

# Building Youth Resiliency and Community Vitality within Montreal's English Language Population

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The YES Experience with Youth seeking to Improve  
their Work Situation

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April 2013

**Contents**

- 1. Introduction ..... 2
  - The Problem of Youth Unemployment ..... 2
  - This Report: Youth Employment Services (YES) Montreal ..... 4
    - An Internet based Survey of YES Clients: ..... 4
    - Key Informant Interviews: ..... 4
    - A Statistical Profile of English speaking Youth using the Canadian Census (2006): ..... 5
- 2. Key Characteristics of English-speaking Youth of the Montreal Area ..... 6
  - The Size and Proportion of Quebec`s English-speaking Youth ..... 6
  - Youth within a Cultural Minority Characterized by Cultural Diversity..... 6
  - Labour Force Participation and Education ..... 7
  - Income and Household Arrangements ..... 8
  - Mobility Patterns..... 9
  - Access to English language Services..... 10
  - Summary ..... 11
- 3. The YES Experience with the Mental Health Challenges of Unemployed and Underemployed Youth..... 13
  - The Clients..... 13
  - Transition-related Mental Health Needs of YES Youth ..... 15
  - Health and Social Services and Montreal’s English-speaking Youth..... 16
  - Small Group Support at YES ..... 17
  - Summary ..... 19
- 4. Conclusion: Youth Resiliency and Community Vitality within Quebec’s Minority Language Population ..... 20
- 5. References ..... 21
- 6. Appendices ..... 23

# 1. Introduction

## The Problem of Youth Unemployment

There is a substantial literature demonstrating that employment is an important determinant of the quality of life and well-being of individuals both young and old not only as a source of income but also as a source of identity and social inclusion. For communities, the rise of unemployment and underemployment represents a cost in many ways including the price of an increase in social problems and decline in health status.<sup>1</sup>

While they have much in common, there are characteristics of youth unemployment that distinguish it from the patterns observed among older age groups<sup>2</sup>. For Canadian youth, prospects for work continue to diminish with the unemployment rate for people between the ages of 15 to 24 standing at 13.6% which is nearly double the national average of 7%<sup>3</sup>. Young workers have a higher likelihood of being employed under temporary contracts than older workers making them more vulnerable to layoffs during economic shifts<sup>4</sup>. The successful passage from education or training into the world of work is also an important life transition for young people in many ways. In industrialized nations like Canada, this transition tends to represent the advent of adulthood and the celebrated assumption of the rights and responsibilities that accompany economic independence, establishing a household and even family formation. Today, it is the first of many transitions between work and learning that young people may experience throughout their lives.

The first job(s) through which a young person gains entry to the workplace does not necessarily decide the type of employment they occupy in their older years but access and successful progression through the stages of work and career are related in important ways to the nature of their early life experience. Consider, for example, the young people for whom the passage from learning to work is delayed or for whom temporary joblessness becomes long-term unemployment. What about the case of the substantial number of youth for whom the passage from school to work is fraught with difficulty and for whom the highly prized life transition to adulthood it symbolizes is denied? Their difficult first transition from school to work influences not only the likelihood of access to later transitions (transitions within the workplace as well as life stages)<sup>5</sup> but also how these transitions are likely to be negotiated when they do arise.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of employment and working conditions as social determinants of health see the following: Raphael, D. (ed.) (2008) *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press; Mikkonen, J. & Raphael, D. (2010) *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. [www.theCanadianfacts.org/](http://www.theCanadianfacts.org/); WHO, *Social Determinants of Health website*, [www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/).

<sup>2</sup> The definition of youth varies across studies but generally refers to 18 to 35 years of age. Statistics Canada standard age cohorts for youth are 15-24 and 25-44 years of age.

<sup>3</sup> April Fong, *Financial Post*, in *The Ottawa Citizen*, Tuesday April 9, 2013, p.D4.

<sup>4</sup> See TD Economics Special Report "Assessing the Long Term Cost of Youth Unemployment" January 29, 2013. [http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/ms0113\\_YouthUnemp.pdf](http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/ms0113_YouthUnemp.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Community Foundations of Canada. (2012) *Generation Flux: Understanding the seismic shifts that are shaking Canada's youth*. [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca)

To borrow from the literature, unemployment can have a “scarring” effect for the youth, for their families and for the larger communities in which they reside.<sup>6</sup> Wages that are lost due to extended unemployment are unlikely to be regained, prolonged dependence upon parents may affect their life course and the intergenerational reciprocity that forms a crucial thread in our social safety net, for example the family care of vulnerable community members such as seniors, is weakened. High rates of unemployment and lowered social economic status (SES) for one generation will have a ripple effect upon others as they move through the life stages of their communities. According to a recent TD Economics report (2013) the loss of tens of thousands of youth jobs during the recession will cost Canadians \$23.1 billion in lost wages for the next 18 years.<sup>7</sup>

When the trauma of denied passage to the work world takes its toll in terms of the loss of health then the scarring of unemployment becomes psychologically and physically etched. A young person who is “not in education, employment or training” (NEET)<sup>8</sup> is more vulnerable to symptoms of poor mental health such as anxiety, psychological distress and depression than their employed counterpart<sup>9</sup> and early unemployment can contribute to health problems throughout later life.<sup>10</sup> Health related symptoms can themselves become a formidable barrier to making progress along an already tangled pathway to employment opportunity. There also tends to be a stigma of failure attached to unemployment – a stigma that can loom even larger for those with higher levels of education.<sup>11</sup>

Recommendations for solving the complex problem of youth unemployment and underemployment are being proposed in Canada and industrialized nations worldwide. Among them are recommendations for change in government policy, solutions to the rise of the dual labour market, strategies for economic development and entrepreneurship and approaches to improving the bridge between education, training and the job market. Importantly, adequate frontline services to support young people through this difficult period of transition and assist them in finding employment are seen as an essential part of any multi-level and multi-sectoral solution. There is increasing recognition of the importance of localized activation strategies that focus on job-search, good targeting, mentoring and “engaging the young person at an individual

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<sup>6</sup> “Economic research indicates that a period of unemployment at the time of entry into the labour market is associated with persistently lower wages for many years thereafter” Martin Schwerdtfeger, TD Economist as interviewed at <http://brighterlife.ca> February 4 2013. See also Gregg, P. & Tominey, E. (2005). “The wage scar from male youth unemployment”. *Labour Economics*, 12:487-509.

