Improving the School-to-Work Transitions of Youth in Canada : Key Informant Interview Report

By:

Krista Benes
Donnalee Bell
Dave Redekopp, Life-Role Development Group Ltd.

2016

CCDF ⬥ FCDC

CCDF gratefully acknowledges the support and contributions of the Advisory Committee:

- Sarah Anson-Cartwright, Director, Skills and Immigration Policies, The Canadian Chamber of Commerce
- Madeleine Barker, Director, Development Programs, RBC Royal Bank of Canada
- Barbara Bowen, Manager, Special Programs, Manitoba Aerospace HR Council
- Judy Doidge, Director, Partnerships, Social Capital Partnerships
- José Domene, Canada Research Chair in School-to-Work Transitions at the University of New Brunswick
- Kelly Hoey, Executive Director, Halton Industry-Education Council
- Trish Hennessy, Founder and Director, Ontario Office, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Riz Ibrahim, Executive Director, The Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling
- Ryan Land, Manager of Corporate Affairs, Vale Canada Ltd.
- Sophia Zhang, Strategy Lead, 10 Thousand Coffees
- Tom Zizys, Innovation Fellow, Metcalf Foundation

About the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)
CCDF is a non-profit organization that works to advance career services and the capacity of the profession to respond with empathy and skill to their clients and stakeholders in an ever-changing work environment. CCDF is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in the field of career development and works on a range of projects and specializes in areas of:

- Applied Research: Creating an evidence-base for the outcomes of career services, interventions and policies;
- Policy Consultation: Bringing policy makers and service providers together to develop policy that is attuned to the realities of service provision in the field;
- Training: Developing and delivering training courses for a range of practitioners aligned to the competencies set out in the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career
- Development Practitioners;

- Resource Development: Making career products that respond to client and practitioner needs;
- Service Capacity Building: Working with diverse partners to enrich and strengthen career services and to integrate career, community, economic and workforce development.

Citation: Benes, K., Bell, D., & Redekopp, D. (2016) Improving School-to-Work Transitions: Key Informant Interviews. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Career Development Foundation

The Canadian Career Development Foundation
119 Ross Ave Suite 202, Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 0N6 Canada
Toll-Free: 1-877-729-6164
Tel: (613) 729-6164 Fax: (613) 729-3515
www.ccdf.ca

Table of Contents

BACKGROUND

In January and February 2016, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) conducted key informant interviews as part of the Improving the School-to-Work Transition for Youth in Canada project. This initial phase (Phase 1) of the project was intended to identify a need for further research and/or development to improve school-to-work transitions of youth. The purpose of Phase 1 was to scope the efforts to improve school-to-work, unemployment-to-employment and underemployment-to-desired employment transitions for Canadian youth and identify research/programming/policy gaps for future project considerations (Phase 2). The interviews were part this scoping and followed the completion of:

- A Summary of the Information Gathering Forms filled out by the project's 12-member Advisory Committee (AC). This form asked for the AC's input on the scope of the research, potential hypotheses, a systems map, resource, programming and literature sources, possible levers of change and key informant contact suggestions;
- A Literature Scan: Improving the School-to-Work Transitions of Youth in Canada: The literature scan reviewed 83 Canadian and international sources, including literature reviews, international meta-analyses and programming aimed at supporting school-to-work transitions for emergent themes and possible research gaps.
- A Survey of Key Informants Report: The survey report is a summary of the input from 141 key stakeholder respondents (youth 15-29, teachers, employers, career practitioners, parents and policy makers) in response to 14 qualitative questions about the root causes of poor school-to-work transitions, the groups of youth most impacted and ideas for improving stakeholder response to the issue.

All of the above helped to provide information towards answering the following questions:

- What is the broader system related to youth employment? Who are the key stakeholder groups, what is the role of each, how are they connected, does a policy framework (national, provincial) exist and, if so, is it working to support youth employment, what are the existing networks, and where are the constraints and opportunities within this system?
- Where are the levers of change (government policy, industry policy, certification systems, associations or sector councils, education bodies, business groups, career development organizations, parents) and what are the barriers to implementation? What are promising practices that improve outcomes?

- What are the existing career education programs, policies and practices for different youth populations: school leavers, secondary-school graduates, PSE leavers and PSE graduates? What is the evidence base for these?
- What are the common principles/elements of successful programs, policies and practices and can these be scaled, ported to different jurisdictions and/or adapted to diverse groups of youth? If so, what is the best approach?

METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

The purpose of the key informant interviews was to serve as a final check on the findings of the other research conducted to this point. Namely, we asked the key informant interviewees: Is what we are seeing in the literature and hearing from the stakeholder survey respondents connecting with what they are seeing in their work and efforts to support effective youth transitions?

Contacts for the key informant interviews were gathered from the project's Advisory Committee, the survey respondents, the literature scan and the project team's own network. For the list of interviewees, we asked the Advisory Committee and survey respondents for people that we defined as champions – policy-makers, educators, workforce developers, social innovators that have developed and worked on projects that have brought together a number of stakeholders to successfully impact school-to-work[1] transitions of youth or whom have created significant social change through their efforts on parallel initiatives (e.g. mental health). A total of 80 key informants were identified with the hopes of finding at least 10 individuals to interview. We started narrowing the list by first looking at name repetition (i.e. counting how many times someone was being recommended by the Advisory Committee and survey respondents). We then took that list and narrowed it further by trying to ensure that multiple stakeholders were represented. Once we developed a short list, we did further research to find out more about each contact. Through these efforts, we compiled a list of 22 people and prioritized an order for contacting them. We contacted 15 people and interviewed 11 key informants, ranging in professional portfolios:

- Craig Foley, Program Director at United Way Calgary;
- Dr. Rob Shea, Deputy Provost and Associate Vice-President (academic) at Memorial University;
- Kathy Short, Director of the Ontario School Mental Health Assist program;
- Darrell Cole, Founder and CEO of Career Trek;
- Janet Lane, Director of the Centre for Human Capital Policy, CANWEST Foundation;
- Kelly Hoey, Executive Director of the Halton Industry Education Council;
- Michael Harris, Executive Director of the Ontario Business Education Partnership;
- Judy Doidge, Director of Social Capital Partners;
- Nancy Hoffman, Vice-President at Jobs for the Future;
- Gary Rabbior, President for The Canadian Foundation for Economic Education; and

---

[1] The term "school-to-work transition" was interpreted broadly throughout the project. We included in this term transitions of youth who have left school prior to graduation and graduates of high school and PSE.

- Deputy Minister Alexander Bezzina, Ministry of Youth and Children, Province of Ontario.

We developed an interview protocol (Appendix A) that included a description of the project, a set of questions and the following premises, which were based on the findings from the research conducted to date:

1. Youth transition issues are not *primarily* the result of poor or non-existent policy, programs or resources. Rather, issues occur because of poor execution of available policy, programs and resources and/or limited availability of policy, programs and resources in certain areas. In other words, it appears as if the central tools needed to support transitions exist and, for the most part, are available.
2. A significant precursor to poor execution is the lack of perceived accountability among all stakeholder groups. Educators, employers, social service providers, parents and youth may not know their roles, may not wish to perform the requirements of their roles, or may not see themselves as having a role in school-to-work transitions. In many cases, each seems to look to others to blame for the transition issues.

All interviewees received the protocol prior to the interview and were asked to consider their response to the two premises prior to the interview. Each interviewer (n=3) began with the same question for each interviewee:

> First, we'd like to ask for your immediate impression of our preliminary findings; that execution is the main issue, and it is an issue because of lack of engagement and accountability by the involved stakeholders. How does this fit with your experience?

Depending if they agreed or disagreed with the above premises, interviewees were asked a different set of questions pertaining to their response. The interviews were conversational in nature with the questions serving as a guideline for the discussion. Not all interviewees were asked or responded to each question listed in the protocol. The interviews were approximately an hour in length.

Although all interviewees were comfortable with having their names listed as a key informant, a few were less comfortable with their name being attributed to a particular quote. For this reason, we have chosen not to attribute any questions to a particular interviewee in this report.

