



# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE  
6 DEGREES-TORONTO PEARSON  
YOUTH COHORT

MARCH 3, 2018

FROM: 6 DEGREES  
INSTITUTE FOR CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP  
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## A Message from 6 Degrees

Young people have always been a key stakeholder group for 6 Degrees. They infuse our conversations with energy and optimism; they contribute an often-overlooked perspective; and they offer the greatest potential to change the future narrative around inclusion. It is for these reasons and more that we involve and support groups like the 6 Degrees Young Advisors, 6 Degrees Junior Fellows, Pathways to Education, and CivicAction's DiverseCity Fellows. It is also why we were enthusiastic about partnering with Toronto Pearson's Propeller Project to create the 2017 6 Degrees–Toronto Pearson Youth Cohort and to co-host its culminating event, 360: Propelling Youth Employment in the GTA on December 13, 2017.

Toronto Pearson recognizes that in the communities in and around the Toronto Pearson International Airport, young people are struggling to find stable, meaningful work. 6 Degrees offered a unique format through which 15 young leaders could work on a project that would shed light on youth employment issues while also engaging their peers and employers in a dynamic, interactive, and memorable way. We were amazed by the honesty, vulnerability, and depth of research that surfaced in the lead-up to and during our 360 event. Issues around lack of transparency, racism, and outdated structures were met with practical suggestions and alternatives.

We are happy to share the findings of the 6 Degrees–Toronto Pearson Youth Cohort with you here—the result of months of research, exchange, and analysis, and a must-read for employers, policy-makers, and young people themselves.



## A MESSAGE FROM TORONTO PEARSON

Toronto Pearson is Canada's largest airport that welcomes millions of people annually through our gates and to the region. We are your airport, and also your neighbor. As your neighbor, we not only work to connect passengers to their next adventure, but also people with jobs and opportunities, investments to the region, and residents to transit. We are also a hub for our community, and we think about where our communities are headed as much as we do about where we are as an airport.

This is why in September 2017, Toronto Pearson and the Institute for Canadian Citizenship's 6 Degrees program partnered together to form the 6 Degrees-Toronto Pearson Youth Cohort. This program offered the unique opportunity for 15 dynamic young leaders drawn from Toronto Pearson communities to focus on the theme of youth employment and to think about where they are headed.

There are many communities within the GTA and beyond that are experiencing youth unemployment and underemployment issues, and research show us that young people face many challenges that prevent them from continuing to thrive economically. What we don't often hear is the *why* behind the issue, and what barriers the youth themselves perceive to be faced with in today's job market. This report strives to answer these complex issues through the voice of the youth themselves, and puts forward a set of recommendations gathered through stakeholder interviews, roundtable events and discussions.

Toronto Pearson is proud to have sponsored 360: Propelling Youth Employment in the GTA event and research project – a youth-led initiative that has produced the following set of recommendations, that we hope can bring awareness and guide policy makers, businesses and hiring managers to break down barriers to youth employment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'R Connelly'.

Robyn Connelly  
Director, Community Relations

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The logo for Toronto Pearson International Airport, featuring a stylized graphic of colorful lines above the text 'Toronto Pearson International Airport / Aéroport International'.

[torontopearson.com](http://torontopearson.com)

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Views expressed in this report are those of the authors—the Youth Cohort—and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the GTAA / Toronto Pearson or 6 Degrees / Institute for Canadian Citizenship.

## Background

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Many young people in the Greater Toronto Area report having trouble finding work and experience a number of barriers to securing meaningful employment opportunities. In 2017, 6 Degrees partnered with Toronto Pearson International Airport through their community investment program, the Propeller Project, on a five-month endeavour that would engage youth in addressing the challenges of employment by examining what changes could be made by policymakers, the private sector, and young people themselves.

A group of 15 leaders between the ages of 18–29 were selected from the communities surrounding Toronto Pearson International Airport (Etobicoke, Mississauga, Brampton) to guide the project. The inaugural **6 Degrees–Toronto Pearson Youth Cohort** spoke to numerous experts on youth employment, including hiring managers, policy makers, HR professionals, and youth leaders, and helped organize **360: Propelling Youth Employment in the GTA** on December 13, 2017. Drawing from their research and the event itself, the cohort produced a set of recommendations for young people and the public and private sectors. We believe these recommendations may shine some light on what youth perceive to be the challenges to finding meaningful employment in the Greater Toronto Area.

