Employment Support for Youth with Disabilities

Guiding Principles and Best Practice Checklist

Provincial Employment Strategy for Youth with Disabilities
ASPECT Conference Handbook

Guiding Principles

There are six guiding principles to support youth with disabilities in their employment:

1. **Address Youth Separate from Adults**
2. **Address Intersecting Barriers that Impact Youth in their Employment**
3. **Provide Individualized Support that Meets the Unique Needs of Each Youth**
4. **Highlight the Strengths of Each Youth Throughout their Employment Journey**
5. **Support the Mental Wellness of Youth**
6. **Emphasize Continuous Learning and Career Growth**

Here is a closer look at each principle:

Address youth separate from adults…

As young people transition from high school or post secondary, they are faced with decisions about their futures. They are learning what it means to build a life in community. This is a dynamic transition, with changing environments, relationships, and priorities. Employment programs need to support the range of learning and change that takes place.

Youth with disabilities must also navigate barriers during this transition. This can lead to challenges that interrupt the employment journey. For example, things like housing instability, family challenges, and addiction issues threaten basic needs and take precedence over job search. Some youth experience many challenges that compound over time. When these things continue to alter a youth's priorities, it can be difficult for them to re-

engage with their employment journey. To serve youth well, employment support needs to meet youth where they are at. It should be flexible and responsive to any change in their immediate priorities.

It's also important to consider how to communicate and engage with young job seekers. Youth seek out, access, and absorb information in a different way than adults. They rely on social media, apps, and other digital spaces. The recruitment, engagement, programming, and knowledge-sharing of youth-serving programs must fit these platforms.

Address intersecting barriers that impact youth in their employment...

Intersecting barriers impact the employment journey. For example, a youth who has a disability and is non-binary can experience a different mix of barriers than a youth with a disability who is cisgender. They may be subject to discrimination throughout their employment due to their disability and gender identity. These challenges can compound and create an additional layer of barriers for the youth to navigate.

Employment programs should address any intersecting barriers that complicate the employment journey. They should also create space for youth with disabilities to explore their full identity.

Provide individualized support based on the unique needs of each youth...

Each young person is at a different stage in their employment journey. Some have a clear idea of what their employment goals are, while others may not be ready to consider employment as an option. Some are ready to work, while others are looking to grow in their careers and engage in

professional development. Employment support needs to be available to youth at any stage.

Highlight the strengths of each youth throughout their employment journey...

Regardless of where a youth is at in their employment journey, their strengths should be central in guiding all support.

Support the mental wellness of youth...

Youth with disabilities are facing a crucial life transition during unprecedented provincial and global crises (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic, heat waves, forest fires, inflation, etc.). On top of experiencing barriers, their defining years take place during a time of unprecedented change with many unknowns. This has a profound impact on mental health. Employment programs need to recognize this impact. They must commit to supporting the mental wellness of their youth clients.

Emphasize continuous learning and career growth...

Youth with disabilities have much to offer. Their strengths, skills, and potential should be nurtured at every stage of their employment journey. To do this, employment support needs to be available on a long-term, on-going basis. This allows youth to access the support they need throughout their journey.

Activity 1: *Guiding Principles Scenarios*

The purpose of this activity to is to become familiar with the guiding principles. As a group, you will apply them to employment support scenarios and discuss prompting questions.

Please note, the scenarios in this activity have been curated by the ESYD team and are not real-life examples from employment programs.

Instructions:

1. Introduce yourself to your group.

2. As a group, nominate a speaker who is comfortable sharing key learnings at the end of the activity.

3. Have one person read the first scenario out loud.

4. Discuss questions below the scenario with your group.

   You do not need to write down any answers for this activity.

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for all scenarios.

6. After the allotted 15-minutes, groups will be invited to share key learnings and insights from this activity.

Scenario #1:

An employment program offers workshops and one-to-one support to youth. To stay enrolled, youth must consistently engage in service. If they miss more than two workshops or sessions with their Job Coach, they lose their spot in the program. And the start dates are rigid, so to re-engage with the program, they must wait a full year.

1. Which guiding principle is this program **not meeting**?
2. How could this employment program better meet this principle?

Scenario #2:

An employment program draws on each youths' strengths and assets. Youth are supported to recognize the inherent resources they have at their disposal. They are encouraged to use these resources to make their own informed choices on how they wish to move through their employment journey. Program staff are trained to help youth identify their strengths and encourage them to pursue work that aligns with these strengths.

1. What guiding principle is this program **meeting**?
2. What else could this program do to meet this guiding principle?

Scenario #3:

An employment program provides learning opportunities around physical and mental wellness, confidence-building, stress management, healthy habits, and other wellness-related topics. It also creates space for youth job seekers to connect with one another and develop strong relationships with peers and support staff.