FINDINGS

Although many of the key informants agreed that implementation was a key issue, about 64% (7 of 11) felt it was not necessarily the only issue impacting on poor school-to-work transitions of youth. Those who somewhat agreed or disagreed with our premises said that, in their opinion, there continued to be a need for different resources, programs and policies in many areas of the country where existing resources, programs and policies were not well suited to meet individual needs. Although many interviewees qualified their response to the initial question in this way, all interviewees came back to systemic and execution issues repeatedly throughout the interviews more often than mentioning specific programs, resources and policy requirements missing from the school-to-work landscape. Overall, the issues raised in the key informant interviews can be divided into two themes:

1. Systemic and execution issues getting in the way of effective school-to-work transitions; and
2. Systemic and execution changes needed to support better transitions.

We also asked the key informants for their perspective on possible research questions for Phase 2 of the project and if, in their opinion, the focus of Phase 2 should be on a particular target audience or if the focus should be on systems issues. Their responses to these questions follow the thematic discussion.

Theme 1: Systemic and Execution Issues Getting in the Way of Effective School-to-Work Transitions

Whether they initially agreed with our premise that systemic and execution issues are getting in the way of effective school-to-work transitions, several key informants highlighted problems at this level. This section of the report outlines a number of systemic and execution issues around access to career guidance, career education, resources, polices, programs and provincial and federal funding processes that are negatively impacting young people's transitions.

- **Young people are not getting the career development supports they need to make informed career decisions.**

  It was widely acknowledged by key informants that young people are not getting the career education and guidance they need to make effective transitions. One key informant said, "We have no assurance that (in the current system) a young person who graduates from Grade 12 has received the support to build the necessary skills for career decision-making."

Key informants talked about the "chaotic" nature of the labour market and that approaches to career education in school have not "kept up" with the changing nature of the labour market that youth are entering. Key informants also mentioned that "we" have devised an approach to career education that is both too little and too late. Many interviewees said that career education cannot only be discussed in a compulsory Grade 10 career class. One interviewee said, "The grade 10 course is the most failed course in the entire curriculum." Several interviewees (8) talked about the need to integrate career education throughout the curriculum in elementary school. To this point, one interviewee said, "Career education needs to be integrated throughout your years in school. By the time you reach Grade 12 you should have a clear indication of your career decisions and what has led up to those decisions. Career education needs to be inherent in the education of all students."

Key informants also highlighted the need for increased opportunities to participate in workplace-based and/or experiential learning beginning in the K-12 system and continuing into post-secondary. As an extension of this point, one key informant felt that young people need to develop core career management skills in the classroom because current guidance counsellor-to-student ratios are too high for guidance counsellors to support career education in schools and "employers don't help you develop your career." This key informant argued that "We need to teach kids in kindergarten that they are going to be entrepreneurs – not necessarily owning a business, but that they need to be able to apply the skills of an entrepreneur to their careers."

Key informants also pointed to the need for all educators and guidance counsellors to have access to professional development training in career education so that they can be supporting young people with career decisions. One key informant said, "We talk about the career myth (one job for life), but teachers have lived this career myth. We have a system where those leading the career conversation have a very narrow view of careers." For this reason, many interviewees raised the point that they believe that the education system overly pressures students to attend university and this preferred pathway minimizes alternative pathways to employment such as entrepreneurship or self-employment. In the absence of "good career advice," one key informant said, "young people are spending a lot of money, time and energy on their first degree, only to return for further schooling that better matches their career interests." Another key informant echoed this comment and pointed to Cathy Campbell's work on "navigating with uncertainty" as a good resource to support educators in learning more about career development in the 21st century.

- **Career education, resources, programs and policies are not equally available or effective for all students, even when great curriculum/resources/programs/policies exist.**

  Some key informants argued that implementation and execution issues exist because programs and policies were not designed with the whole person in mind. Rather, programs and policies are designed with a "one size fits all" approach. Individuals who are most at-risk of not making successful school-to-work transitions (e.g. persons with a disability, Indigenous youth and low-income youth) are often left out of this approach. One key informant said, "There are some areas in Canada with an abundance of career development resources, but other areas, like on reserves for example, where even just casual role models are in short supply." There is a need, key informants said, to map what is available and for whom in order to determine who has access and who does not and what can and should be done to "level the playing field."

  Key informants also talked about the need for looking at the individual as a whole person in terms of policy. One key informant argued that although:

  > Yes, it is true that we have lots of policies… the policies that are in place are fragmented across a number of different sectors – we are not looking at youth as a whole person; we are looking at them as a recipient of a program and assume we know their needs. We know that youth "who are not making it" have a number of intersecting issues and unless programs and policies attend to the whole person, success is going to be limited.

