

# ESCALATOR

**JOB**S FOR YOUTH FACING BARRIERS

**REACHING THE NEXT  
LEVEL OF OPPORTUNITY:  
PROGRESS REPORT  
2015**



**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**



**CivicAction**  
Greater Toronto CivicAction • Alliance

# LAYING THE FOUNDATION: A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR OF ESCALATOR & CEO OF CIVICACTION

Youth unemployment is a global problem. Around the world today 1 in 4 youth are not in education, employment or training. While this issue has global roots, it has local economic, social, and personal implications.

Toronto remains an economic powerhouse. This city alone generates 45% of Ontario's GDP and we have the top market potential in North America. And yet, in many cases, this outlook is not reflected for our youth. As many as 83,000 youth in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) are not in education, employment or training. Many face multiple barriers and are not tapped into the tremendous prosperity and potential of the region. While our youth unemployment numbers are high across the board, they are even higher for certain groups of young people who face multiple barriers to entry into the workforce.

In 2013, CivicAction worked to understand the magnitude of this challenge and identify solutions that would be sustainable, scalable, and engage the private sector. In September 2014, CivicAction launched the second phase of *Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers*. As a part of this phase, we initiated three pilot projects to open up access to skills training, mentoring, and employment opportunities for youth facing barriers. Our multi-sector Champions Council supported these pilots, giving their time and expertise to move these projects from ideas to actions. In just one year, these pilots have effectively engaged private sector companies, brought job opportunities into the open, trained youth and community workers to leverage online tools, closed the skills gap by helping to establish a proven employer-designed training and internship program, and created a scalable model to connect youth with role models in a coordinated way. This report captures our lessons from this phase of work and the impact we've seen so far.

Our work is not done. Our pilot projects have begun to show great results, but it will take the sustained investment and engagement of many partners to scale up to meet the need. CivicAction has sowed the seeds for ongoing multi-sector collaboration on this issue for the GTHA and set the conditions for continued impact.

As the Government of Ontario looks to replicate this model in other communities, Escalator offers some helpful lessons in how to effectively engage cross-sector leadership. Building private sector-led infrastructure, creating opportunities for senior leaders to contribute, and engaging committed pilot lead organizations with an interest in sustaining and scaling their work were some of the approaches undertaken in this work which contributed to the overall success of the initiative.

Looking forward, CivicAction will drive action on persistent gaps in the landscape. Arm in arm with private sector partners, we will continue to convene leaders to reduce barriers to employment and ensure best practices are shared among professionals with similar challenges and opportunities in their respective sectors.

On behalf of CivicAction, we'd like to thank our partners for their commitment to opening up opportunities to young people facing barriers in our region. In particular, thank you to the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services for helping to drive real change and catalyze action on this important issue.

Sincerely,



**Zabeen Hirji**  
Chief Human Resources Officer, RBC  
Chair, Escalator  
Board Member, CivicAction



**Sevaun Palvetzian**  
CEO, CivicAction



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“This project is an example of what CivicAction does best: build local consensus and get people from all walks of life working for a common goal.”**

Carol Goar, *Toronto Star*, “Civic leaders tackle youth unemployment,” 11 Sept 2014

## 1.0 CivicAction and Escalator

For over a decade, CivicAction has played the role of neutral sandbox, bringing together senior executives and rising leaders from all sectors to tackle challenges facing the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). CivicAction builds partnerships and takes action through campaigns, programs and organizations that transform our region.

*Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers to Employment* emerged from a unique partnership among government, community, and the private sector to identify ways the private sector could contribute to tackling unemployment among youth facing barriers. Stakeholders, including leaders in the private sector, expressed a belief that business had a stronger role to play in supporting employment opportunities for young people who face multiple barriers.

The 2014 report *Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers* proposed a series of ten recommendations to enhance opportunities for young people facing barriers to employment. We prioritized four of these actions:

1. Established a regional youth mentorship coordinating body;
2. Establish an initial employer-designed training and internship program;
3. Engage small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to share entry-level recruitment opportunities with multi-barriered youth; and
4. Increase transparency of the labour market by leveraging technology solutions.

We implemented three pilots addressing these actions. This report summarizes work undertaken during this phase of the initiative to:

- > **Establish a Private Sector Led Infrastructure:** We set out to engage private sector leaders in the issue of youth unemployment. By identifying potential collaborators, creating partnerships, connecting private sector leaders to pilot projects, consulting leaders

for their perspectives, and securing private sector leadership through a Champions Council, Escalator fostered many opportunities for the private sector to take a leading role.