<sup>7</sup> See TD Economics Special Report *Assessing the Long Term Cost of Youth Unemployment*. January 29, 2013. [http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/ms0113\\_YouthUnemp.pdf](http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/ms0113_YouthUnemp.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Youth who are neither enrolled in school nor employed are referred to by the acronym 'NEET.' The NEET concept emerged in the 1990s when jobless, out-of-school youth in several European countries were considered at risk of becoming discouraged and disengaged. This indicator is now regularly produced by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

<sup>9</sup> Sissons, P. and Jones, K. (2012) *Lost in Transition? The changing labour market and young people not in employment, education or training*. [www.theworkfoundation.com](http://www.theworkfoundation.com)

<sup>10</sup> Hammarstrom, A and Janlert, U. (2002). “Early unemployment can contribute to adult health problems”. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 56: 624-630.

<sup>11</sup> Fares, J. and Tiongson, E. (2007) *Youth Unemployment, Labour Market Trends and Scarring*. 2007 World Development Report. The World Bank.

level rather than broad brush strokes” (whether addressing housing issues, confidence levels , health or access to social support)<sup>12</sup>.

### **This Report: Youth Employment Services (YES) Montreal**

Youth Employment Services (YES) is a not-for-profit organization located in Montreal that provides job search services, training and networking opportunities to Quebec’s English-speaking youth. YES also has entrepreneurship programs and offers business skills to artists of all ages.

In response to an increase in the number of clients’ experiencing mental health challenges in the course of their job search YES (through CHSSN) has commissioned this report to establish an evidence-based profile of the youth that they serve. At the present time, YES uses limited resources to offer additional support through a focus group that is designed for clients who are experiencing symptoms such as decreased motivation, anxiety, social isolation and diminished confidence in dealing with the transition process. YES seeks to gain a better understanding of

- the needs of their clientele with respect to mental health challenges they are experiencing in the course of their search for employment,
- the impact of these challenges on their lives and on the work counselling process at YES,
- satisfaction with support group services offered at YES and
- the general state of the English-language resources available to Montreal youth for their mental health through the public health and social service system.

Three types of data collection have been used in assembling the evidence-base provided by this report. These include an internet-based survey, key informant interviews and a statistical profile of English-speaking youth of the greater Montreal area. For the purpose of this report the findings from all three lines of evidence will be drawn upon. The statistical profile report has been submitted to YES separately.

The data collection methods are described below.

#### **An Internet based Survey of YES Clients:**

A total of 217 YES clients from the job search, entrepreneurship and artist programs responded to an internet-based survey designed and circulated by YES. The first mailing of the survey was February 12<sup>th</sup> to 5580 recipients. (890 people viewed this email 1301 times). The second mailing was March 26<sup>th</sup> to 5476 recipients. (766 people viewed this email 1057 times).

The survey questions are included in appendix 1 of this report.

#### **Key Informant Interviews:**

A total of 9 semi-structured interviews were conducted and they included YES employment counsellors, artist and business coaches, executive director and a mental health professional

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<sup>12</sup> See Quintini, G., Martin, J.P. and Martin, S. (2007). *The Changing Nature of the School-to-Work Transition Process in OECD Countries*. Paris: Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development. Also, Hollywood, E. Egdell, V. and McQuaid, R. (2012). *Youth unemployment initiatives and the impact on disadvantaged youth*. Labour Market Information. Employment Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University.

involved in the additional support group services. The interviews were recorded and the interview guidelines are included in appendix 2 of this report.

**A Statistical Profile of English speaking Youth using the Canadian Census (2006):**

The statistical profile consists of a series of tables that together form an up-to-date portrait of the various age groups in the language populations of the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)<sup>13</sup>.

The profile uses data from the 2006 Census to describe the key socio-economic characteristics that shape the experience of these populations. The analysis focuses on the 15-24 and 25-44 age groups and considers the aspects of gender, visible minority status and language group for these age cohorts in light of such demographic characteristics as household living arrangements, highest level of schooling, labour force activity, income levels and tendency to be living below the low-income cut-off (LICO).

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<sup>13</sup> *The Montreal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) consists of the administrative regions of Montreal, Laval and those municipalities in the Laurentians, Lanaudière and Montérégie regions that have a high degree of integration with Montreal. This report sometimes uses “Montreal area” to refer to the above administrative regions.*

## 2. Key Characteristics of English-speaking Youth of the Montreal Area<sup>14</sup>

In offering English language services to youth seeking to improve their employment situation YES draws its clientele primarily from the English-speaking population residing in Montreal and the surrounding area. Who are the youth of Quebec's English-language communities and in particular of the urban Montreal region and surrounding area? What is their situation with respect to participation in the labour force and to the public services they are likely to rely upon in transitioning from school or training to employment? How do these minority language youth differ from the majority youth and how are the English-speaking youth of the Montreal area distinct from those living in the rest of Quebec's regions?

### The Size and Proportion of Quebec's English-speaking Youth

The English-language communities of Quebec are numerically smaller than the French-speaking majority with whom they share the territory. In 2006, the English-speaking population of Quebec numbered 994, 725 individuals with 800, 600 of these located in the Montreal area and 194, 125 distributed across the rest of Quebec (ROQ). There were 109, 600 English-speaking individuals aged 15-24 living in the Montreal area that made up 13.7% of the total English-speaking population. This is a somewhat higher proportion than that represented by French-speaking youth (12.8%) within the majority population for the same geographical territory. There were 260, 525 English-speaking individuals aged 25-44 living in Montreal with 52, 980 in this age group living throughout the rest of Quebec. This represents 32.5% of the total Montreal English-speaking group which is a greater proportion than that formed by French-speakers of the same age (29.5%).

Aside from their size and proportion, English-speaking youth tend to display high levels of English/French bilingualism when compared to their elders and to majority youth.

