

December 16th, 2024

Her Worship, Olivia Chow
Mayor of Toronto
Toronto City Hall, 2nd Floor
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

The Honourable Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

The Honourable Marci Ien, P.C.
M.P. Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Youth
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

RE: JOINT STATEMENT ON CREATION OF A TORONTO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Dear Mayor Chow, Minister Parsa and Minister Ien,

We hope this letter finds you well. We are writing to you collectively as a diverse group of community organizations, youth-serving agencies, and educational institutions to express our concerns about the alarming rates of youth unemployment in Toronto and its interconnection with the rising incidents of youth violence.

Over the past year, the Toronto Youth Cabinet has engaged thousands of youth across the City. We have heard firsthand about their desire for meaningful employment that allows them to learn, grow, contribute positively to their communities, and gain the necessary skills to support them on their path toward a future of career success and economic security. However, the urgency of the current situation calls for immediate action.

Toronto is experiencing the highest levels of youth unemployment since 2014, coupled with significant cuts to employment services at all levels of government. Our most vulnerable young people – particularly Black, Indigenous, youth living in priority neighborhoods and Toronto Community Housing – are bearing the brunt of this crisis. The consequences are dire, as evidenced by the staggering 161% increase in youth firearm arrests and the disproportionately high rates of violent carjackings committed by youth over the last two years.

We cannot ignore the direct link between the lack of economic opportunities and an increased risk of youth involvement in serious violence and crime. Unemployment perpetuates poverty and disenfranchisement, impacting not only youth's immediate financial stability but also their long-term prospects and mental well-being.

Research shows investing in Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs) can break this vicious cycle. SYEPs provide proven protective factors, equipping youth with job skills, connecting them to mentors and networks, prioritizing opportunities for equity-deserving youth, and offering critical wraparound support. Cities like Atlanta, Chicago, and New York have experienced significant decreases in violent crime, arrests, and justice system involvement after implementing robust SYEPs.

That is why the Toronto Youth Cabinet, The Neighbourhood Group Community Services and all underlying signatories are collectively calling for the City of Toronto to create a Toronto Youth Employment Program to provide 10,000 additional jobs for youth aged 15-24 by Summer 2026!

This program must be a cross-sectorial initiative ensuring youth have access to employment in the private sector, non-profit sector, and within the City's own divisions, agencies, boards and corporations. This YEP is more than just a job creation effort, it is an upstream investment in Toronto's future. It will bridge the gap between youth and the labour market, offering valuable paid work experience, skills development, mentorship, networking, capacity-building opportunities and a pathway to long-term employment. By providing holistic capacity-building experiences along with meaningful and gainful employment, we can equip youth for economic security and career success while reaping the benefits of engaging them productively.

We recognize the magnitude of this undertaking, but we are confident that through collaborative efforts and a commitment to prioritizing the needs of our youth, we can achieve this ambitious goal. To launch and sustain an initiative of this scale, we urge the City to allocate dedicated funding, while also advocating for investment from the provincial and federal governments. A program providing 10,000 youth employment opportunities in its first year would require an estimated investment of \$50 million.

Investing in youth employment is not only a moral imperative but also a sound economic strategy. Research indicates that for every dollar spent on upstream youth crime prevention and employment programs, society can save multiple dollars in downstream costs associated with policing, incarceration, and the lasting impacts of crime on our communities. Our young people are not merely assets; they are the foundation upon which we build a safer and more equitable city for all.

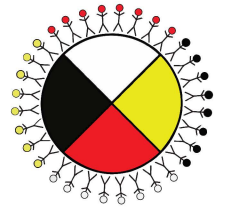
We urge you, Mayor Chow and Members of City Council to seize this opportunity and demonstrate your commitment to Toronto's youth by supporting the creation of a Toronto Youth Employment Program. Together, we can create a brighter future for our youth by investing in their potential and providing them with the opportunities they deserve to thrive while also strengthening our economy, and promoting public safety,

Mayor Chow, Minister Parsa and Minister Ien, we thank you for your attention on this matter. We look forward to working collaboratively on this crucial initiative.

CC: Members of Toronto City Council

Sincerely,

1. Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC)
2. The Neighbourhood Group Community Services
3. First Work
4. The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)
5. United Way Greater Toronto
6. Toronto Community Benefits Network
7. CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals
8. ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency
9. Malvern Family Resource Centre
10. Social Planning Toronto
11. Access Alliance
12. Youth Association of Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE)
13. Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre
14. Delta Family Resource Centre
15. Culture Link
16. Albion Neighborhood Services
17. NIA Centre for the Arts
18. Peacebuilders Canada
19. Central Etobicoke Youth Agency (CEYA)
20. West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre
21. Youthful Cities
22. Woodgreen Community Services
23. Tropicana Community Services
24. Youth Rex
25. For Youth Initiative (FYI)
26. Yonge Street Mission (YSM)
27. Jane Finch Centre
28. Springboard Services
29. Warden Woods Community Centre
30. Frontlines Toronto
31. ACCES Employment
32. Youth Without Shelter
33. LOFT Community Services
34. BGC Toronto Kiwanis
35. Lumenus Community Services
36. BGC St. Alban's Club
37. West Neighbourhood House
38. Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth
39. Student's Commission of Canada
40. Laidlaw Foundation
41. Dixon Hall
42. LAMP Community Health Centre



Opportunity made here.