- > **Strengthen Cross-Sector Partnership:** We set out to achieve the best results through multi-sector collaboration. We did this by facilitating partnerships between private, public, and community sector organizations and identifying opportunities to expand the reach of the initiative beyond our pilot projects.
- > **Increase Youth Opportunities:** We set out to increase and enhance opportunities in employment and mentorship for young people facing barriers. In addition to implementing our three pilot projects, we maintained strong engagement with key stakeholders – gathering and sharing lessons learned and promoting other recommendations identified in the first phase of Escalator.
- > **Develop a Transferable Model:** We set out to ensure that our efforts to move the needle for youth facing barriers to employment would be sustained over time. To do so, we worked to develop a transferable model for each of the pilot programs to contribute to their long-term sustainability and scalability. We also built a resilient private sector-led infrastructure to allow the work conducted under Escalator to continue on after the culmination of the initiative.
- > **Build and Sustain Awareness:** We set out to ensure that private and community sector organizations were aware of the issue of youth unemployment and the role that they can play in addressing this issue. Through a broad-based traditional and social media campaign, we worked to build and sustain awareness amongst key stakeholders.

## 2.0 Youth Unemployment: Why It Matters

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in our region. 83,000 young people in the GTHA are not in education, employment, or training<sup>1</sup>. Within our population of young people, certain groups experience unemployment disproportionately. We call this group youth facing barriers to employment – youth that have untapped potential but a web of barriers prevents them from finding and pursuing meaningful careers.

The cost to these youth as individuals is tremendous - young people experiencing unemployment may experience a lack of self-esteem, a lack of dignity, and a feeling of hopelessness. The cost to us as a society is monumental - the cumulative lifetime of youth who aren't in school or working was conservatively estimated at \$1 million per youth.<sup>2</sup>

## 3.0 Collaboration Across Sectors

For over a decade, CivicAction has been a strong voice for the importance of cross-sector collaboration to find and implement solutions to society's most intractable problems. We are known for our ability to bring committed and invested representation from each of these sectors to the table. As you'll read, we've brought this same approach to Escalator – and achieved promising results.

The Escalator Champions Council was one of the most important mechanisms for achieving cross-sector collaboration. A Champions Council brings senior decision-makers together to guide and build the credibility of the initiative. The Champions Council, chaired by Zabeen Hirji of RBC, represents a cross-section of leaders across the region who have stepped up to take action and help drive our priority actions.

As a result of their participation on the Council, Champions developed a strong appreciation for the important role that the private sector could play in this issue. They valued the opportunity to connect across sectors, building relationships with new organizations, and look at the issue from new perspectives. The Champions delivered the message of the importance of this issue within their own organizations and networks, mobilizing support and raising awareness. Finally, the Champions Council provided strong support and leadership to each of the pilots.

### 3.1 Why Private Sector?

The private sector has played a critical role in this phase of Escalator – and with good reason.

**It's where the jobs are.** As the source of over half of the jobs in the province, it was critical that the private sector be heavily engaged in designing

and implementing the solutions to bridge the gap for youth facing barriers.

**It's where the champions are.** A growing number of private sector organizations are recognizing the benefits of engaging in their community. From corporate social responsibility to employee engagement, the private sector is hungry for opportunities to give back to their communities in a meaningful way.

The private sector has taken up the call for action – engaging in each of the *Escalator* pilots, participating in the *Escalator* Champions Council, and looking inward for opportunities to improve outcomes for youth facing barriers.

## 4.0 Taking Action

*Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers* set out to secure private sector leadership, establish the infrastructure to support and guide the three pilots, and increase employment and mentoring opportunities for youth facing barriers to employment. The initiative has effectively engaged private sector leadership and will continue to do so as the pilots expand.

### 4.1 Pilot 1: Regional Mentorship Initiative: Connecting Youth with Role Models – netWORKS

#### Keys to Success

- **Align program design with employer goals, such as corporate social responsibility and employee engagement objectives**
- **Identify both a senior champion and a local coordinator at each employer to ensure that top-down and bottom-up support drive the program forward**
- **Manage expectations for all parties about what the program will achieve**

Recognizing the positive influence that career-oriented mentoring can have on a young person, CivicAction, in partnership with the United Way Toronto & York Region and Ten Thousand Coffees, set out to create a new model for connecting youth to role models across the region.

We established **netWORKS**, which enables youth seeking new networks and mentorship to meet professionals who are ready to roll up their sleeves and share their knowledge and experience. It is a program that exposes young people to new career possibilities and expands their networks, all while providing them and volunteer mentors with training and support to make the most of their new connections. Delivered on the foundation of an industrial-strength technology platform, **netWORKS** helps to democratize access to professional networks for

1 - CivicAction (2014). *Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers*. [http://civicaaction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/civicaaction\\_escalator\\_report\\_apr\\_16.c.single.page-from-Key-Gordon.pdf](http://civicaaction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/civicaaction_escalator_report_apr_16.c.single.page-from-Key-Gordon.pdf)

2 - Based on analysis conducted by RBC of Belfield, C.R., Levin, H.M., and Rosen, R. (2012). "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth."