### Youth within a Cultural Minority Characterized by Cultural Diversity

Aside from being numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the province, the English language communities of Quebec meet the criteria generally used to define a minority *as a social group* including:

- they do not occupy a dominant position<sup>15</sup>
- they have a language and culture distinct from the larger population
- the members of the group have the will to preserve its specificity<sup>16</sup>
- they are citizens of the provincial territory where they reside
- they have a long-term presence as a group in the territory where they reside

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<sup>14</sup> This report uses the First Official Language Spoken (FOLS) definition with multiple responses proportionally distributed as it best reflects the total English-speaking health service users in the province. FOLS is an inclusive language concept derived from three census questions: knowledge of official languages, mother tongue and home language. "Montreal area" here refers to Montreal CMA.

<sup>15</sup> Floch, W. and Pocock, J. (2008), "The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed." In Bourhis, Richard (ED.), *The Vitality of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival, Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montreal*.p.35-63

<sup>16</sup> CROP-Missisquoi Institute. (2000). *Attitudes, Experiences and Issues for Quebec's Anglophone Communities*. [www.CHSSN.org](http://www.CHSSN.org)

They are also defined as an Official Language Minority Community (OLMC) in accordance with Canadian legislation. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and the *Official Languages Act* (1988) set official languages policy in Canada by which English and French are recognized as Canada's official languages. A consequence of this is the definition of Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC) which in 2006 included 997, 115 speakers of French outside of Quebec (4.2% of the population) and 994, 725 speakers of English in Quebec (13.4 of the population)<sup>17</sup>.

When we compare Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC) across Canadian provinces, the heterogeneous composition of Quebec's English-speaking population stands out as a noteworthy feature. The Quebec minority language population is composed of a much greater percentage of members of visible minorities, a greater percentage of individuals of non-Christian religious affiliation and more individuals born outside of Canada than other OLMC in Canada. This is also the case when Quebec English-speakers are compared with the Francophone majority with whom they share the province of Quebec<sup>18</sup>. Among English-speaking youth living in the Montreal area who are also members of a visible minority, 35, 130 are aged 15-24 years of age and 90, 835 are aged 25-44. The English-speaking youth of Montreal's visible minority communities represent a much higher proportion of their communities than the youth of communities who do not hold visible minority status.

Quebec's English-speaking community tends to be composed of a large percentage of newcomers from outside of the province of Quebec and outside of Canada. Across Quebec, there are 101, 175 English speakers who arrived from outside of Quebec between 2001 and 2006. In 2006, this in-migrant group represents 10.6% of the English-speaking population. In comparison, just 2.6% of French-speaking Quebecers moved to Quebec from outside the province in this period. The greatest concentration of English language newcomers is located in urban Montreal.

### **Labour Force Participation and Education**

In 2006, the English-speaking minority communities of Quebec experienced unemployment rates that were 1/3 higher than those experienced by their Francophone counterparts. Among the 62, 650 English-speaking persons aged 15-24 in Montreal who were in the labour force, 8, 745 or 14.0% were unemployed. This proportion of unemployed was higher than majority French-speaking youth in the same age cohort which was 11.3%. Similarly, the proportion of English-speaking individuals aged 25-44 who were unemployed (8.4%) was higher than the proportion of French-speakers in the same situation (6.0%). For both the English-speaking 15-24

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17 The linguistic definition used here is First Official Language Spoken, which is a broad language concept, encompassing 99% of the Canadian population. Only those who can speak neither English nor French are not covered by the FOLS definition which is derived from responses to three census questions (knowledge of official languages, mother tongue, and home language).

18 Consultative Committee for English-speaking Minority Communities, (CCESMC). (2007). *Building on the Foundations – Working towards Better Health Outcomes and Improved Vitality of Quebec's English-speaking Communities. Compendium of Demographic and Health Determinants on Quebec's English-speaking Communities, Health Canada, Ottawa*. pp.33, 34 and 37.



and 25-44 age groups, the proportion of unemployed was higher for those living outside the Montreal area.

Among English-speaking youth aged 15-24 living in the Montreal area, 42.8% were not in the labour force<sup>19</sup> compared to 35.4% of majority youth and 17.5% of English speaking youth aged 25-44 compared to 12.1% of Francophones of the same age. English-speaking visible minority youth tend to display a greater disadvantage both in terms of proportion of unemployed (actively seeking work) and not in the labour force (not working and not seeking work) than those who are not members of a visible minority.

With respect to education, 28.4% of the English-speakers aged 15-24 living in Montreal in 2006 and 8% of English-speakers aged 25-44 had no educational certificate, diploma or degree. English language users with a university certificate, diploma or degree accounted for 9.4 % of those aged 15-24 and 37.4% of English-speakers aged 25-44. English-speaking youth who are women were more likely to have higher levels of schooling than their male counterparts. Generally, English-speaking youth are less likely to have no certification and more likely to have a university certificate, degree or diploma than majority language youth. However, intergenerational analysis has shown that the educational strength of Quebec Anglophones is diminishing across generations with higher educational levels observed in the older age cohorts (45-65 and 65+) and lower educational levels in the younger cohorts (15-24 or 25-44).<sup>20</sup>

Among Montreal youth, English-speakers are much less likely to have an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma when compared to the majority language group. In relative terms, 4% of English-speakers aged 15-24 and 9% of those aged 25-44 have apprenticeship or trades certification compared to 8.2% of French-speakers aged 15-24 and 17.2% of those aged 25-44.

In Canada, the level of education achieved by an individual tends to be an indicator of social status, and ideally, a predictor of economic opportunity. In the case of Quebec's English-speaking youth, high levels of education do not lead to entry into the labour force within the province to the degree proportions would reasonably predict.

### **Income and Household Arrangements**

Although there is no official measure of poverty in Canada, the Statistics Canada measure of Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO) is probably the best known. Commonly known as the "poverty line", LICO uses the income levels of a given family and considers how large a share of its income is spent on necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. If the amount a family spends is 20% higher than an average family in a year, it falls into the low income cut-off category.

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<sup>19</sup> *The labour force includes the employed and unemployed. Not in the labour force refers to persons who were neither employed nor unemployed at the time of the census. This includes students, homemakers, retired workers, seasonal workers in an "off" season who were not looking for pay and persons who could not work due to a disability or long-term illness.*

<sup>20</sup> Floch, W. and Pocock. (2008), "The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed." In Bourhis, Richard (ED.), *The Vitality of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival, Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montreal.*p.24

People who live below a set of income cut offs may be said to live in “straitened circumstances”<sup>21</sup>.

In 2006, 29.5% of English language youth aged 15-24 residing in Montreal were living below the low income cut off compared to 22.7% of the majority youth of the same age. Among English-speakers aged 25-44, 25.95% were living below LICO compared to 18.6% of Francophones of the same age. English language youth residing in the Montreal area are much more likely to be living in poverty than those located in communities throughout the rest of Quebec. Of the English-speaking visible minority youth aged 15-24 living in Montreal, 44.6% are living below LICO and 40% of the 25-44 age group are in this circumstance.

In terms of high income, of the 155,765 English-speaking persons aged 25-44 living in the Montreal area 48,480 (18.6%) reported earning over \$50,000. The proportion of English-speaking males in this age group and income bracket (23.8%) was much greater than the proportion of females (13.3%).

Household living arrangements may be used as an indicator of groups within a population who are vulnerable to isolation or a poor health status. For example, the Quebec Social and Health Survey/Enquête sociale et de santé (Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) revealed that parents of minors living in lone parent households were more likely to report food insecurity, high levels of psychological distress and having more than one health problem compared to parents with other household arrangements.<sup>22</sup> Individuals living alone may lack the important benefits of a strong support network which may be compounded with the occurrence of isolating events like unemployment, relocation, or illness.

In the English-speaking 15-44 age group 46,025 individuals were living in lone parent households in the Montreal area. This represents 19.1% of the 15-24 age group and 9.7% of the 25-44 age group. Among the English-speaking visible minority youth, both the 15-24 and 25-44 age group, display a greater likelihood than non-visible minority youth to be living in lone parent households. Montreal English-speakers aged 15-44 living alone numbered 37,340 which accounted for 5.2% of the 15-24 group and 12.2% of the 25-44 age group.

### **Mobility Patterns**

The tendency of Quebec’s young English-speaking adults to relocate is clearly linked to difficulties associated with the transition from school to work in their home province.

The socio-economic profile of Anglophone leavers and stayers suggests that the upwardly mobile are increasingly associated with the outwardly mobile as young, well-educated members of the Quebec Anglophone minority seek economic opportunities elsewhere. Those who left the province tend to perform very well in the labour market outside Quebec, showing substantially lower unemployment rates than other Canadians and higher tendencies to be in the high income bracket. In contrast, Anglophones who stayed in Quebec experienced a relative

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<sup>21</sup> See “Low Income in Canada: 2000-2007 Using the Market Basket Measure” August 2009 by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada for a breakdown on various Low Income Measurements. Available online at <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications>

<sup>22</sup> For discussion of the survey, see *Community Health and Social Services (CHSSN)/Pocock, J. (2008) Baseline Data Report 2007-2008. Quebec’s Social and Health Survey Information. www.chssn.org*

loss in socio-economic status and cohort analysis suggests that such decline will continue in the near future.<sup>23</sup>

The ongoing loss of human capital within the minority language population is a noteworthy feature when language groups are compared and clearly a cost to all Quebec citizens in many ways. Commonly referred to as “brain drain”, English-speaking communities are increasingly concerned to improve Quebec’s retention rate of their most likely to leave members, namely, the young, bilingual and highly educated<sup>24</sup>. “Anglophones (25-44 yrs.) at the peak of working age are the most likely to leave their province of birth.”<sup>25</sup> In a 2010 provincial survey of Quebec’s English-speakers, respondents were queried with respect to their intentions to stay or leave the province in the next 5 years. Among those planning to leave, the most frequently cited reason for leaving was “economic opportunity”.<sup>26</sup>

### **Access to English language Services**

While the English-speaking minority communities of Quebec display high levels of bilingualism, especially among their youth, language barriers have an impact on their access and satisfaction with public services. English-speaking respondents to the province wide CHSSN-CROP Survey of Community Vitality (2005) expressed very low levels of satisfaction with access to employment services and economic development programs in their respective regions. Only 41.4% of English-speaking respondents from Montreal (centre), an area including Montreal CMA, were satisfied with employment services and 26.7% were satisfied with economic development programs.<sup>27</sup> A similar observation emerged from a Community Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) report drawing on a series of focus group discussions with English-speaking small business owners across Quebec. Participants described the experience of lack of support from government services due to limited availability of English language information.<sup>28</sup>

Evidence indicates that language is a barrier to access to health and social services especially in the area of mental health which is a noted concern among youth. The respondents of the Quebec Health and Social Survey/Enquête sociale et de santé (Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) aged 15-24 years of age reported the highest levels of psychological distress among all age groups and survey respondents with high levels of psychological distress were

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<sup>23</sup> Floch, W. and Pocock, J. (2008), “The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed.” In Bourhis, Richard (ED.), *The Vitality of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival*, Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montreal.p.65

<sup>24</sup> Floch, W. and Pocock, J. (2008), “The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed.” In Bourhis, Richard (ED.), *The Vitality of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival*, Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montreal.p.64

<sup>25</sup> Floch, W. and Pocock. (2008), “The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed.” In Bourhis, Richard (ED.), *The Vitality of the English-speaking Communities of Quebec: From Community Decline to Revival*, Montreal, Quebec: CEETUM, Université de Montreal.p.57

<sup>26</sup> Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)/Pocock, J. (2011). *Baseline Data Report 2010-2011. English-Language Health and Social Services Access in Québec*, [www.chssn.org](http://www.chssn.org)

<sup>27</sup> Community Health and Social Services Network CHSSN/Pocock. (2006), *Baseline Data Report 2005-2006 English-Language Health and Social Services Access in Québec*, p.25. [www.chssn.org](http://www.chssn.org)

<sup>28</sup> Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) (2010). *Stimulating Small Business Development in Quebec’s English-speaking Communities* [www.cedec.ca/about-cedec/publications](http://www.cedec.ca/about-cedec/publications)

more likely to report suicidal ideas and suicidal attempts.<sup>29</sup> Both Quebec's majority and minority language communities face challenges but this is an area where language barriers are particularly formidable for the minority community. Unlike some health and social service concerns, language is a tool in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems and the likelihood of impaired communication results in the service being ineffective and simply not pursued.

