucky."

"The place where my [youth] worked hired and fired people on a weekly basis. They would hire high school aged people and expect them to instantly operate the same as an experienced cashier. When they stumbled, they were fired. Clear communication, clear direction, and understanding that people starting their first job are petrified would help."

Knowledge About Disability in the Workplace

Caregivers noted the benefit of employers and colleagues understanding disability in the workplace. They emphasized the importance of having greater awareness about the specific challenges that youth with disabilities face. Here are some quotes:

"Mental health awareness days in the workplace."

"Training and building awareness for staff that work at my youth's job. This would help them build empathy for my youth's challenges."

Supports Outside the Context of Employment

Some caregivers identified the value of supports being available outside the employment context. Responses specifically mentioned the need for mental health care and facilitated access to disability-specific resources. Here are some quotes from this theme:

"Discounted access to therapy and a mental health professional"

"Direction to more social programs."

PART 4: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ACCESS

Findings from this survey highlight four themes regarding youths' experiences accessing employment programs:

1. Lack of awareness

2. Ineligibility or inaccessibility of programs

3. Program access through community

4. Geographical implications

Lack of Awareness

Caregiver responses showed that **many youths are unaware of employment programs.** This aligns with findings from MyStartr's (2022) Youth Employment Insights Report. This group found that many Canadian youth do not take advantage of employment support because they do not realize its there. They instead rely on their personal networks for information and advice as they pursue employment (MyStartr, 2022).

Of the caregiver respondents, **35% indicated that their youth had accessed an employment program**. This means that the majority (65%) of youth had not. Most (60.9%) of the caregivers' youth experienced mental health disabilities, which could account for this lack of awareness. As found in the Youth Survey Report by CanAssist at the University of Victoria (2023), youth with mental health challenges may not be aware of employment programming because there are no clear and direct pathways to employment services for this group (in contrast to youth with diagnosed developmental disabilities, autism, and fetal alcohol syndrome disorder who have clear and direct pathways through provincial organizations like Community Living British Columbia).

Ineligibility or Inaccessibility of Programs

Many caregivers responded that their youth was either ineligible for or not accessing employment programs. This was particularly true for respondents who were caregivers to youth with mental health and substance use challenges and youth from the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Mental Health Challenges

In British Columbia, eligibility for employment services can be quite narrow. In most cases, youth need to meet the following requirements to be eligible for services:

1. Be between 12 and 24 years old

2. Have a formal disability diagnosis

3. Be out of school

Many youth with mental health challenges do not meet these criteria.

In addition to eligibility barriers, the way employment programs operate can pose barriers to youth with mental health challenges. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario (2010), it is common for people with mental health challenges to take a non-linear approach to employment. They move back and forth between employment readiness and career development (Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, 2010). Employment supports in British Columbia primarily operate on a results/outcomes-based funding model that does not leave space for this type of path. This funding model prefers job placement over job preference and quality (CMHA Ontario, 2012), which can discourage youth who need a more flexible approach to support.

Substance Use Challenges

In the Youth Survey Report by CanAssist at the University of Victoria (2023), youth with substance use challenges were the most likely to have accessed employment programs. Because of the link between substance use challenges and connection to government systems (Fletcher, 2019; Patterson, Moniruzzaman & Somers, 2015), a proposed explanation for this finding was the availability of direct referrals from government care programs to employment services. This explanation was supported, as youth respondents with experience in government care and the youth justice system had accessed employment programs at higher rates than the average of all other respondents (CanAssist at the University of Victoria, 2023).

In contrast to these results, caregiver responses from this survey indicated that youth with substance use challenges were the least likely to have accessed an employment program. This discrepancy could be the result of the average age of caregivers' youth in this survey. Most (50.4%) were between 15 and 18. In

the Youth Survey Report, there was fairly equal distribution of ages (26% of youth were between 15 and 18, 34% were between 19 and 23, and 39% were between 24 and 30). The data in the present caregiver survey may be biasing the experiences of the youngest sub-group of the youth demographic. Despite this discrepancy, 100% of the caregivers who cared for youth who were connected to the youth justice system responded that their youth had accessed employment programs.

LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

Caregiver responses indicated that youth who are part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community have lower access to employment programs (when compared with youth with disabilities who have other community affiliations). Considering the clear and direct pathways that are present for groups that have higher access to programming, this makes sense. These pathways are the result of connection to government systems – and provincially, there are few government programs that target LGBTQIA2S+ youth with disabilities. Programs that do exist tend to not focus on employment services.

Program access through community

For caregivers' youth who had accessed employment services, it was more likely that they had done so through their community versus their school. Career classes are an option in some British Columbia schools – but not mandatory across educational institutions. According to youth surveyed by the McCreary Centre Society (2014), mandatory career classes in educational settings would increase youth access to employment training programs. This makes sense, especially considering that most youth with disabilities do not meet the strict eligibility requirements for the community-based services that are available. Using the school system as an entry point to employment services would increase youth exposure and access to employment programs.

Geographical implications

According to caregiver responses, geography impacts how likely a youth is to access an employment program. When comparing rural/remote and urban locations, caregivers living in rural and remote communities were more likely to respond that their youth had accessed an employment program.

Rural and remote communities are likely to have one or two obvious program

options versus a multitude of services (which is common to urban centers). It's also possible that those living in rural and remote locations feel a greater sense of community (Carpiano & Hystad, 2011). Those who feel a stronger connection to community may be more likely to lean on community resources for support (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) (Carpiano & Hystad, 2011). Clear pathways to support mixed with strong community connections likely contribute to the greater program access seen in these areas.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Caregivers spoke to a general positive experience when asked about their youths' involvement in employment programs. Overall, accessing programs was helpful for their youth and led to positive experiences. It was also found that more youth were working after accessing these programs, and significantly more were working full-time. This shows that when youth can access support from employment programs, they see positive results.

Traditional employment support (e.g., support with resume writing, interview skills, and setting employment goals, and support and guidance through job search, etc.) was cited as the most helpful. Because the job search process is so daunting for youth, support in this area is particularly helpful – especially for those experiencing added stress from mental health challenges.

Caregivers see opportunity for employment programs to provide more support around life skill building and mental health management.

Support Through the Employment Journey

Caregiver responses confirmed that the youth employment journey is complex and dynamic. To better manage this challenging time, caregivers want to see their youths supported with:

1. Managing mental health

2. Navigating the job search process

3. Finding work environments that are supportive and accommodating

Managing Mental Health & Substance Use Challenges

Caregiver responses highlighted mental health support as necessary to serving youth with disabilities in their employment. The employment journey causes mental health strain for many youths – which is especially challenging for those

who are already struggling with their mental health. The BC Chapter of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA BC) confirms that mental health and substance use challenges often begin for youth when they near completion of high school or post-secondary (2014). Without proper support, these challenges can impact their ability to complete school or any skills training they need to move forward in their employment journey (CMHA BC, 2014). In fact, mental health and substance use challenges are a primary cause for unemployment among youth with disabilities in British Columbia (Foundry, 2021). Having support to manage mental health challenges can help youth as they navigate this complex and dynamic time.

Navigating the Job Search Process

Caregivers shared that their youth struggle with the job search process. Responses highlighted a need for strong support in this area. For youth with little to no work experience, knowing where to start job search is a major challenge. The challenge only intensifies when there is no employment support available, which is the case for many youths. Employment support that is designed to help youth navigate job search as they transition from youth to adulthood is key.

Supportive and Accommodating Work Environments

Responses also highlighted the value of having employers that create supportive and accommodating work environments. This includes having employers and colleagues who are supportive and compassionate to youths' needs and understanding of disability and how it can manifest in the workplace.

Caregivers also spoke to a general disconnect between youth and employers. Youth face challenges expressing and communicating their needs, skills, and abilities to employers – and employers hold unrealistic expectations for youth and demonstrate a general lack of understanding of their needs, skills, and abilities. There needs to be support on both ends of the spectrum to facilitate strong connection and understanding between these groups.

CONCLUSION

Based on this survey of caregivers, we provide the following recommendations to support youth with disabilities in their employment journey:

1. Develop direct pathways to employment programs for youth with mental health challenges and youth with disabilities who are part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, utilizing the school system as an entry point to services.