3 - This number includes youth who directly attended the July 17, 2015 YouthConnect workshop.

youth facing barriers to employment. When it comes to mentoring, one size does not fit all. netWORKS incorporates a spectrum of opportunities, from group networking to one-on-one mentoring, designed to meet mentors and mentees where they are. There is high demand amongst youth for career-oriented networking and mentoring opportunities in the GTHA. That's why we've embedded an eye to scalability in every element of the netWORKS model.

#### Early Results

- > More than five employers and five community agencies will engage mentors and youth in netWORKS this fall. It is anticipated that 250 youth will participate in the first year of the program.
- > 10 youth participated in the soft launch of netWORKS in June 2015 with one private sector employer.

### 4.2 Pilot 2: Employer-Designed Training and Internships: Closing the Skills Gap

#### Keys to Success

- ↔ **Engage private sector partners early and often**
- ↔ **Map in detail the employment landscape in the field of focus**
- ↔ **Develop strong partnerships with community agencies that can refer high volumes of young people**

The IT sector has a growing demand for entry-level workers and a growing skills gap to overcome. While companies may undertake recruitment and training programs, few target or sufficiently support barriered youth. Employer-designed training is a new and innovative model that seeks to bridge this gap. These curriculums place business needs at the center of training design, ensuring candidates graduate with the skills required for success.

NPower Canada offers one such program, consisting of intensive technical skills training, professional skills training, mentorship, internship, and job placement support. To universal acclaim, the NPower Canada team developed strong private sector relationships and a scalable program design – already doubling the number of youth in their second cohort, launched in June 2015.

#### Early Results

- > 100% of class 1 graduates are now employed or pursuing further education.
- > With the second cohort, the program doubled in size, reaching 62 young people.

### 4.3 Pilot 3: Transparency of the Job Market: Connecting the Dots Between Supply and Demand & Engaging SMEs: Bringing Job Opportunities into the Open

#### Keys to Success

- ↔ **Find partners that reach a wide spectrum of employers and are accessible to young people facing barriers to employment**
- ↔ **Design around systemic leverage points – identify those individuals and organizations that can exponentially grow small investments in capacity building**
- ↔ **Overlay technology solutions for employers on top of strong relationships with community agencies**

Online platforms like LinkedIn are an increasingly important tool for employers in their hiring and recruiting efforts. In spite of this change in hiring practices, our approaches to educating young people on how to find jobs and market themselves to potential employers haven't quite caught up.

On the demand side, we know that small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up a significant proportion of the job market – almost 9 in 10 private sector jobs in Ontario. Yet, just like barriered youth, many of their job opportunities remain hidden.

Before youth facing barriers can access job opportunities, they need to have a compelling professional presence online. In partnership with LinkedIn Canada, CivicAction identified an opportunity to "train-the-trainer" – training youth workers on how to use tools like LinkedIn to enhance access to the labour market for the young people they serve.

To enhance SME's access to talent and to bring opportunities for youth facing barriers into the open, CivicAction identified an opportunity to encourage SMEs to post their job opportunities online and to connect with youth-serving agencies to source talent.

#### Early Results

- > 209 staff representing 77 community agencies attended LinkedIn workshops.
- > They estimate they can teach the content they learned to over 2,500 youth by December 2015.
- > 197 youth have created or updated their LinkedIn profiles.<sup>3</sup>
- > 86% of employers say participating in this pilot has increased their capacity to connect with youth.

## 5.0 Moving the Model Forward

Throughout this phase of *Escalator*, CivicAction has been conscious of the need to build long term capacity to address the issue of youth unemployment. During this phase of *Escalator*, CivicAction has raised the profile of this issue, expanding the community of committed individuals and organizations who are putting up their hand to make a difference in the lives of youth facing barriers to employment.

Given these important signs of new leadership in this area, it is time for CivicAction to transfer leadership of the pilots to the appropriate organizations, supported by key partners. To inform the transferable model, CivicAction has consulted with 16 private sector organizations.

Moving forward, CivicAction will continue to provide a platform for collaboration and mutual support among our pilots and the partners that are supporting them. We will foster opportunities for Champions Council members to work more closely with the pilots and activities with which they are most closely affiliated, rather than renew the table in its current form.

CivicAction will also work to identify gaps in the landscape that are not currently being addressed and initiate creative strategies to tackle them. We will continue to call attention to the barriers

that employers create, often unintentionally. We aim to convene private sector leaders to make sure they are playing an active role opening doors and creating pathways into their organizations, and we will tap into their learning to share with a broader group of employers and their human resources professionals how they can create opportunities for youth. CivicAction's next phase of work in this area will concentrate on this approach.

Building on the success of the Youth Jobs Strategy, as the Government of Ontario looks to apply lessons learned in the GTHA to other parts of the province, and as organizations expand their youth employment work, we share the following steps for developing a transferable model.