Recent consultations with English-speaking communities across the province reveal that mental health promotion, youth mental health and support for caregivers of individuals with mental health problems rank high among their health and social service priorities.<sup>30</sup> The findings of the consultation of Quebec's English-speaking population with respect to health and social service priorities for 2013-2018 underline the difficulty in accessing mental health information, prevention and treatment services. The centralization of public services in Montreal means these institutions are overburdened with clients across the province and the waiting list for admittance is unacceptably long<sup>31</sup>.

According to the Quebec Social and Health Survey/Enquête sociale et de santé (Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), English-speaking survey respondents display a greater prevalence of mental health problems (7%) when compared to French-speaking respondents(4.4%) and are more than twice as likely to perceive their mental health as poor<sup>32</sup>. For all respondents the highest levels of psychological distress were reported by those who were unemployed and/or students. High levels of psychological stress are strongly associated with dissatisfaction with social life and low levels of social support, low scolarity and low income levels. From the consultations we learn that, "Individuals are falling through the cracks in the transition from youth (18 and under) to adulthood where support dramatically decreases. Children with developmental problems will have parents/families included in their treatment quite readily but not the parents of young adults" (Executive Director, AMI Quebec)<sup>33</sup>.

## Summary

- While the English-speaking youth of Montreal form a numerically smaller group than their Francophone counterparts, they comprise a greater proportion of their minority community. As a group, Montreal English-speaking youth display high levels of bilingualism and include larger proportions of visible minority youth and newcomers to the province than the majority group.

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<sup>29</sup> *Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)/Pocock, J. (2008). Baseline Data Report 2007-2008. Health and Social Survey Information on Quebec's English-speaking Communities, [www.chssn.org](http://www.chssn.org)*

<sup>30</sup> *Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) (2012). Health and Social Services Priorities of Quebec's English-speaking Population 2013-2018 [www.tinyurl.com/a81bpw8](http://www.tinyurl.com/a81bpw8)*

<sup>31</sup> *Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) (2012). Health and Social Services Priorities of Quebec's English-speaking Population 2013-2018 [www.tinyurl.com/a81bpw8](http://www.tinyurl.com/a81bpw8)*

<sup>32</sup> *Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)/Pocock, J. (2011). "Baseline Data Report 2010-2011. English-Language Health and Social Services Access in Québec, p.121-130 [www.chssn.org](http://www.chssn.org)*

<sup>33</sup> *Community Health and Social Services Network(CHSSN)/Pocock, J. (2012 )Health Challenges, Needs and Priorities of Quebec's English-speaking Communities,2011-2012.p.19 [www.chssn.org](http://www.chssn.org)*

- When compared to Montreal French-speaking youth and English-speaking youth residing outside of Montreal, English speakers aged 15-24 and 25-44 residing in the Montreal area experience the highest unemployment rates.
- English-speaking youth residing in the Montreal area attain high levels of educational accreditation but are not highly likely to attain apprenticeship or trades certification. Their levels of education have diminished when compared to older English-speakers and there is a tendency of the young and highly educated to leave the province seeking economic opportunity elsewhere.
- There are high levels of poverty among English-speaking youth living in the Montreal area.
- Language barriers have been identified with respect to access to employment and economic development services as well as health and social services. Mental health services are targeted as an area indicating a high level of need among English-speaking youth that is not being met.
- There are high levels of psychological stress among English-speaking youth particularly among the unemployed and students. Those transitioning from youth (18 and under) to adulthood have been identified through province wide consultation to be “falling through the cracks” or those most likely to experience poor access to mental health services in the English language.

### 3. The YES Experience with the Mental Health Challenges of Unemployed and Underemployed Youth

From the previous section of this report we learned that English-speaking youth who experience challenges in the transition from school to the work world form a notable proportion of their Montreal minority community. The high levels of unemployment and high levels of psychological distress observed among these young adults are met with language barriers in accessing the services they are likely turn to for training, work-related coaching and counselling support. English-speakers transitioning from youth to adulthood are described as disproportionately “falling through the cracks” of the public safety net and increasingly living in straitened circumstances or taking leave of their home province altogether in search of economic opportunity.

Youth Employment Services (YES) is located at the heart of this critical impasse. The case of YES underlines the crucial distinction between the problems that arise from the economy that impact all unemployed youth, majority or minority population alike, and the secondary problems that arise from the public agencies designed to respond to this impact that uniquely disadvantage Quebec’s minority language youth. Economic recession is one matter; a language barrier in accessing services is another. In keeping with the literature, evidence from the YES experience in Montreal indicates that the effectiveness of youth services is improved when employment search and transition-related mental health needs are treated as inseparable<sup>34</sup> and when mental health services are linguistically and culturally appropriate.<sup>35</sup> This section draws primarily on the client survey and staff interviews to focus on YES clientele, their socio-emotional needs, the implications of these needs in the transition process, their use/perception of public resources and the experience of clients and staff with the additional group support YES offers to distressed individuals.