  The need for policy and programming to consider having wrap-around supports tailored to individual need came up several times across the interviews.

- **The funding process is a source of frustration to community-based organizations delivering employment services, and contributes to gaps in service for youth.**

  We heard from key informants that accountability and application requirements for provincial and federal funding have become increasingly onerous. Informants also expressed frustration with short-term (e.g. 1-2 years) grants and the length of time that they are left awaiting funding approvals. Many stated that the funding process can lead to gaps or interruptions in service for clients (including youth) and leave organizations in a difficult financial position. This has resulted in the loss of talent as staff members are not waiting for the program to get off the ground before finding other work. One key informant said:

  > It can take up to 6 months to get funding reinstated for no other reason than bureaucratic ones. In the interim, what ends up happening is that entire infrastructure

for a program is gone; people leave and organizations are left hanging. They have leases, other commitments related to the program and they are left saying, hey, I'm not going to reapply in the future. We can't operate programs at a loss.

Key informants also talked about their frustration in seeing reincarnations of previous programs/tools/resources, just repackaged and reframed to fit new shorter funding terms. One key informant stated that a commitment to funding programs over the long-term "is an investment in nurturing organizations to deliver programs in such a way that they can achieve excellence. It allows organizations the time to plan and provides continuity for programs and services." We also heard that even programs with good evaluative data demonstrating impact struggle to obtain funding so that they can increase the number of young people they serve.

Theme 2: Systemic and Execution Changes Needed to Support Better Transitions

It was clear from the key informant interviews that there are a number of systemic and execution issues getting in the way of young people's school to work transitions. This section speaks to the changes needed for all stakeholders, including employers, educators, parents, career practitioners, youth, and federal and provincial governments, to play a role and share responsibility for improving school-to-work transitions.

- **Stakeholders must work collaboratively to better support school-to-work transitions.**

  All but one of the interviewees felt that there is an urgent need for stakeholders to work together to support school-to-work transitions. One said, "It's the willingness to drop down silo thinking and look at the issue itself to see and say, who are the parties we need to have at the table and how do we all play our part seamlessly in order to help young people?"

  Many key informants stated that to get stakeholders to work together, they will have to be less competitive and more collaborative. To do this successfully, one key informant stated, "We need all stakeholders to understand how dire the situation is, and to not only see that they have a responsibility to help, but also have something to gain from getting involved." One key informant stated that "although everyone wants to see young people succeed, to get people to take action they have to be able to see that they are part of the solution and what the benefits are to them."

  Key informants pointed to a number of successful partnerships with stakeholders to address better school-to-work transitions, including McDonald's and British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Siemens Canada and five post-secondaries in Southern Ontario, the All in for Youth Program through United Way in Calgary, the Mental Health Assist Program in Ontario, Career Trek in Manitoba, Pathways to Prosperity Network being implemented in 11 US states, Cornwall, Ontario's Supply Chain Hub, and the former Job Connect Program in Ontario. Many informants also talked about the need for collective action models that are supporting the development of such partnerships, and mentioned wanting more programming and policies to be developed through approaches like collective impact, implementation science and social enterprise models.

- **Clearly defined roles are key; motivation to act on the role is crucial**

  Educators: "We need an education system that accepts responsibility to share the role of preparing young people for transition to the world of work".

One informant asked "What is the role of schools? Is it to graduate kids? Is that the marker of success?" To which, another key informant emphatically stated that "We need a clear line of responsibility of the education system as a key stakeholder in this to be able to have clear outcomes in terms of preparing young people for the world of work."

All key informants felt that schools and educators have a key role in supporting education-to-employment transitions. Five key informants pointed to the restrictive nature of curriculum requirements within the education system as a key barrier to educators integrating career education into the curriculum and called for a re-examination of the education systems mandate. Informants suggested that unless the education system shifts their focus from course requirements toward the competencies that young people are graduating with; youth will continue to struggle. One key informant stated that "If kids do not come out of school knowing what they can do, how that applies to the workforce, or what they need to get into the workforce, then we, as educators, have done them a disservice." Two key informants applauded the new approach being taken by the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. Both Alberta and BC have taken steps to overhaul their education systems to shift from an input model to an output focus in their curriculum.