## 6.0 What's Next

We have seen amazing transformative progress over the last year of the *Escalator* initiative. Cross-sector relationships with the potential to achieve meaningful change have been established. The pilot actions are well on their way to continued success through the committed leadership of the pilot leads. Champions Council members have expressed their interest in continuing to contribute their time to guide and support the implementation of the pilots. We

***"An eminently practical effort to meet a compelling need... A great many [unemployed and barriered] young people face a future of alienation, isolation and poverty. But economic loss isn't a burden that's theirs alone to bear. Unemployment on this scale costs government, and society, billions. When tens of thousands of young people are excluded from job opportunities, companies are deprived of a deep labour pool, leading to costly skills shortages. So reaching out to jobless youth is in everyone's interest."***

Editorial Board, *Toronto Star*, "CivicAction's plan for unemployed youth warrants strong business and government support," 8 Sept 2014



look forward to seeing how this investment in the future of our young people will generate returns to the region for generations to come.

That being said, as a region, our work is not done. Young people facing barriers to employment remain among the most vulnerable in our society and the responsibility rests on all of us to make the changes that will meaningfully impact their lives.

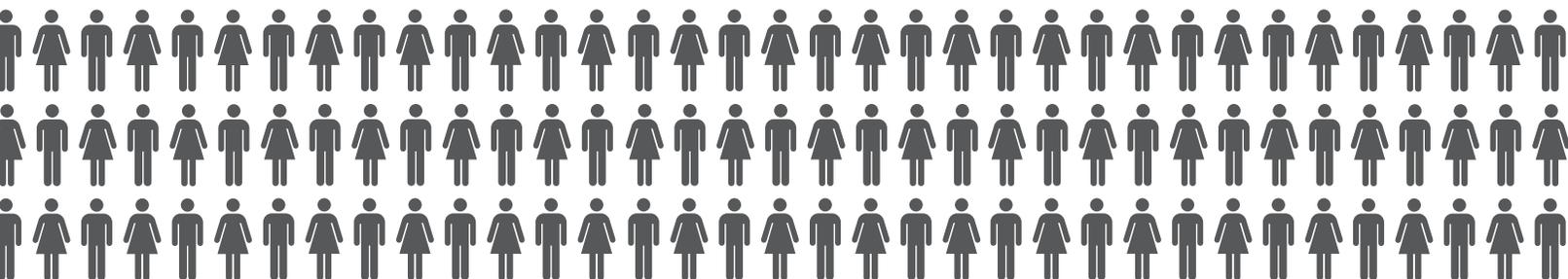
Many organizations are accelerating their leadership in this area - either through the initiation of new initiatives to address the needs of youth facing barriers to employment or by enhancing existing youth strategies to take a private-sector demand-led focus. For example, the provincial government has renewed the Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy, which will focus on skills development, labour market connections, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Given these important signs of new leadership in this area, it is time for CivicAction to identify gaps in the landscape that are not currently being addressed and initiate creative strategies to tackle them. We know that there are many business leaders who are interested in being part of the solution, yet there remains a gap between their interest and their readiness to take action. These organizations are looking for support and clear information on approaches that can be implemented internally. There is an opportunity to deepen our impact by working with these leaders to facilitate long-term behavior change in their organizations by identifying and removing barriers in hiring and workplace culture. To amplify our impact, we bring an industry/sector-specific lens and design a process that would allow for learning and sharing of best practices to occur between professionals with similar challenges and opportunities.

Moving forward, CivicAction will continue to shine a spotlight on this issue and the responsibility that all sectors share to create meaningful mentoring, skills development, and employment opportunities for youth.

## Steps to a Transferable Model

<b>For Private Sector Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Leverage the passion and commitment of your employees, especially millennial employees, as a resource to the community.</li> <li>&gt; Leverage senior champions and build the capacity of mid-level managers to lead relationships with youth-serving programs.</li> <li>&gt; Re-evaluate your hiring practices, such as post-secondary education requirements, to ensure you aren't missing out on qualified talent.</li> <li>&gt; For SMEs, connect with community organizations in your area. Get to know the services they provide and the youth they work with. Post your job opportunities online and share with local community organizations.</li> </ul>
<b>For Community Sector Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Engage employers in program design processes to ensure effective partnerships and long term financial sustainability.</li> <li>&gt; Promote employer-designed training programs to greater numbers of youth.</li> <li>&gt; Leverage technology and embed online tools like LinkedIn into program offerings for youth.</li> </ul>
<b>For Governments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Embrace private-sector led initiatives, and work with partners they can convene and build support across sectors.</li> <li>&gt; Seek out cross-sector collaborations to ensure that the best thinking from across industries is represented in solutions to intractable challenges.</li> <li>&gt; Ensure that skills development programs are tied to industry needs.</li> </ul>



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