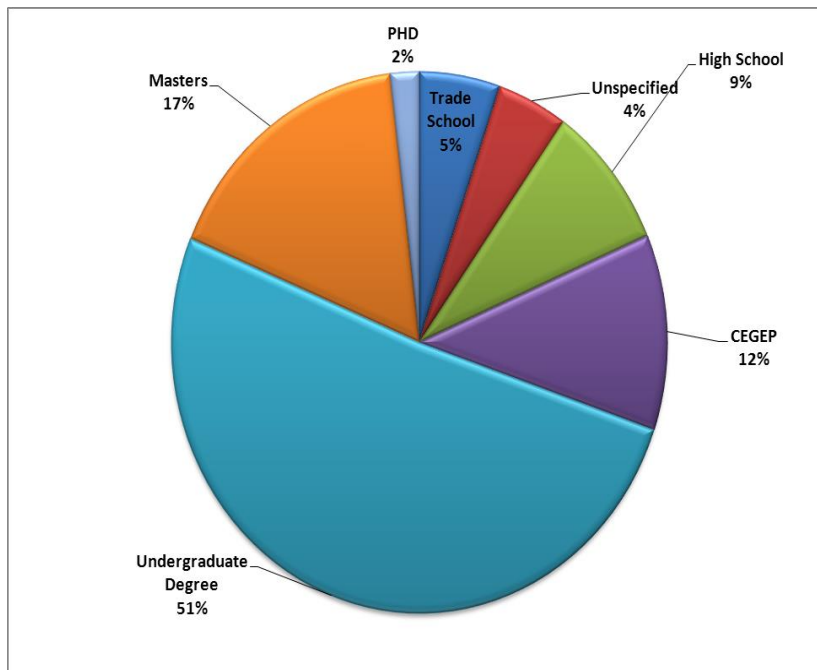
#### The Clients

The profile of YES clients reveals that the greatest portion of them use English as their first language and they tend to fall mainly within the age range of 18 to 34 years of age. Individuals aged 35 years and over represent 17% of YES clientele. The profile of clients of the job search program tells us that 4% are certified in a trade, 10% have completed high school, 52% have completed CEGEP and University and 15% have a post-secondary degree<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Hollywood. Egdell, Valerie and McQuaid. (2012). *Youth unemployment initiatives and the impact on disadvantaged youth. Labour Market Information. Employment Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University.*  
<sup>35</sup> Kirmayer, L.J. et al. (1996) *Pathways and Barriers to Mental Health care in an Urban Multicultural Milieu: An Epidemiological and Ethnographic Study. Culture and Mental Health Research Unit Report No.6, Jewish General Hospital, Montreal* [www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/research/cmhru](http://www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/research/cmhru) Also, Kirmayer, L.J. (2012). “Cultural Competence and Evidence-based practice in mental Health: Epistemic Communities and the Politics of Pluralism”. *Social Science & Medicine*, 75, 249-256

<sup>36</sup> This is from profile information compiled by YES.



It is commonly assumed that the unemployed are lacking education and have opted out or failed to gain access to the legitimate avenues to workplace success. The unemployed throughout time and across cultures have been labeled as “lacking a work ethic” or “lazy”.<sup>37</sup> While the literature substantiates the fact that education tends to give young adults an advantage in securing an income, English-speaking youth in Montreal who have obtained accreditation are nonetheless vulnerable to

difficulty entering the labour force and the array of socio-emotional symptoms that follow from what counsellors describe as being “lost”.

*We sometimes think because someone has a degree or comes from a very good family that mental health problems do not affect them. It is dangerous to think this way...They may seem together but mental health touches everyone, rich, poor, educated or not educated and we see that here. I think sometimes we forget that these youth are an at risk population. (YES Counsellor)*

*The youth who come to us generally have worked really hard to get their education. They have school loans; they're living on credit and have no financial education. They know nothing about the labour market. They are beyond receiving support from their parents. Some clients think about welfare but there's a stigma around that. Language is a huge source of anxiety. They are lost and very worried about the future. (Yes Counsellor).*

A sizable portion of YES clients are newcomers to Canada. Among respondents to the client survey 21.6% of job search clientele, 13.4% of entrepreneurship clientele and 11.6% of clients in the artists' program have been living in Canada for less than two years.

*We are an important port of entry for newcomers. The lack of family support is really challenging for them. They have no network. They often show resiliency in the*

<sup>37</sup> See McFadyen, R. (1998) “Attitudes toward the Unemployed” *Human Relations*, Vol.51, No.2. Also Eardley, T. and Matheson. (1999) *Australian Attitudes to Unemployment and Unemployed People*. Social Policy Research Centre, ISBN 7334 06084, pp.1-51.

*beginning but after a while reality sets in in terms of language and then you can see them feeling more anxious, depressed and discouraged. (YES Counsellor)*

According to the client survey, the duration of time spent in searching for work, launching a business or pursuing artistic endeavours varies from less than 6 months to more than 2 years. The greatest percentage of survey respondents, 64.8%, had been engaged for one year or less, 18.1% were engaged for 1-2 years and 17.1% for two years and more.

### **Transition-related Mental Health Needs of YES Youth**

When survey respondents were asked if they ever felt worried, anxious or stressed during their job search or while launching a business, a substantial 89.3% replied 'yes'. Among those who answered 'yes', 50% rated their stress level as high or very high and another 47.7% rated their stress level as moderate. A high proportion (60.7%) of clients who responded to the client survey reported feeling distressed during the process to the point where it impacted their daily or weekly routine.

In their interviews YES staff agreed that they had observed “a big shift” in terms of an increase in transition-related mental health problems among their clients in recent years. In their words, “people are much more pessimistic than in 2008 and 2009 ... during the recession it was bad but it has gotten worse.”

“Intake” is how the staff at YES refers to the first step in their process with clients. This is the time when client history is gathered and the client is placed in one of their available programs. Mental health information is gathered during intake such as diagnosed problems and prescribed medications, if the client chooses to disclose. When a mental health problem arises that is severe, or clearly distinct from what is regularly encountered and recognized as “transition-related”, YES staff refer the client to medical expertise outside their offices. Otherwise, career counselling and emotional support are inevitably intertwined.

*During the intake some are more open than others. In my experience, I find that as I'm working with a client things start to unravel. Initial intake is only thirty minutes so I don't get as much there because their comfort level with me is not high. It takes time to bond. They won't necessarily talk about it, then they start crying...After a couple of months...in job search it often takes a long time especially with the labour market in Montreal. The longer it takes, the more the anxiety increases, they worry about money etcetera then the depression comes in and that's when they really start to break down a lot. There is a cycle to what people go through emotionally and psychologically. You can't really deal with the career aspect if there are other barriers. If we meet with a client and there's depression, anxiety, substance abuse, lack of focus, we can't work on a resume. It is not going to work. So we have to deal with that before we can move on to career stuff. Often there is a lot of work to be done and people don't understand that part of our job. Anxiety is high right now – maybe fifty percent of my clients. (YES Counsellor)*



*They feel like a failure. They underestimate themselves a lot, very low self-esteem, and very afraid of jumping. They may have been doing low-level jobs for years even though their education level is high. I find low self-esteem is very common and as a result of that people feel under pressure to perform and tend to isolate themselves. Others have a lot of anxiety. Some have panic attacks as the result of an interview with an employer. It is very difficult to market yourself when you are not feeling good about yourself. It is hard for them to do that. Isolation is a problem. Even if they are living at home they can be isolated because they can't talk to their parents. Just the fact that they are still living at home can make them feel like a failure. It becomes hard for them to talk to peers who have moved on – there is a stigma around mental health issues. They can end up alone. (YES Counsellor)*

*It is a period of huge transition in their lives and it goes to the age of 30 now. It is quite traumatic. There is very high anxiety and more uncertainty than in previous generations about their future. The transition was different for their parents. They do not feel they can follow in their parents' footsteps. They want to please their parents but they can't hold those values anymore. (Mental Health Professional)*

With respect to a support network (friends, family, organizations, professionals), only 57.8% of survey respondents reported having a strong support network and a sizable 85% felt they would benefit from extra support services. When asked what kind of services would be most beneficial, 65.3% of clients surveyed indicated networking events and 59.7% indicated peer-to-peer support groups.