In terms of motivators, key informants felt that in order to integrate career education/support transitions, educators need to have something "taken off their plates." One informant said that we need to present this as a mental health issue to educators as it is "increasingly becoming apparent that youth are overly stressed about their futures."

Employers: "They need to re-examine their social contract with potential and existing young hires."
All but one of the key informants saw a role for employers in supporting better school-to-work transitions and felt they needed to be "far more active." One key informant said, "Employers need to know that part of their job is to help young people develop workplace skills, and the workplace is the only place you can learn this." Another informant said, "We've babied and coddled employers – it's time for them to step up, identify the skills they need and help develop these and help schools develop these."

Key informants acknowledged that many employers were aware of the benefits of training new workers, but that they are either too busy to train or not busy enough. We also heard that employers face too much financial pressure to meet quarterly targets to be able to focus on the long term payoff of supporting and training new young workers. One key informant stated, "In order to change employers' hiring and training practices we need to appeal to their social and corporate responsibility and help them to see the advantages of longevity in their staff."

"We need," one key informant suggested, "to talk about the economic benefit of helping kids to transition." Another key informant stated that, "Industry wants to work with kids; they want their innovative ideas and this intersection of kids wanting to know more about work opportunities and where employers want to know more about the ideas of kids might be where the win-win can happen." This same informant suggested that what has worked to increase employer involvement for him/her was to allow employers to choose their desired role and to help them do it. For him/her, relationship development is key to supporting employer involvement in education to employment transitions.

Career Practitioners: "We need to first get our own house in order."
We heard from key informants that most people don't come to the career development field with a degree in career development, so understanding what career development is and why it's important can vary greatly. Key informants spoke to the importance of developing a common language and understanding for career development, both inside and outside of the field. One informant noted that "If we can't get our own house in order it's unlikely we're going to be able to convince other people to come to our party."

Youth and Parents: "We need to manage expectations."
The key informants concentrated their responses to questions of the role for the stakeholders to educators, employers and career practitioners. Only two key informants mentioned roles for parents and youth in supporting education to employment transitions. One of the two informants who spoke to the role of parents said that "most kids get their direction from parents, but I'm not sure that parents have the resources they need to support their children." The other, who spoke of youth, said that "they need to be entrepreneurs; be in the business of themselves (to transition better)."

- **We need leadership to make it happen: We need a national dialogue to create a framework around school-to-work transitions and career development in Canada.**

A key theme highlighted in the key informant interviews was that in order to engage all stakeholders to take action, leadership is needed. Five key informants pointed to the need for government to "step forward" as a leader and investor to ignite a national dialogue on the topic. Many informants perceived governments at the federal and provincial level to have the ability to bring stakeholders together. We also heard about the importance of including champions into this discussion. "We need leading edge people working on the task of building a report on the changes that need to happen and developing a much better transition system," one informant said. Key informants pointed to several individuals and groups who are already talking about and invested in this issue, including, the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Suzanne Fortier, President of

McGill University, the Canadian Business Education Partnership, Magnet, the Business Council of Canada, the Canadian Association of Career Educators, Employers and CCDF.

Leadership is needed, we heard, because currently there is no clarity on what the system is, and many argued that there is no system. One key informant summarized this finding, saying: "We have no clear system in place; we have no clear set of responsibilities and no assurance whatsoever that a young person is going to get effective guidance or counselling related to better opportunities for employment."

A need for bringing stakeholders together to have a dialogue about the issues was an overriding theme among interviewees. One informant said, "People need a realistic picture of what is happening; what little is being done to support the development of a future workforce. We need a dialogue to start to understand how bad it is so that it can get better." One key informant suggested that, "We need a taskforce that brings in the private sector, the public sector and the post-secondary system to clearly identify roles to support transitions."

Target Audience for Phase 2 and Possible Research Questions

At the end of the interview, we asked interviewees if there was a particular audience that we should focus on and/or if they had possible research questions that would shape our approach in Phase 2 of the project. Two of the key informants were not asked this question because although their expertise was relevant to inform Phase 1 of the project, they did not specialize in school-to-work transition issues

The responses to these two final questions focussed on three themes:

- Research to better understand the experience of youth in transition,

- Research to better understand effective implementation and funding models, and,

- Strategies to improve collaboration among stakeholders to support school-to-work transitions.

Under each recommended theme for Phase 2 research, we have included interviewee suggestions for related research questions.

- ## Theme # 1: Research on Youth Experience of School-to-Work Transitions

Research Recommendation: Examine how race, class and ethnicity impact on transition success
One key informant suggested that Phase 2 of our research should focus on the impact that race, ethnicity and social class has on the outcomes of young people's school-to-work transitions.

Related Research Question: How does a young person's race, ethnicity or class impact their school-to-work transitions?

Research Recommendation: Conduct a ethnography of youth
Another key informant stated that we should apply an ethnographical approach to better understand all factors that are getting in the way of the school-to-work transitions. This information could then be used to inform program and policy development.

Related Research Questions: What is getting in the way of young people who fail to make successful transitions? What are the gaps in policy and programming around youth transitions? What are the essential elements of policies and programs that attend to the whole person? Do policies and programs that attend to the whole person have better success? How can we design policies and programs that attend to the needs of all youth (e.g. single moms, youth with addiction issues, youth with alcoholic parents, youth with disabilities etc.) to better support transitions? What supports do young people need to succeed in their school-to-work transitions?

Research Recommendation: Look at how pathways from high school impact on transition
Several key informants mentioned examining high school students as focal point for Phase 2 -- including those who leave prior to graduation, those who end their formal schooling at grade 12, those who continue on to post-secondary and those who go into apprenticeship. Informants recommended examining the experiences of each of these sub categories and how their pathways impacted their transitions to work.

Possible Research Questions: How are young people's transitions to the labour market impacted by the pathways they take after high school (including those who leave prior to graduation, those who end their formal schooling at grade 12, those who continue on to post-secondary, or those who go into apprenticeship)? Of these pathways, what are the contributing factors that prevent youth from making the transition to work?

- ## Theme #2: Implementation and Execution Factors

  Research Recommendation: Look at the impacts of effective implementation
  Seven key informants stated that there are pockets of great programs, policies and resources, but that in some regions and for some groups of youth these interventions fall short in implementation. The next phase of research could examine the role implementation plays in contributing to the uptake of new programs, policies and resources.

  Possible Research Questions: What are the essential elements of an implementation plan? How can implementation science inform the roll-out of programs, policies and resources related to school-to-work transitions to ensure equal access for all young people? Do these programs, policies and resources come with the necessary funding to support implementation?

  Research Recommendation: Examine how funding processes and procedures impact implementation
  Two key informants stated that the application process for youth employment program funding and approval procedures are a source of frustration and can contribute to gaps in service for young people. Phase 2 of the research could take a closer look, they suggested, at successful funding models (both nationally and internationally) for youth career and employment services.

  Possible Research Questions: How can the funding process be improved for youth employment service providers to ensure the continuity of programs and services for young people? What do effective funding processes for employment services look like?

- ## Theme # 3: Strategies for Successful Transitions

  Research Recommendation: Develop a national school-to-work strategy
  Four key informants stated that Phase 2 of this research should focus on the need to provide stakeholders with a national school-to-work strategy that articulates how they can work collaboratively on improving education to employment outcomes. One key informant noted that stakeholders don't have the skill sets, tools or resources in place to come together around this issue. Two of these key informants spoke of study models as an effective way to approach the issue. It was suggested by two informants that the next phase of the research could include national and international travel to learn from the models adopted by others working on improving young people's transitions.

  Possible Research Questions: What are the components of a national school-to-work strategy? What are the markers of success of an effective school-to-work framework?

What stakeholders need to be involved in its development? How does the strategy focus on the needs of all youth?

Research Recommendation: Look outside the field for models of social change that can be adapted to support strategies to improve transitions from school to work
Seven key informants stated that the focus of Phase 2 needed to include a dialogue with all stakeholders involved in school-to-work transitions. Two informants referenced models of Collective Impact as a way to support this process. Informants suggested bringing together workforce development boards, private sectors, post-secondary institutions, service delivery organizations, unions, youth representative, Chambers of Commerce, researchers around social change, government, high school representatives and others, to learn from their experiences and identify a way to move forward.

Possible Research Questions: How do other social change initiatives work with a wide variety of stakeholders? How can these models inform strategies for improving education to employment for youth? What kind of leadership is needed to start this dialogue? What are the funding models that would support these discussions?