### 360: PROPELLING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE GTA

Through interactive Coffeehouse roundtables and an expert-led session in the round, the 6 Degrees–Toronto Pearson Youth Cohort uncovered best practices, common concerns and paths forward.

Speakers included:

**Nation Cheong**, Vice President, Community Opportunities and Mobilization, United Way Toronto and York Region

**Vasiliki Bednar**, Senior Advisor, Public Policy, Airbnb, and Chair, Federal Expert Panel on Youth Employment

**Huda Bukhari**, Executive Director, Arab Community Centre of Toronto (ACCT)

**Margaret Eaton**, Executive Director, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)

**Othniel Litchmore**, Founder and Host, *Making it in Toronto* podcast

**Jaskaran Sandhu**, Special Advisor to the Mayor of Brampton

## Recommendations

### PRIVATE SECTOR

**Recommendations by:** Sanel Ahmic, Nathan Yu, Demas Soliman, Irum Anjum, Sharon Suresh

- 1. Outline the growth opportunities of roles that may not initially appeal to young people**  
Young people could help fill job gaps if roles were better marketed to them. Job titles do not always reveal all the marketable skills that will be gained on the job. Companies could outline skills acquired, growth potential, and growth paths in job descriptions, career event brochures, or career pages on the company website. In this way, youth can view entry-level jobs as growth and learning opportunities. Organizations could also consider using data or narratives on past employees' paths to success within the organization.
- 2. Build work cultures and benefit packages that attract youth**  
Work cultures are slow to change, particularly for large, established organizations. To better attract and keep young employees, workplaces should take steps to ensure their work cultures are inclusive, and that senior employees see young people as opportunities, not challengers. Also appealing to young people are benefits and perks that include flexible schedules, tuition or school grants, performance incentives, and positive work environments (e.g. workplace lunch rooms). Opportunities for personal and professional growth, including seminars, skills development and internal networking opportunities are of incredible value.
- 3. Better advertise work cultures, benefit packages and inclusive activities**  
Once attractive work cultures are developed by an organization, the organization should advertise and promote both tangible and intangible benefits that are provided through their website and on job descriptions. Early in their careers, there are a multitude of factors that can excite young people about working for a particular organization that go well beyond salaries and titles.
- 4. Facilitate mentorship opportunities**  
Mentorship has been shown to be both extremely valuable for young people finding their way in a new career, and also surprisingly difficult to attain. Workplaces have some natural opportunities to facilitate mentorship potential, including training by senior employees on job tasks, and even training by younger employees on potential job-task enhancements (e.g. technology-based efficiencies).
- 5. Improve interpersonal skills displayed through the recruitment process**  
Often, HR recruiters don't display the attitude they are hiring for and fail to enthusiastically "sell" job openings. As such, roles become less appealing and candidates aren't motivated to join teams. Roles can often be made more appealing by both their presentation by hiring managers and recruiters, and also by genuinely developing roles that take into consideration the long-term ambitions of young people new to the workforce or early in their careers.

**PUBLIC SECTOR**

**Recommendations by:** Jai Singh, Jae Park, Farah Mahmood, Dina Nikitina, Malhar Memon

**1. Implement common improvements and greater coordination across all governments**

The coordination of municipal, provincial, and federal government efforts toward improving the quantity and quality of youth employment opportunities would undoubtedly lead to greater results. Issues that would benefit from being tackled jointly include:

- Addressing unethical hiring practices and creating universal standards for hiring managers
- Providing economic incentives to companies willing to invest in a younger workforce
- Providing more flexible job programs, open to all young people (studying full-time/part-time, not working, and working part-time)
- Focusing on year-round job programs and opportunities, rather than just summer ones
- Redirecting money away from job services duplicated across levels of government toward job programs and services that have a proven track record of being effective

**2. “Demystify” the workplace**

Young people often do not understand the intricacies of the workforce, especially if they themselves are marginalized, have immigrated here, or have parents who immigrated here. The public sector could deliver an education campaign to level the playing field, focused on secondary- and post-secondary-aged youth, to help them develop job-seeking skills and greater awareness of their rights and responsibilities when pursuing work opportunities.