### **Health and Social Services and Montreal's English-speaking Youth**

The mission of YES Montreal (Youth Employment Services) is to provide English-language support services to help Quebecers improve their work situation by finding employment and start businesses. Increasingly, for YES staff the success of their mission rests upon emotional and psychological support for their clients dealing with transition-related symptoms. For the individuals who come to YES for work-related assistance there a number of reasons for feeling their goal would be facilitated through extra support services and also that there is little available to them in the way of services outside of the YES offerings.

*Some clients had access to counselling through their schools but now they are no longer enrolled. The CLSC's (health clinics) are understaffed when it comes to mental health and there is very little English service. There is a waiting list and the list is even longer if you are looking for English-language services. You need to be in crisis or else you wait. The other thing is regular therapy but that can cost anywhere from \$85 to \$255 for 30 minutes once a week. Our clients don't have the money. The Argyle Center has a sliding scale and we work with them but you have to keep the age group in mind and there is associated shame especially for certain cultures. (YES Counsellor)*

When it comes to mental health services language is a key issue. Most clients are seeking English-language services at YES despite being proficient in French because when it comes to

needs like counselling and mentoring they are more comfortable in their first language. From staff interviews we learn that many of them perceive language to be a barrier in terms of their entry into the workplace and they are looking for a neutral space to gather their skills and inner strength without more of the isolation and poor self-esteem that can result from poor communication in their second or third language. If language is the barrier causing stress they are not likely to seek out a therapeutic situation with the very same barrier.

*For our English-speaking clients, which are most of them, the language barrier is a big cause of stress. We see a lot of newcomers and it increases their anxiety because English is already their second language and now they need to know a third. Even the ones who speak French know they can't get certain jobs because they don't know enough or have an accent. Even if they do know how to communicate some feel frustrated because they do not feel they can ever be up to the calibre of a Francophone. It is a huge source of anxiety and it prevents them from moving forward. (YES Counsellor)*

For the clients, the mental health challenges being addressed are primarily transition-related and therefore distinct from clinical problems like schizophrenia or attention deficit disorder. They are linked with what one counsellor referred to as “the twilight zone” that they find themselves in and they prefer to address their issues in a context that frames them in these terms.

*Most clients are not receptive to help from outside YES. They have established trust here and they just want to stick to the process. They'll go to the extra support groups that we offer... they are only interested in staying inside these walls. (YES Counsellor)*

*When it comes to outside help it's hard to find the right social worker or therapist...sometimes you go and don't like them. It takes a while to find a fit. It can feel like quite a setback in the process. They have taken a huge step in just getting to our office. (YES Counsellor)*

Turning to outside services for support is to step away from the process of entering or relocating in the labour force and from the healing peer-to-peer contact with others who are of the same generation and share the same predicament. It is underlined that the extra support offered by YES is not duplicating or running parallel to existing mental health services. It addresses socio-emotional challenges that are experienced by many as intrinsic to the process of transition and in a format that is quite distinct from individual-based clinical therapy.

### **Small Group Support at YES**

The YES Focus Group is additional free support offered by YES to their Montreal clients who seek help to overcome common obstacles and barriers related to their job search. The Focus group was launched in 2009 and YES is currently (spring 2013) beginning its tenth session. The small group sessions take place for two hours, once a week, for six weeks. The group is

organized primarily as peer-to-peer support and facilitated by YES counsellors and/or a mental health professional. The words of those involved at YES capture it best.

How did the support group come about?

*The group came about because we could see that our clients needed the emotional and psychological support and if we did not offer it the needs were going to go unmet. We are committed to a holistic approach... we take the whole person into consideration. We know the needs have to be addressed if we going to move forward in helping the client improve their work situation. (YES Counsellor)*

How does it work?

*We do some preliminary evaluation of clients going into the group. We look at group dynamic and personality. Its purpose is to come together as a unit. We have other workshops which are mostly lecturing and we decided to have a place where our clients can have a voice. They are also smaller, maybe 12 participants, and people drop out as they find work or come in, and so there is a flow. What we see right away is a sense of community. They realize they're going through the same thing despite different backgrounds. They tend to continue to meet each other after the 6 sessions are over. They feel motivated. The ideas they hear are not coming from experts but from peers. It is a setting where they take charge and we just facilitate. During those two hours it's their time and they can express whatever they want. There's no agenda, structure or homework. We had a newcomer's focus group. Last year we had a group where every member had been laid off for one reason or another. (YES Counsellor)*

How does the support group help YES counsellors in their main mission?

*I've been working with a client for about six months, almost weekly, and if I didn't have that focus group I don't know what I would do. She doesn't want services outside of YES, wasn't receptive to that. She has become very depressed so we try to meet with her on a weekly basis but it was getting to the point where I have no room in my schedule. It is a problem of time and we are not a huge staff. I suggested she go to the focus group, she did and afterwards she felt it was going to be helpful. She'll be able to go once a week and continue seeing me. I think the support is essential to help me help her. (YES Counsellor)*

Why small group sessions?

*At this stage of life peers are very important. I think the best thing about the group session is that it is normalizing. I am not sure that private sessions on an individual basis could do that as well. They are not in school anymore and they are not working – where else can they get together with people going through what they are going through? The group creates a sense of belonging and helps them recover their sense of self-esteem. Social isolation and stigma are issues here -that is not always the case – and so the group session is an appropriate model. I think it is amazing what they get out of just six sessions; they become friends, they network on their own and*

*they really try to address their issues. I think it contributes something to resiliency. You hope when the next crisis comes they will be able to get to a better place faster. They will have ways to cope. I have been doing mostly individual psychotherapy since the early 90's and I think I see real transformations in six sessions in a group that would take months or years of individual therapy. (Mental Health Professional)*

As interviewees eloquently point out, the YES model for extra support for young adults not only provides coping skills for navigating a traumatic first transition but also fosters resiliency in preparation for life transitions that may confront them throughout their remaining years. In many ways the emotional and psychological challenges of being “unemployed” stem from the scarring that comes not from loss of income but from internalizing a negative social identity. In this respect, the group model is an ideal approach as it invites reframing what is presumed to be a “personal failing” into a “shared problem” that is recognized and acted upon with social peers.