1. What guiding principle is this program **meeting**?
2. What else could this program do to meet this guiding principle?

Scenario #4:

A youth job seeker immigrated to BC with her family. She's in the process of applying for Permanent Residency. She has been working with a Job Coach to find inclusive employment. They've recently found a job with an employer who was really accommodating during the interview and hiring process. However, during training the employer told the youth that her wage would start at $3 below minimum and go up once she provides proof of residency. The youth is concerned about this and speaks to her Job Coach. The Job Coach points out that the employer has been really accommodating in other ways and suggests waiting it out until she gets her residency.

1. Which guiding principle is this program **not meeting**?
2. How could this employment program better meet this principle?

Scenario #5:

An employment program offers group workshops and provides one-to-one support to youth. To meet the needs of more youth, the program had updated its model to include mental health and life skills training. However, to access service youth must be seriously considering employment. If they are not actively applying to jobs, they lose their spot in the program.

1. Which guiding principle is this program **not meeting**?
2. How could this employment program better meet this principle?

Scenario #6:

An employment program offers the option for virtual and in-person support. Support is also provided through group workshops and one-to-one appointments for youth. To meet the needs of more youth, the program had updated its model to include mental health and life skills training. However, once youth secure employment, they are no longer able to access support from the program.

1. Which guiding principle is this program **not meeting**?
2. How could this employment program better meet this principle?

Activity 2: *Best Practice Checklist Feedback*

The purpose of this activity is to **provide feedback** on the Best Practice Checklist that will be used to implement the Guiding Principles. We are excited to hear your feedback on the practices listed and your suggestions for additional practices that could be added!

Each Guiding Principle will be separated into three sections:

1. Program Information and Access
2. Program Delivery
3. Job Placement

With your group, you will work through each section and discuss your feedback.

*Please note, for this activity, you are **not** using this checklist to evaluate your own/another employment program.*

Instructions:

1. As a group, nominate a speaker who is comfortable sharing key learnings at the end of the activity.

2. Identify the Guiding Principle you have been assigned.

   - *You can find your group's principle on page 13 of this workbook*

3. Starting with section 1, read through the best practices listed.

4. When you're finished reading, review the questions and discuss your answers with your group.

5. Write down your answers on sticky notes and stick them to the corresponding section of your group's "Feedback Workbook". This is a **separate** handout.

   - *We will be collecting your group's "Feedback Workbook" at the end of the session.*

6. After the allotted 15-minutes, groups will be invited to share key learnings and insights from this activity.

Guiding Principle #1: Address Youth Separate from Adults

Section 1: Program Information and Access

☐ Is your program advertised through youth-friendly channels (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, etc.)?

☐ Is your program information available in youth-serving spaces (e.g., distributed by schools, libraries, community centers, etc.)?

☐ Is your program information easy for youth to understand (e.g., uses plain language, free of policy jargon, etc.)?

☐ Can youth easily apply/register for your program online (e.g., straightforward fillable application that is posted to your website or social media channels, etc.)?

☐ Are the waitlists for your program short or non-existent?

Questions

1. Would you change any of the above practices to better fit Guiding Principle #1?

2. Would you add any practices to this list?

Section 2: Program Delivery

☐ Does your program support youth to learn general life skills (e.g., filing taxes, financial management, how to find housing, etc.)?

☐ Does your program support youth to develop their interpersonal skills (e.g., problem solving, respectful communication, professional relationship expectations, etc.)?

☐ Are all youth in your program aware of the full range of supports that are available to them (e.g., general life skill and interpersonal skill support, etc.)?

☐ Does your program have a plan in place to respond to youths' changing priorities (e.g., needing to pause or alter job search support youth to learn how to manage a more pressing issue like a housing or financial crisis, etc.)?

☐ Can your program support youth to complete and manage tasks related to building their independence in community (e.g., paying a utility bill, setting up an account with BC Hydro, paying a cell phone bill, etc.)?

<u>Questions</u>

1. Would you change any of the above practices to better fit Guiding Principle #1?
2. Would you add any practices to this list?

Section 3: Job Placement

☐ Does your program support youth to understand their rights as employees with disabilities?

☐ Does your program support youth to identify inclusive and accommodating job opportunities with youth-friendly employers (e.g., helping youth identify inclusion statements in job postings, supporting youth to identify quality jobs that are suitable for skill building and personal growth, etc.)?

☐ Does your program support youth in completing onboarding tasks for a new job (e.g., requesting a Criminal Record Check, filling out new hire paperwork etc.)?

☐ Does your program support youth to learn about and manage self-disclosure with their employer?

☐ Does your program support youth to advocate for their needed workplace accommodations?

<u>Questions</u>

1. Would you change any of the above practices to better fit Guiding Principle #1?
2. Would you add any practices to this list?