Currently, the eligibility requirements of employment programs for youth with disabilities often exclude those experiencing mental health challenges, which was the most common barrier reported by caregivers. Overall, this leads caregivers to believe their youth is ineligible for programming. More robust support for those with mental health challenges would better serve youth.

According to this survey, youth with disabilities who are also a part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community are the least likely to have accessed employment programs. These youth are already facing multiple barriers to employment, making their access to employment programming increasingly important. Additionally, youth who are accessing employment programming often do so through a community organization rather than their school, despite the connection many youth have to the school system and the career learning that takes place there. By utilizing the education system more robustly, there is likely to be an immediate increase in access and awareness of these programs, translating to greater participation.

2. Create an immediate and low-barrier type of employment support that is highly accessible to youth with disabilities.

Removing strict eligibility requirements for employment support and allowing for self-diagnosis will lead to increased participation. This strategy could immediately and effectively remove the barrier of eligibility requirements for youth outlined by caregivers in the survey results. It is also important to provide caregivers and youth with support in a variety of forms (i.e. virtual, in person, one on one). Different delivery methods can represent an additional barrier for youth to accessing support, making it important to provide them with easy access to the method that works best for them.

3. Expand on the current supports that are offered through employment programs by adding life skill building, job-specific skill building and mental health support. In addition to this, support needs to become more personalized to the recipient as well as ongoing, including post-job placement.

Caregivers have emphasized numerous barriers youth with disabilities face in the job search process. These barriers show the importance of not only providing youth with disabilities with access to employment support, but also making sure this support leads to positive outcomes. Some of the employment-related skills that caregivers believed were more useful to their youth included support with resume writing and interview skills, support with the job search process, and support with setting employment goals. Additional best practices identified in the survey include personalized, ongoing support and job-specific skill development. Additional improvements recommended by caregivers focused on the development of life skills and helping youth cope with mental health challenges.

4. Minimize the intimidation and difficulties surrounding the job search by ensuring particular attention is focused on supporting youth throughout the process. Personalize the job search process to the individual receiving support to ensure they find a job that is suitable for their skills, desires and capabilities. Focus support on helping youth and employers better communicate with one another to ensure job placements are a positive fit for both.

Based on the survey results, caregivers would prefer a more personalized approach to the job search process that is responsive to their youth's individual needs. According to caregivers, the top barriers identified for their youth during job search included being intimidated by the job search process (66%), difficulty finding an accommodating job (57%) and difficulty with the job search process (46%). Increased support from employment service providers can help to minimize these barriers for youth with disabilities.

It is also important that service providers help to close the gap in communication between youth with disabilities and employers. The survey found that employers often do not thoroughly understand the skills, abilities and needs of their young employees, leading to incorrect assumptions and unrealistic expectations. At the same time, youth with disabilities had challenges effectively communicating their own skills, abilities, and needs. It is important for service providers to help bridge this gap by implementing strategies and approaches to better engage youth and employers with one another.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The data was imported into the open-source data analysis software, R. This software was used to analyze relationships between groups of respondents and different survey themes (e.g., top barriers to accessing employment support for youth of caregivers living in a certain regions of BC). Relationships were coded and analyzed based on the percentage of caregivers from a specific category who had chosen each answer.

The validity of relationships was tested using chi-squares. Relationships with a value greater than zero were considered valid. The statistical significance of relationships was tested using two methods: chi-squares and Fisher's test. Both methods were used to ensure confidence in the accuracy of results. A p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

While most relationships analyzed were statistically significant, some were not. Therefore, we also performed cross-tabulation analysis using SurveyMonkey's Crosstabs feature. This allowed us to focus in on more details. For example, caregivers whose youth were connected to a system (e.g., government care) were likelier to have accessed an employment program. All relationships analyzed were valid and provide valuable insight into how youth experience the employment journey from the caregiver perspective.

CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIPS AND STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The table on the next page shows the validity and statistical significance of relationships overall from the caregiver survey data. As some of the various sub-groups of caregiver respondents were too small to test for statistical significance (e.g., there were only 2 caregivers of newcomer/refugee youth), several of the overall relationships in the report did not emerge as statistically significant. Therefore, while we have reported on these relationships as being of interest, we caution against drawing causational conclusions. A bigger and more representative sample of caregivers of youth with disabilities could potentially give more concrete information.

For more information on the statistical analysis of survey data please contact: **youthstratresearch@uvic.ca.**

RELATIONSHIP *(IN THE ORDER THEY APPEAR ON THE REPORT)*	CHI-SQUARE	VALIDITY	P-VALUES *FOR CHI-SQUARE TEST*	FISHER'S TEST P-VALUE	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Disability and Current Employment Status	23.604	Yes	0.1684	0.1489	No
Overall Age and Current Employment Status	9.3505	Yes	0.4056	0.3743	No
Region and Current Employment Status	14.827	Yes	0.251	0.1729	No
Equity-deserving groups and current employment status	7.6634	Yes	0.8108	0.7801	No
Experience in govt care/the youth justice system and current employment status	4.8681	Yes	0.5608	0.5887	No
Region type and employment status	4.6468	Yes	0.1996	0.2254	No
Equity-deserving group and employment program access	4.3943	Yes	0.3553	0.3378	No
Experience in government care/the justice system and employment program access	3.1325	Yes	0.2088	0.2289	No
Disability type and employment program access	20.297	Yes	0.002452	0.001499	Yes
Education level and employment program access	26.098	Yes	0.0004838	0.000995	Yes
Employment status and employment program access	24.4	Yes	0.0000206	0.0004998	Yes
Disability status and employment program helpfulness	15.692	Yes	0.2058	0.1434	No
Equity-deserving identity and employment program helpfulness	6.9875	Yes	0.538	0.4548	No

A deeper dive into the data revealed that the following relationships were statistically significant. They were analysed using cross-tabulations of variables (e.g., Age vs. Current Employment Status). These relationships were calculated with a 95% confidence interval and a p-value of less than 0.05. This means that the difference between the two variables reported in the following relationships have a less than 5% probability of occurring by chance or sampling error alone.

OVERALL RELATIONSHIP	SPECIFIC RELATIONSHIP	KEY TAKEAWAYS
Community Affiliation and Current Employment Status	**23.68%** of caregivers whose youth were LGBTQIA2S+ were not working	**Caregivers whose youth identified as LGBTQIA2S+, Indigenous, and RPOC were likelier to not be currently working.**
	35.48% of caregivers whose youth were Indigenous were not working.	
	36.67% of caregivers whose youth were racialized/person of colour were not working.	
Experience Barriers and Current Employment Status	**34.78%** of caregivers whose youth had experience in government care were not working	**Caregivers of youth who had experiences in government care and the justice system, were also likelier not to be currently working**
	23.68% of caregivers whose youth had experience of the justice system were not working.	
Age and Current Employment Status	**31.43%** 31.43% of caregivers whose youth are between 15-18 also stated their youth were working part-time	**Caregivers of youth between 15-23 were likelier to be working part-time or not working.**
	41.43% of caregivers whose youth are between 19-23 and whose youth are also working part-time	
	56.48% of caregivers whose youth are between 15-18 are not working	
	19.44% of caregivers whose youth are between 19-23 are not working	

Experience Barriers and Employment Program Access	**58.17%** of caregivers whose youth were in government care had accessed an employment program	**Caregivers whose youth were connected to a system (e.g. government care) were also likelier to have accessed an employment program.**
	65.79% of caregivers whose youth had experience of the justice system had accessed an employment program.	
Experience Barriers and Employment Program Help	**52.17%** of caregivers whose youth were in government care and had accessed an employment program had found employment support helpful	**Caregivers whose youth were connected to a system and who had accessed employment programs were likelier to find employment support helpful.**
	47.13% of caregivers whose youth had experience of the justice system had accessed an employment program had found employment support helpful	

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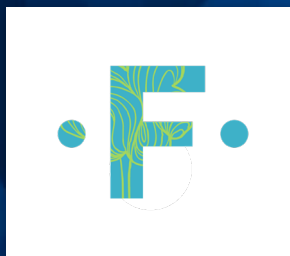
ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER TRAINING (ASPECT)

BC ABORIGINAL NETWORK ON DISABILITY SOCIETY (BCANDS)

DIVERSECITY

FOUNDRY BC

IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BC

INCLUSION BC

INCLUSION LANGLEY

JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S GROUP