Research Recommendation: Examine the impacts that workforce development and education-industry partnership models are having or could have in this field
One key informant spoke of the success that workforce development/industry education partnership models are having in supporting youth transitions and believed this could be a promising area of further research.

Possible Research Questions: Does the research indicate that workforce development systems and/or industry education partnerships contribute to better school-to-work transition outcomes for young people? What does effective systematic exposure to the workplace look like? What are the models of best practice?

CONCLUSION

The key informant interviews were an important step of the design phase of the project. The interviews affirmed much of what the Project Team heard from the Advisory Committee, the findings from the literature scan and the analysis of the responses from the key informant survey. The interviews acknowledged the need to look at the experience of youth especially those most vulnerable to inform policy, programming and practice aimed at improving school-to-work transitions. To this end, they identified a number of research gaps to better understand young people's transitions. Many informants agreed that implementation and execution of current policy and programming is lacking and that improvement in evaluation and funding processes is needed.

Although a number of research gaps were identified, many felt that we need to move from research to enacting the systemic change that we know is needed through an overarching strategy that maps the way forward. As such, most interviewees believed that the next phase should focus stimulating a national dialogue on the issue and the collective development of a national strategy on school-to-work transitions. "It's time," one informant said, "for the rubber to hit the road!"

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

FINAL Version: January 18, 2016

Premises

1. Youth transition issues are not *primarily* the result of poor or non-existent policy, programs or resources. Rather, issues occur because of poor execution of available policy, programs and resources and/or limited availability of policy, programs and resources in certain areas. In other words, it appears as if the central tools needed to support transitions exist and, for the most part, are available.
2. A significant precursor to poor execution is the lack of perceived accountability among all stakeholder groups. Educators, employers, social service providers, parents and youth may not know their roles, may not wish to perform the requirements of their roles, or may not see themselves as having a role in school-to-work transitions. In many cases, each seems to look to others to blame for the transition issues.

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We are studying youth transitions from school-to-work, post-secondary education-to-work, unemployment-to-work and underemployment-to-better employment. Our investigations thus far have pointed to a plethora of policies, programs and resources to address transitions, but an absence of reliable execution or consistent and wide delivery of these policies, programs and resources.

In other words, there is a lot available (perhaps more readily available in some provinces/territories than others), but it is not effectively implemented, resourced, or utilized, or implementation is limited in terms of the numbers that have access to these programs, tools and resources.

The players in the system have what they need to play their part. There is no over-arching framework, however, that encourages them to play their parts, play their parts well, or adjust their parts as other players adjust theirs.

Questions

1. First, I'd like to ask for your immediate impression of our preliminary findings; that execution is the main issue, and it is an issue because of lack of engagement and accountability by the involved stakeholders. How does this fit with your experience?

Ask the following if the "execution and accountability" concept lines up with the informant's view:

2. How can we, as a country, get the various players to take responsibility for their part of youth transitions, and then actually do their part effectively? In other words, what is needed to change the various players' engagement and investment in youth transition issues?
3. What instances or contexts have you seen in which various stakeholders worked together to deliver policy, programs or resources successfully? How did they mobilize the group to work towards a common issue or cause? (Please don't restrict yourself to the youth employment issue when thinking about these)? What made these different than the norm?
4. What are the key elements needed to successfully engage/mobilize all stakeholders to implement policy, programs and resources? Where/with whom would you start? What would you do next to change Canada's overall approach?
5. What barriers to engagement/mobilization would be overcome by the elements/steps you've just described, and what barriers would remain?
6. What else do you think we need to know that will help us determine the next best action or inquiry to make progress on this issue? (Go to #11)

Ask the following if the informant disagrees with the premise:

7. If the delivery of policy, programs or resources is not the primary issue, what do you see the main factor or factors at play?
8. How is this factor a problem? (How are these factors a problem?)
9. Where have you seen this factor/these factors you just described working successfully? In which contexts or jurisdictions?
10. Given your understanding of the cause(s) of transition difficulties, what would you recommend in terms of a next step and/or further research?

Ask the following of all informants:

11. Who else do you know who would be particularly well suited to discuss this issue with us?
12. Assuming this project carries on into Phase 2, and we explore the issues we've just discussed, who should be the primary audience of the Phase 2 results/product? Who should we target?