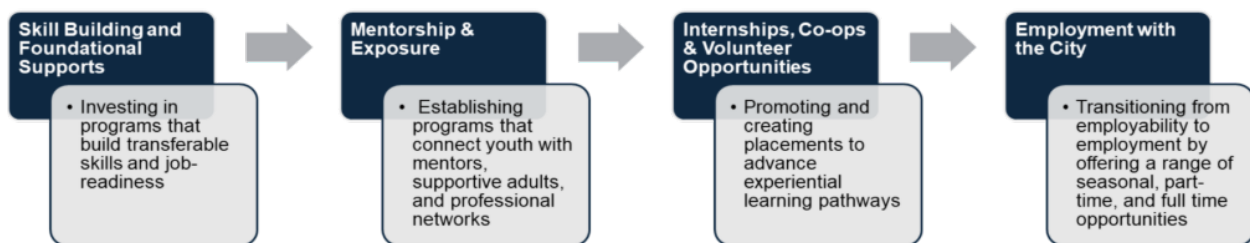


Attachment 2: Case Studies of Toronto Youth Employment Pathways

The City of Toronto delivers a wide range of youth employment programs across its Divisions, Agencies, Boards, and Corporations, each operating at different stages of the employment pathway: from early exposure and foundational skills-building to paid work experience, mentorship, and entry into career-track roles. While the models vary in scale, sector, and target population, they share a common purpose: supporting young people to build skills, gain experience, and move toward meaningful, long-term employment.

These case studies are not program evaluations or endorsements, but descriptive illustrations of how youth can move through different stages of an employment pathway. Together, they show how City-delivered and City-supported initiatives help youth transition from first jobs and training into more sustained forms of work, including apprenticeships, public-sector roles, and sector-specific careers. They also surface areas where alignment, continuity of supports, or clearer advancement pathways could strengthen outcomes over time.

The image below illustrates the City's employment pathway model:



Across the examples, several elements consistently shape successful transitions: paid work experience linked to real labour-market demand, mentorship that supports confidence and identity development, credentialed or experiential training that translates learning into practice, and intentional equity supports designed to reduce systemic barriers. Whether it is a young person progressing from aquatics certification into a supervisory role, a Zoo participant turning climate learning into career direction, a tenant apprentice moving from subsidized training into full-time employment, or a youth fellow entering policy work, these programs illustrate the City's role not only as an employer, but as a connector, mentor, and launchpad for Toronto's next generation of workers and leaders.



Case Study 1: Aquatics – Scaling a Proven Model for Equitable Youth Employment

Toronto's Aquatics program, run by Parks & Recreation, is one of the City's largest and most popular youth employment pipelines, employing up to 4,500 youth annually across pools, beaches, and recreation facilities. In 2024 alone, more than 45% of aquatics staff were first-time City employees, and nearly one in three identified as racialized youth. The program demonstrates that targeted investment and mentorship can break down systemic barriers while meeting critical service needs. Yet despite its success, more than 6,000 interested youth and applicants are unsuccessful each year because they cannot afford or complete mandatory certifications, such as Bronze Cross, Bronze Medallion, and Standard First Aid, or the transit required to access training sites.

Programs like Future Lifeguards and Building Skills Through Recreation directly address these challenges by offering free or subsidized certification, transportation, mentorship, and wrap-around supports to ensure employment upon completion. When these supports were introduced in 2023, participation among youth from underserved communities increased by over 60 percent, and retention rates among lifeguards who participated in mentorship activities were 20 percent higher than those who did not.

Case Study 2: Toronto Zoo – Climate Action Learning & Leadership (CALL) Program

The Toronto Zoo's Climate Action Learning and Leadership (CALL) Program demonstrates how paid experience, mentorship, and hands-on learning help youth thrive in emerging green careers. Launched in 2021, Climate Action Learning and Leadership engages young people from historically underrepresented communities in conservation, climate action, and environmental education through structured internships and co-op placements.

The program's design removes barriers to participation and builds pathways to employment. Paid internships for youth aged 18 and older include job rotations across areas such as Conservation Science, Wildlife Care, and Horticulture. Each participant is paired with a mentor and completes a Climate Action Project that applies their learning to real environmental challenges. The Indigenous Student Leadership stream, delivered with the Toronto District School Board, connects youth with Elders and staff who provide cultural mentorship and support. For younger participants aged 13 to 17, the Engaging Climate Action Champions stream combines biodiversity and climate education with teamwork and communication skill development. Meals and transportation are provided to ensure that all participants can take part fully.