### **Summary**

Among the English-speaking youth who are clients of YES Montreal 67% have accreditation from a CEGEP, university or graduate school<sup>38</sup>. A sizable portion of the group consists of newcomers to Canada. According to the client survey, a large proportion of clients experience high levels of stress during the search for employment and for the majority of respondents the stress they experience interferes with their regular activities.

The case of YES draws attention to important dimensions of the mental health challenges that many of their minority language clients face whether searching for a job, starting a business or establishing an artistic career. Extra support designed to take these dimensions into account improves the effectiveness of the programs organized to address the work situation of Montreal’s English-speaking youth while at the same time laying the ground for their socio-emotional resiliency. These dimensions include,

- A distinction needs to be made between mental health problems that arise as a feature of the school/work transition process (transition-related) and clinically diagnosed problems that are individual, persistent and generally require treatment by a specialist.
- The effectiveness of services to young adults with work-related mental health challenges is improved when employment services and mental health services are not dissociated.
- The effectiveness of services to minority language youth with mental health challenges is improved if the services are linguistically and culturally appropriate.
- Age is an important dimension of work-related mental health challenges and their treatment.
- Peer-to-peer group sessions are an ideal model for support to youth with socio-emotional challenges who are also receiving individual employment counselling.

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<sup>38</sup> Profile information compiled by YES.

#### **4. Conclusion: Youth Resiliency and Community Vitality within Quebec's Minority Language Population**

In many ways the young adults of Montreal are the wellspring of their communities. Their situation, especially in terms of education and labour force participation, has an important impact on the quality of life of their elders and on the future generations who will follow them. Prolonged high rates of unemployment have a “scarring” effect on individuals and communities that impacts their economic and social status as well as their health. This has a ripple effect in terms of the increased use of finite public provisions designed as a safety net for vulnerable Quebec citizens.

It is acknowledged that efforts to reduce the rates of youth unemployment must take place at many levels not the least of which is the provision of services that facilitate the efforts of young adults seeking to improve their work situation and gain entry to the labour force. Logic dictates that to be truly effective the services provided must be shaped to the needs and characteristics of those they are intended to assist as well the demands of the task at hand. In the case of YES, their success depends upon offering services that align with the needs and characteristics of vulnerable English-language youth as well as the entry requirements of the labour force and local economy of Montreal and the province. The benefit of their success promises not only the improved well-being of their clients as individuals but also the improved vitality of communities that presently suffer not only from the declining socio-economic status of their youth but also from the disproportionate number of educated and skilled young people who leave the province in search of work elsewhere.

The high levels of unemployment coupled with high levels of psychological distress which characterize Montreal's minority language youth pose a dilemma for YES. Increasingly in recent years, they have been faced with the fact that their success as an employment service depends upon finding a way for their clients to address their socio-emotional challenges. The age and work-related nature of their mental health challenges coupled with language barriers which complicate their access to public health and social services renders referral to outside services inappropriate for many clients. The response on the part of YES in 2009 was to launch additional support at their Montreal offices for distressed individuals in the form of small group sessions. This is not a parallel service to existing mental health services but in fact addresses transition-related socio-emotional challenges through a peer-to-peer format that the report survey has demonstrated to be the client preference. It does this in a timely fashion which is a crucial element for YES as an organization offering a service in high demand and given the fact that transition-related distress increases the more difficulties are prolonged. The sessions have proven to help both counsellor and client to move forward in the employment process and in some cases to clarify that indeed individual, more in-depth, therapy is called for.

Besides increasing the capacity of YES to respond to the need of their clients on the frontline, the additional support of the group sessions builds a resiliency among these youth that lowers the likelihood of being at risk in the future. In a sense, the YES solution weaves a thread into the safety net of Quebec citizens that makes it work better for all.

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## 6. Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Guide for Interviews with YES Personnel

- (1) In your experience with your clients do you encounter individuals who are struggling emotionally and psychologically?
- (2) Does this tend to interfere with their search for work, trying to start a business or in pursuit of their artistic goals? How?
- (3) What proportion of your clients is experiencing distress to the degree that it is a barrier to their success?
- (4) During your employment at YES, would you say you have seen changes in the degree to which clients are experiencing distress?
- (5) In your words, what do you see as the issue for YES clients who are experiencing distress? For example, is there a common predicament that you notice these clients share?
- (6) Do you have a sense of the strength of the support network they rely upon in their personal lives? (Friends, family, partner)
- (7) What sort of public resources are available to your clients experiencing psychological distress or depression? (Social services, professional counselling)
- (8) How do you respond to clients who manifest symptoms of anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges?
- (9) Do you feel satisfied with the resources you have at your disposal in responding to your clients' needs? How could this be improved?
- (10.) Give me an example of a best case scenario in your work in assisting a struggling client? With what impact?
- (11) What do you feel is the impact in the scenario wherein clients do not have access to support services at YES during this transitional period in their lives? What would be lost if the extra support services offered at YES were discontinued?



## Appendix 2 – Youth Employment Services Well-being Survey

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. Have you been living in Canada for less than two years?
4. Are you a: (YES client type)
5. How long have you been searching for work, in the process of launching your business or pursuing your artistic endeavours?
6. How would you describe your emotional well-being throughout this process?
7. Have you ever felt worried, anxious or stressed during this process?
8. If you answered YES, how would you rate your level of stress from 1 to 5?
9. Do you believe that your level of stress may be impacting your daily, weekly routine or activities?
10. Do you have a strong support network available to you? (this would include: friends, family, partner, organization or professional)
11. If yes, how frequently do you reach out to your support network?
12. If you do not feel that you are obtaining adequate support, would you benefit from extra support services?
13. If yes, please indicate what kind of services you feel you would benefit from:
14. Please let us know of any services, activities or workshops that you would like to see at YES.