**3. Support marginalized communities**

The government could play a key role in ensuring that marginalized youth who are underrepresented in the modern workforce have equal access to opportunities within their community. This could take the form of employment centres with resources that are focused on young people, or the creation of grants that help marginalized youth develop marketable or entrepreneurial skills.

Examples of past action plans that could be replicated and/or diversified include:

Ontario Black Youth Action Plan: Focuses on the employment of black youth and families, as black youth in Ontario are unemployed at nearly two times the provincial rate.

YouthVoiceON: Gives youth opportunities to communicate their opinions on public policies and plans directly to the provincial government.

**4. Update employment rules**

Employment/labour laws and the legal system do not appear to meet contemporary needs. The updating of such laws to fit a modern context would make it easier for employers to understand the rules around hiring new workers, and would also allow employees to benefit from laws better suited to today's work environment.

**5. Keep an eye on the future**

There is a strong economic and social case to be made for ensuring that young people are not left behind or out of our society. As such, the government could implement policies like universal basic income and/or a negative income tax to allow young people more time to establish themselves and become economically independent.

## YOUNG JOB SEEKERS

**Recommendations by:** Kayla Harvard, Sehaj Singh, Fatima Hirsi, Ifrah Yousuf, Jason Liu

### 1. Engage in the democratic process to have your voice heard

In order to create lasting change, youth need a seat at the proverbial (and sometimes literal) table. This requires that young people be constantly engaged with those who have the power to enact policies or processes which encourage youth hiring. It also requires youth to organize themselves and participate in the democratic process by voting. Voting is an incredibly powerful tool that young people have been known to overlook. However, through the power of organizing, rallying, and voting, youth can ensure that politicians, policy makers, and even businesses listen to their needs and concerns.

### 2. Develop the appropriate hard and soft skills to match employer needs

Many young people struggle to find meaningful employment after graduation due to intense competition and lack of professional experience. Furthermore, many senior employees are delaying retirement, reducing the number of opportunities in the workforce more broadly. To stand out from their peers, young people may return to school to complete post-graduate certificates or volunteer in their field of interest. It is important that youth make themselves aware of the skills they need to improve on by consulting with prospective employers and mentors. By working on their soft skills and developing their competencies, young people can show potential employers that they are already prepared for a role and would be an asset to the organization.

### 3. Leverage the hidden job market to uncover opportunities

A significant portion of the job market is “hidden.” As such, many young people miss out on opportunities that are not advertised simply because they do not have access to networks. In order for young people to gain access to these networks it is imperative to network in person. More specifically, youth should attend networking events, conferences, and reach out to people in their fields of interest, in order to find out about employment opportunities that are hidden.

### 4. Expand your career options

Youth are often instructed and pressured to pursue higher education at universities and as such, we see an overabundance of university-educated graduates and a shortage of trade-program graduates. When examining career options, youth may want to consider careers that are best suited for them as opposed to following conventional wisdom dictating that a university degree is mandatory for a prosperous career. Examples of profitable careers that do not require university credentials include construction management, plumbing, graphic/web design, and realty.

### 5. Create and utilize a job search group

Studies have shown that people who are part of a group whose collective goal is to help one another land a job are more likely to succeed compared to individuals who job search alone. Job search groups not only provide emotional support for individual members but also help in the form of job leads and interview preparation. Furthermore, by setting collective and individual goals, members can hold each other accountable for their progress.

## Cohort Members

**Sanel Ahmić**



Sanel is a business leader focused on organizational sustainability strategies through inclusion and leading with purpose.

**Irum Anjum**



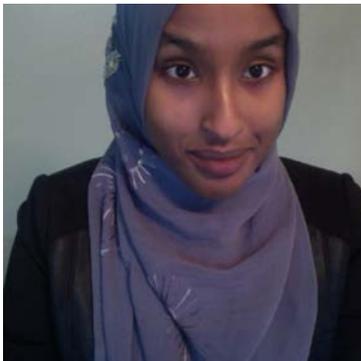
Irum is a Human Resources professional with experience in national and global recruitment.

**Kayla Harvard**



Kayla is a graduate of the Business Hospitality Tourism Program at Ryerson University. She works as an independent contractor doing project coordination.

**Fatima Hirsi**



Fatima is an active and forward-thinking individual committed to meaningfully engaging with communities to improve quality of life outcomes.

**Jason Liu**



Jason is a recent MBA graduate from the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

**Farah Mahmood**



Farah is passionate about social issues and is a youth advocate. She has a diploma in Social Services, focusing on immigrant and refugee issues from Seneca College. She plans to return to school to receive a B.A. in Social Work.

**Malhar Memon**



Malhar is a university student studying Public Policy & Administration and possesses a deep passion for music producing.

**Dina Nikitina**



Dina holds a MBA and Masters of Public Health, with a passion for health innovation and a keen interest in entrepreneurship.

**Jae Park**



Jae is pursuing a Bachelor of Science at University of Toronto in the field of forensic psychology. He is passionate about intersectionality and development in the field of law enforcement.

**Jai Singh**



Jai was born and raised in Newmarket. The son of immigrant parents from Asia, Jai has spent many lovely hours volunteering for the Safehaven Project for Community Living, a cause he is passionate about.

**Sehaj Singh**



**Demas Soliman**



Demas is a new active member of the GTA with 8 years of experience in engineering. He recently finished his Master's from the Clinton School of Public Service. He enjoys working with youth and making the community better for them.



**Sharon Suresh**



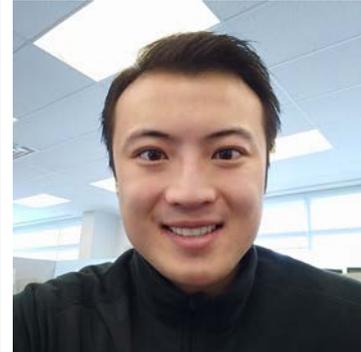
Sharon is a recent business graduate, an aspiring professor and an advocate for causes surrounding youth.

**Ifrah Yousuf**



Ifrah is a recent graduate of the University of Toronto where she studied Psychology and Biology.

**Nathan Yu**



Nathan is a graduate of the Bachelor of Commerce program – Accounting and International Business. He hopes to help the world.

## About Us

### **Institute for Canadian Citizenship**

Powered by a passionate and committed national network, the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) delivers programs and special projects that inspire inclusion, create opportunities to connect, and encourage active citizenship. The ICC is a national charity co-founded by The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson and John Ralston Saul.

### **6 Degrees**

6 Degrees connects thinkers and doers to drive the global conversation on inclusion and citizenship. The Canadian initiative works to counter nativism and exclusion through an immersive, annual three-day event in Toronto, national and international daylong pop-up events, and research produced with partners around the world. 6 Degrees breaks down barriers and brings people together to think out loud and reframe the debate over inclusion and citizenship. 6 Degrees is presented by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship.

### **Toronto Pearson**

Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) is the operator of Toronto Pearson International Airport. Toronto Pearson is focused on becoming the best airport in the world; enhancing the passenger experience, safety, security and supporting the success of our airline partners. Welcoming approximately 47 million passengers in 2017, Toronto Pearson is Canada's largest airport and second busiest North American airport for international traffic.

The area around Toronto Pearson is the second-largest employment zone in Canada; it facilitates more than 6 per cent of Ontario's GDP and directly employs 49,000 people. Toronto Pearson believes being a good neighbour means balancing operations by engaging with communities that surround the airport. It strives to have a positive impact by investing in social good and community-building initiatives through its community investment program, The Propeller Project.

### **Propeller Project**

The Propeller Project is Toronto Pearson International Airport's community investment program that supports initiatives addressing issues of unemployment and underemployment in its surrounding communities. The area around Toronto Pearson is the second-largest employment zone in Canada; it facilitates more than 6 per cent of Ontario's GDP and directly employs 49,000 people. Toronto Pearson believes being a good neighbour means balancing operations by engaging with communities that surround the airport. It strives to have a positive impact by investing in social good and community-building initiatives through its community investment.