By combining paid opportunities, dedicated mentorship, and project ownership, Climate Action Learning and Leadership helps youth develop confidence, leadership, and a sense of belonging in environmental spaces. Participants have led community initiatives such as creating an augmented reality app about Arctic wildlife, organizing e-waste drives, and installing sea bins to reduce marine litter.

Since 2021, approximately seventy-five youth have completed the program, and 80% reported increased knowledge and confidence in addressing climate change. Climate Action Learning and Leadership demonstrates how civic institutions can design inclusive learning environments that turn environmental awareness into meaningful career opportunities.

Case Study 3: Cleaner Apprenticeship Program – Building Pathways to Employment for TCHC Tenants

The Cleaner Apprenticeship Program, funded by the City of Toronto and delivered by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), provides meaningful entry points for youth tenants to access stable employment within their own communities. Through a 20-week paid placement, participants aged 18 and older work alongside CUPE Local 416 and building maintenance teams, gaining practical, on-the-job experience in custodial and facility operations.

A central strength of the program lies in its dual focus on professional and personal development. Participants complete certificate-based training and receive one-on-one support from Community Economic Development staff—dedicated mentors who conduct site visits, offer check-ins, and connect apprentices with additional resources to help them navigate workplace challenges and plan next steps after graduation. Cleaners consistently highlight this individualized support as one of the most valuable aspects of the program.

Since its launch in 2023, 31 tenants have participated across three cohorts. Graduates have transitioned into full-time employment with Toronto Community Housing Corporation, including one participant from Mornelle Court who advanced to a Site Lead role and another from Lawrence Heights who became a Custodial Maintenance Person.

By combining paid employment, certification, and individualized mentorship, the Cleaner Apprenticeship Program demonstrates how intentional program design can help youth tenants build the skills, confidence, and connections needed to secure long-term, stable employment within TCHC and beyond.



Case Study 4: ArtWorksTO – Building Creative Careers Through Civic Collaboration

ArtWorksTO, run by Social Development in partnership with the Toronto Arts Foundation and other organizations, shows how creative pathways within the City can launch sustainable careers for equity-deserving youth. Designed for Indigenous, Black, and other racialized young creatives, the program combines paid placements, mentorship, and credentialed education to help participants turn artistic talent into professional experience.

One participant, a Bangladeshi Canadian designer and ArtWorksTO graduate, began her journey through a City placement where she designed a digital mural celebrating diversity and inclusion for a civic workspace. That initial commission led to a series of City contracts supporting youth-focused initiatives, including visual design for the Youth Outcomes Framework Playbook and the Summer Safety Plan. Today, she continues to collaborate with City divisions and community partners as an independent creative, helping make civic information more accessible for young audiences.

Her story reflects the strength of the ArtWorksTO model: practical mentorship, paid opportunities, and alumni supports that keep youth connected to meaningful work well beyond their initial placements. Through this design, ArtWorksTO has helped over 100 young media artists build confidence, careers, and lasting relationships within Toronto's creative and civic sectors.

Case Study 5: Diversity Youth Fellowship – Building Representation and Civic Leadership in Government

Launched in 2018, the Diversity Youth Fellowship Program provides equity-deserving youth with hands-on experience in municipal governance, policy, and civic engagement by placing them directly in the offices of City Councillors. Delivered in partnership with the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, the program is implemented collaboratively by Social Development, and the City Clerk's Office.

Since its inception, the program has provided more than 200 paid fellowships for youth from Black, Muslim, Tamil, Filipino, Chinese, newcomer, and other equity-deserving communities, with a commitment that at least half of participants are women. Fellows receive mentorship from public servants and elected officials, along with structured training in governance, policy development, and community engagement. They gain practical experience drafting motions, supporting constituent services, coordinating



public events, and contributing to policy initiatives that reflect the diversity of Toronto's communities.

The program has become an effective pathway into civic and public-sector employment. Alumni have transitioned into roles as Constituency Assistants, Policy Advisors, and Policy Interns at the City of Toronto, while others have advanced to positions in provincial government, non-profit leadership, and advocacy organizations. The model has since been replicated in other Canadian cities, including Saskatoon, and is expected to launch in London, Brampton, and Brandon. The success of the program also inspired the creation of the Indigenous Youth Fellowship in 2025, delivered in partnership with the ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency.