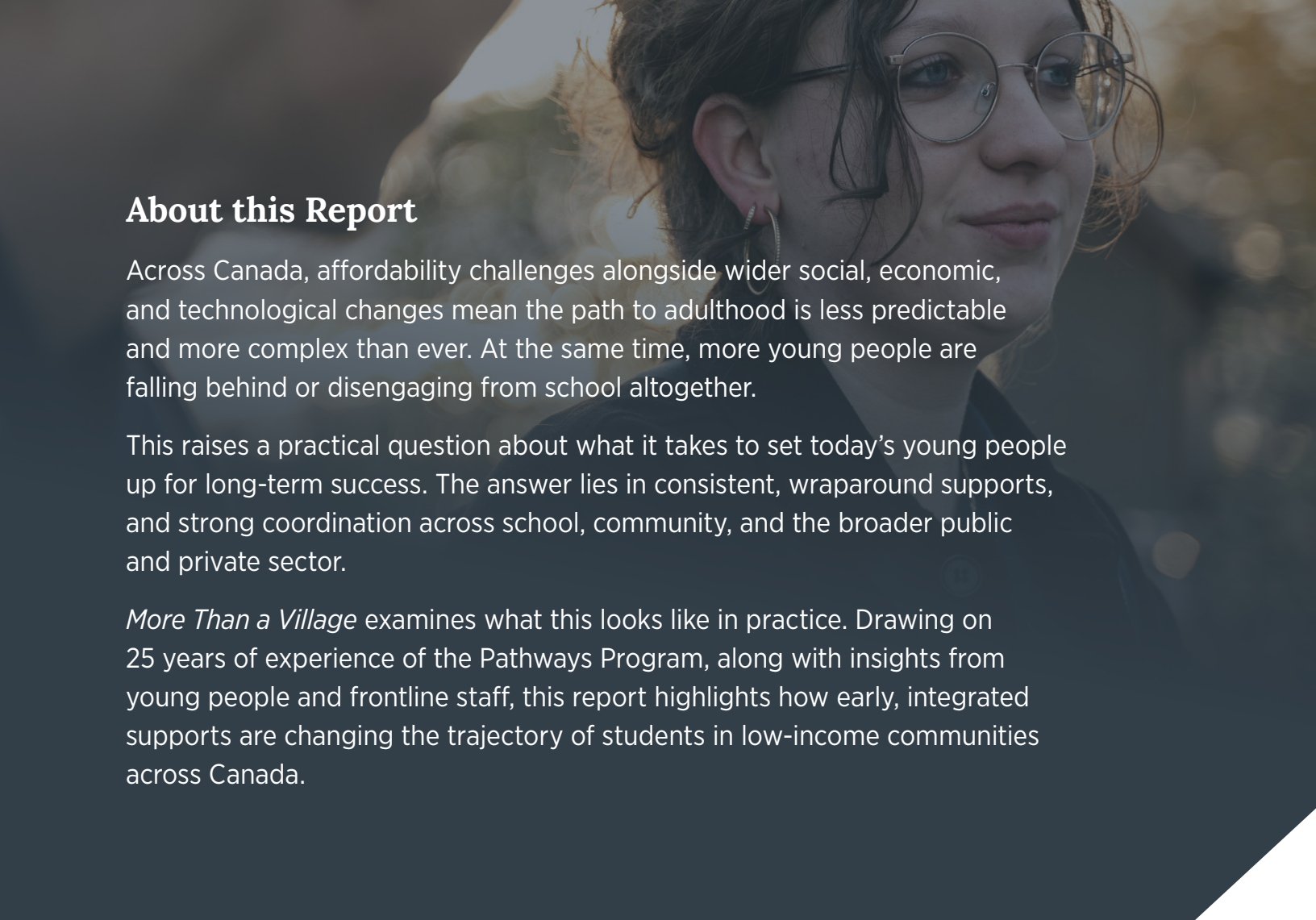


More Than a Village

What it takes to support young people
in a rapidly changing world





About this Report

Across Canada, affordability challenges alongside wider social, economic, and technological changes mean the path to adulthood is less predictable and more complex than ever. At the same time, more young people are falling behind or disengaging from school altogether.

This raises a practical question about what it takes to set today's young people up for long-term success. The answer lies in consistent, wraparound supports, and strong coordination across school, community, and the broader public and private sector.

More Than a Village examines what this looks like in practice. Drawing on 25 years of experience of the Pathways Program, along with insights from young people and frontline staff, this report highlights how early, integrated supports are changing the trajectory of students in low-income communities across Canada.



About Pathways to Education Canada

Pathways to Education is a national, charitable organization breaking the cycle of poverty through education. The award-winning Pathways Program provides youth with a holistic combination of academic, financial, social, and one-on-one supports proven to promote positive youth development by meeting their needs during the critical years of high school. What began as a single program in Toronto's Regent Park has grown into a national social innovation supporting over 9,000 students in 31 low-income communities across 8 Canadian provinces. The program is brought to life through a network of 29 community-based Program Partners who have the knowledge, expertise, and relationships to meaningfully support local youth in their respective communities.

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Executive Summary

In many ways, the village that once helped young people transition into adulthood has frayed. Families are under growing economic pressure. Schools are being asked to do more with fewer resources. Social support systems are being stretched to their limit. Effective transitions between education, training, and work have become less clear and less forgiving. Young people are being left to navigate high-stakes decisions without the support or skills to do so.

Facing fundamental shifts in what it means to prepare for adulthood, the question for Canada is no longer whether young people will be affected by these changes, but whether we are equipping them early enough, consistently enough, and sufficiently enough to navigate what lies ahead.

Answering this question means looking to solutions that are already working to keep students on track. For 25 years, Pathways to Education has worked alongside youth during the critical years of high school. Delivered through a national network of community-led Program Partners, the Pathways Program provides sustained support to help youth build the foundation for long-term success.

What we've learned is that keeping young people equipped for the future requires a consistent set of conditions to be in place. Across Pathways communities, four core factors have emerged as critical to maintaining that connection.

- 1 A sense of belonging and community**
- 2 Access to life skills development opportunities**
- 3 Access to career exploration and workplace readiness programming**
- 4 Financial support and guidance to navigate costs**

These factors do not operate in isolation. They are interconnected and most effective when delivered together, reinforced across school, home, community, and broader public systems. Sustained coordination across these environments helps reduce fragmentation and ensures young people experience consistent support over time.

This work is also strengthened through national alignment. Shared frameworks, funding, and partnerships enable local program locations to deliver these supports consistently, while adapting to the realities of each community. Together, this creates a connected ecosystem of support that helps young people stay engaged in school and prepared for what comes next.

Drawing on the expertise of Pathways Program Partners across Canada, this report highlights the critical role of these integrated wraparound supports as communities respond to rising disengagement and increasing uncertainty for young people.

Help Us Help Youth

As pressures weigh on the very systems designed to support youth, we're asking partners across sectors to help us build stronger collective responses that better meet the needs of young people today. We're calling for:

- **Governments and policymakers** to invest in coordinated, multi-year support across adolescence, recognizing that engagement in school is built over time and cannot be addressed through isolated or short-term policy responses.
- **Funders and corporate partners** to provide flexible funding for community-based approaches that are proven to support youth success in high school and beyond.
- **Educators and youth-serving organizations** to deepen cross-sector collaboration so young people experience continuity and coordinated support as they navigate adolescence and transition into post-secondary education, training, or work.

We're asking you to help us expand and strengthen the village that young people rely on. With your support, we can ensure students have the tools to navigate an increasingly complex world. This means investing in early, sustained supports that are proven to equip students with the confidence and resilience they need for success — whatever the future holds.

Owen Charters

President and CEO

Pathways to Education Canada



A Moving Target

An increasingly uncertain future for youth

Youth in Canada are coming of age amid rapid social, technological, economic, environmental, and political change that has fundamentally altered how we learn, work, and live. Traditional milestones such as finding stable and secure employment are becoming harder to reach,¹ leaving many young Canadians facing greater uncertainty about their financial future and career opportunities.²

Those uncertainties are reflected in the classroom. Absenteeism has increased since the pandemic, with many school boards reporting a growing number of students who are chronically absent.³ This reflects a broader shift in how young people are experiencing school and their sense of connection to it.

Mental health is a central part of this picture. According to Statistics Canada, the proportion of youth aged 16 to 24 reporting their mental health as fair or poor has more than doubled since 2019.⁴ Increased time online and exposure to social media are contributing factors, with many young people reporting higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation with longer hours of personal screen use.⁵ For many youth, this has contributed to disengagement from school, work, and social life, further reducing opportunities to build confidence and support networks during a formative stage of life.

The labour market is also becoming more complex. Over the next decade, millions of young people will enter the workforce, yet employers continue to report gaps in both technical and job-specific skills,⁶ including in high-demand areas such as the skilled trades.⁷ Entry-level jobs are becoming harder to find, with advances in artificial intelligence increasing automation across industries such as manufacturing, utilities, and the natural and applied sciences.⁸

¹ Policy Horizons Canada, *Future Lives: Uncertainty*, 2024.

² Mental Health Research Canada, *A Generation Under Pressure: Economic and Employment Challenges on Young Mental Health*, 2025.

³ M. A. Rogers et al., *Impacts of COVID-19 on School Absenteeism Among Canadian Children and Youth*, *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 34(3), 2025.

⁴ Statistics Canada, *Rising Mental Health Concerns Among Youth*, 2025. www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/7642-rising-mental-health-concerns-among-youth

⁵ Mental Health Research Canada, *Associations Between Social Media Use, Personal Screen Time, and Mental Health Indicators Among Canadian Youth*, 2025.

⁶ Eyob Fissuh, Kodzo-Kuma Gbenyo and Andrew Ogilvie, *Determinants of Skill Gaps in the Workplace and Recruitment Difficulties in Canada*, 2022.

⁷ Government of Canada, *Discover Careers in the Skilled Trades*, 2026.

⁸ Signal49 Research, *Understanding the Influence of AI on Employment*, 2026.

The Uneven Playing Field

These impacts are not shared evenly. Young people living in under-resourced and marginalized communities often face barriers that make it harder to engage in school and plan for the future. In our 2025 report, *Canada's Hidden Youth Crisis*, we detailed how findings from our national Program Review pointed to three interconnected challenges facing youth in low-income communities:

- **Academic needs are intensifying.** Many students are falling behind in core subjects and struggling to stay motivated. Limited access to tutoring, technology, reliable internet, language supports, and academic assistance outside the classroom can make it difficult to keep pace with school expectations.
- **Financial pressures are affecting every aspect of student life.** Rising costs can limit access to school supplies, transportation, nutritious food, extracurricular activities, and post-secondary opportunities. For many young people, concerns about affordability also influence how they think about their future.
- **Social and emotional well-being needs are growing.** Many youth report feeling increasingly anxious, isolated, and disconnected. Challenges related to belonging, transitions into high school, adjusting to new environments, and navigating a new culture or education system can make it harder for students to remain engaged in school and their broader community.

The Program Review also confirmed that these challenges are deeply interconnected, with pressures in one area often affecting a young person's ability to succeed in another. These findings reinforce the importance of integrated supports that address the full range of student needs.



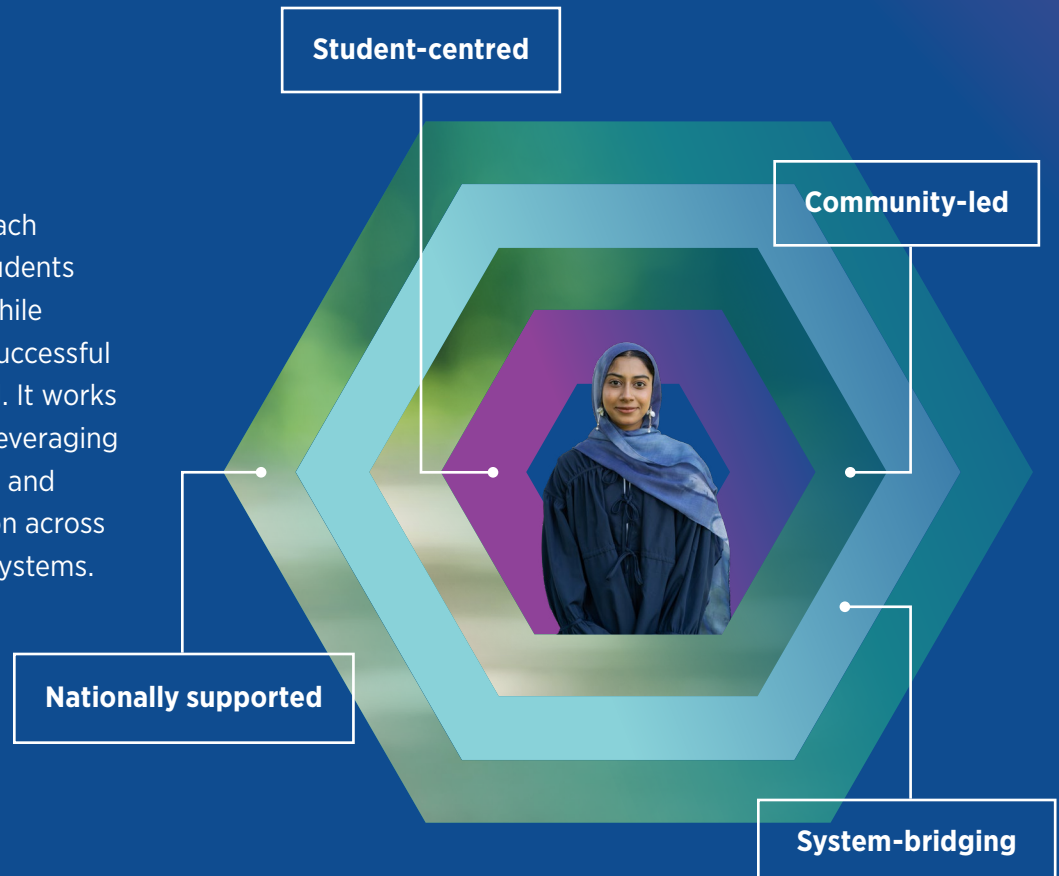
Our Approach:

Wraparound Supports

For over two decades, Pathways to Education has worked in partnership with community organizations, youth, and families to provide consistent, coordinated support to young people in low-income communities.

Our approach

This wraparound approach is designed to keep students connected to school while preparing them for a successful transition to adulthood. It works by centring students, leveraging community leadership, and supporting coordination across education and public systems.





Student-centred

The Pathways Program supports students throughout high school, providing consistent, holistic supports tailored to each stage of their educational journey. The program addresses barriers early and provides guidance over time, helping youth to stay in school and build the foundation for a successful future.



System-bridging

Pathways' model reduces fragmentation by acting as a connector between education and public systems. Program staff work closely with schools, families, employers, post-secondary institutions, and community services to coordinate and strengthen support for young people beyond what any one organization can provide.



Community-led

The program is delivered by trusted, community-based organizations with deep knowledge of the young people they serve. This local leadership ensures programming is culturally relevant, responsive to community priorities, and rooted in strong relationships with students, families, and the broader community.



Nationally supported

At the national level, shared funding, a common program model, and a data and measurement framework enable consistent program delivery across communities while allowing local adaptation. This work is sustained through investment from federal and provincial governments as well as private and corporate donors, ensuring more young people can access the support they need.

Through this interconnected ecosystem, Pathways is part of a broader continuum of care, bridging gaps for young people throughout key stages of academic, social, work, and community life.

In the 2024–25 school year, Pathways program locations worked with over 600 local partners, spanning education, health care, employment, and justice systems.



You have to have the mind of a principal, the heart of a teacher, and the arms of a social worker to do wraparound services.

PATHWAYS STAFF, SASKATOON

A Proven Model

Today, the Pathways Program supports more than 9,000 high school students in 31 low-income communities across Canada. In the 2024-25 school year, the graduation rate was 82 per cent in communities with available data.* Among the 15 communities with pre-Pathways data, graduation rates increased by an average of 65 per cent. In the same year, 69 per cent of Pathways students transitioned to post-secondary education or training. External evaluations also show that eligibility for the program is associated with stronger educational and career outcomes.

The program provides youth with a holistic combination of academic, financial, social, and one-on-one supports designed to address the root causes of school disengagement and prepare students for long-term success.

Across Pathways communities, young people are supported to overcome barriers to education in four key ways:



Creating belonging and community, where students feel connected, affirmed, and supported by trusted adults and peers.



Reducing financial barriers through access to direct financial supports, financial literacy education, and guidance in navigating financial aid systems.



Developing life skills through real-world experiences that build confidence, resilience, and the ability to manage change.



Fostering career readiness through early exposure, individualized guidance, and opportunities to explore a range of possibilities.

*Graduation rate data for the 2024-25 school year is available for 18 Pathways Program locations.

Working alongside the school system, Pathways to Education makes a multi-year commitment to youth and their families, adapting to meet the needs of students in a way that is most meaningful to them.

After 25 years of working alongside young people and communities across Canada, we have seen what is possible when students receive the right support at the right time. They are better prepared to overcome the barriers they face and build the foundation for a brighter future.

“

No matter what problem I had, Pathways had a solution. They had the resources. They found a way to help me through what I thought was impossible to fix.

PATHWAYS GRADUATE

In the following sections, we'll take a deeper dive into each of these core strategies and see how Pathways communities across the country are adapting them to meet local needs.



1 Creating Belonging and Community

Strong relationships, belonging, and emotional well-being are foundational for student engagement and long-term success.

Supportive relationships and a strong sense of belonging play an essential role in helping young people stay engaged in school and build confidence. Yet many youth today have fewer opportunities to form meaningful connections, with increasing social isolation affecting their well-being. These challenges are often more pronounced for students from under-resourced and marginalized communities, where systemic inequities can limit access to trusted guidance and safe spaces for connection.

Many racialized youth, particularly Black and Indigenous students, continue to experience racism and discrimination within education systems, alongside a lack of culturally relevant curriculum. When students do not see their histories, cultures, and identities reflected in their learning environment, it can undermine their sense of belonging and affect their engagement in school.

“

I know how much I needed help at that age, how much I needed role models. Growing up, I didn't see anyone who looked like me in successful positions.

PATHWAYS GRADUATE



How the Pathways Program Responds

Connection and affirmation are core elements of Pathways' wraparound approach, which works to build supportive relationships to help young people connect with their school experience. Pathways staff work closely with students to understand their unique needs, strengths, and aspirations, tailoring supports that help them feel connected.

That sense of belonging extends beyond the program itself. Pathways Program staff work closely with schools, school boards, community organizations, and cultural partners to create an extended network of support.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Access to culturally relevant programming and meaningful opportunities for youth feedback, helping students feel seen, understood, and valued by both adults and peers.

Mentorship and peer learning opportunities that foster trusted relationships and strengthen students' sense of belonging.

Volunteer and civic engagement experiences that build leadership skills and help students see themselves as an important part of their communities.

“

For me, Pathways is hope. It's love. It's community. It's just a wonderful place where you can grow — where you don't feel judged, you feel supported, and you can embrace who you are and where you're from.

PATHWAYS GRADUATE



Local Adaptation: Pathways Saskatoon



The Pathways Program in Saskatoon is delivered by the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC), which is based in the Treaty 6 Territory and represents seven First Nation band governments in the province of Saskatchewan.

Many Indigenous youth in Saskatoon are navigating complex experiences related to culture, identity, and belonging. The lasting impacts of the residential school system have disrupted connections to traditional sources of support for many families. For youth who move from reserve communities to Saskatoon to attend school, being away from family and cultural connections can contribute to feelings of isolation. Experiences of discrimination can also affect their sense of belonging and confidence in their educational journey. Together, these challenges can become barriers to school engagement and can make the transition from elementary to high school particularly challenging.

“

I was getting kicked out of school. I would go to Pathways, and they would help me with my homework and help me through the mental state of me thinking I'm a failure.

STUDENT, PATHWAYS SASKATOON

Pathways Saskatoon seeks to build a sense of belonging by embedding Indigenous culture throughout its programming and creating a safe environment that instills confidence and self-belief.

Centring Indigenous identity and culture

Pathways Saskatoon connects youth with Elders and Knowledge Keepers who share teachings on smudging, prayer, and truthfulness, strengthening students' sense of purpose and supporting healing from past trauma. Students also deepen their connection to community through ceremony and cultural expression, participating in Horse Dance, Sun Dance, and pow-wows alongside program staff. Opportunities for land-based learning, including activities like blueberry picking, allow youth to immerse themselves in traditional Indigenous practices and develop a spiritual connection to the land.

Holistic support and access to safer spaces

Recognizing barriers such as food insecurity and transportation costs, STC provides practical resources — including meals and bus passes — to help youth participate consistently in both the program and in school.

Weekend programming supports youth facing housing insecurity or family separation, offering a space to cook, do laundry, play games and connect with peers in a safe and comfortable environment. The team also provides wraparound services such as mental health referrals, employment and training opportunities, and a space for young parents.

Impact on belonging and confidence

In 2024, the Saskatoon Tribal Council partnered with the Students Commission of Canada to assess the outcomes and long-term impacts of Pathways Saskatoon since 2018. Youth and staff shared their experiences through surveys and focus groups, reflecting on the program's impact and the evolving needs of young people and the community.

KEY FINDINGS:

- **86%** of youth reported participating in cultural ceremonies, with 79% planning future participation, signaling sustained engagement.
- **79%** of participants expressed a strong desire to learn more about their Indigenous identity and culture.
- **More than half** of participants engaged in cultural practices in tangible, everyday ways, including offering food for cultural reasons (57%), using tobacco for guidance (50%), and preparing for ceremonies (50%).

“

It was honestly like going to a family house. They gave us food, tutoring, cultural teachings — it really helped with stress. When you smudge or just talk with your friends, it brings your stress down. It motivates you.

STUDENT, PATHWAYS SASKATOON

Survey findings also highlighted the importance of supportive relationships, with young people describing how access to caring adults, tutors, and peers helped them manage stress, rebuild confidence, navigate school, and maintain their mental and emotional well-being during personal setbacks.

Pathways Saskatoon demonstrates how a strong sense of belonging can support student success. Through culturally grounded spaces where youth feel connected and affirmed in their identities, the program helps strengthen engagement in school while contributing to a growing number of Indigenous youth in Saskatoon reaching the milestone of high school graduation.

2 Developing Life Skills

Social and practical skills equip youth to manage independence, overcome challenges, and meet school and workplace expectations.

Life skills, often described as soft skills, are increasingly recognized as strong predictors of long-term success, helping young people navigate the growing demands of education, work, and adulthood. But amid rising pressures such as overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages across Canada, schools often lack the resources to consistently support this development. Without guidance in critical areas such as problem solving, conflict resolution, and stress management, many young people are left ill-equipped to manage difficulties and stay engaged in their learning.

“

Resilience is something they must learn at this age. It doesn't develop on its own.

PATHWAYS STAFF

How the Pathways Program Responds

Alongside academic support, students in the Pathways Program have access to mentorship, social development activities, and training in digital and financial literacy — experiences that help them build essential life skills.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

One-on-one guidance from trusted adults to develop decision-making, problem-solving, and self-advocacy skills.

Experiential learning opportunities to allow youth to explore interests and build core skills, such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and resilience.

Stress management, study skills and organizational skills workshops to support well-being and preparedness for academic pressures and independent living.

This approach helps young people build the resilience to navigate setbacks and stay engaged in school. Over time, these skills support steady progress and a stronger capacity to manage change and uncertainty, ultimately equipping them to navigate the opportunities and challenges of post-secondary education, employment, and independent adulthood.



Local Adaptation: Pathways Sept-Îles

rap
CÔTE-NORD

The Pathways Program in Sept-Îles, Quebec is delivered by Réussite Accomplissement Persévérance Côte-Nord, an organization working to promote student educational success across the Côte-Nord region.

The dominant presence of the mining industry in Sept-Îles leads some parents to put less emphasis on the importance of education, and to place a high value on well-paid jobs that do not require formal educational qualifications. At the same time, Pathways Sept-Îles has observed a growing number of students experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety, impacting academic focus and relationships with peers. Over the past year, the community has also experienced the emergence of street gang activity. These new safety concerns have placed additional strain on youth and families, affecting the sense of social cohesion within the broader community. In response, Pathways Sept-Îles has prioritized relationship-building with students to better understand and support their needs and aspirations.

One-on-one relationship building

Pathways staff are present onsite at two of Sept-Îles' public high schools, where they have a dedicated space from Monday to Friday. Staff work with students during lunch, recess, class periods, and some evenings. The Pathways team works in collaboration with the school team and families to provide one-on-one guidance to develop personalized support plans. During the 2024-25 school year, program staff held more than 550 individual meetings with students.

Experiential learning

Pathways Sept-Îles offers hands-on workshops that help youth develop essential life skills. The program runs workshops on nutrition, conflict resolution, managing emotions, stress, self-esteem, and finances. Added to these are more playful activities, such as board games or role-playing games, as well as volunteer activities in the community. This lets students practice their communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills.

Study habits and stress management

Tutoring and homework support sessions strengthen organization, time management, and critical thinking skills. Heading into exams, students can also join targeted study sessions that teach grounding techniques to manage stress during tests. Participants receive take-home reference cards, while teachers are provided with digital versions to project during exams, ensuring these supports are accessible when students need them most.

Stephanie's Story

Through trusted relationships and opportunities to step outside her comfort zone, Stephanie learned to see herself as someone who could make a difference.

Three nights a week, Stephanie heads to the Pathways Vancouver centre on Keefer Street, where youth from Strathcona, Chinatown, and the Downtown Eastside gather after school. As a site support worker, she moves between roles depending on what's needed. One moment, she's a tutor, helping with essays or math problems; the next, she's a sounding board, sitting down for quiet conversations, connecting students with the right support.

"After three years, I know these kids," says Stephanie. "I grew up in the same neighbourhood, so there's a lot of trust. I let them know that it's okay to ask for help."

It's a lesson she learned seven years ago, when she was a new Pathways student herself.

Stephanie grew up in the city's Downtown Eastside, the eldest child in a Vietnamese immigrant family. After losing both her parents, she helped care for her younger siblings.

"There was a moment where I felt like I couldn't change anything about my circumstances," Stephanie says. "But Pathways was somewhere I could go and be a normal kid. That meant so much to me."

Pathways students are paired with support workers who take the time to build trust. For Stephanie, that person was Kathryn.

"Kathryn was always there, listening to me. I never felt ashamed to tell her if I was struggling."

Kathryn helped Stephanie talk to teachers and ask for extensions when she couldn't find the words to explain what was happening at home. She also nudged her to try new things — like joining a summer volunteer program called Fresh Roots.

"I spent the whole summer farming across the Lower Mainland! I made new friends. It was a leadership program, and it really encouraged me."

When the summer ended, Kathryn asked a simple question: What are you going to do with the skills you've learned?



After some thought, Stephanie decided to start a gardening club at school. That meant talking to teachers, planning meetings, and then actually asking students to come. It was nerve-wracking, but she found the courage to do it anyway.

Not long after, Stephanie ran for student council president, wanting to represent students whose voices were rarely heard.

“I felt like I could help people. That was my motivation.”

After each new challenge, she met with Kathryn to reflect on what she'd learned, slowly uncovering new strengths and interests.

“It was like a puzzle,” says Stephanie. “I kept finding myself one piece at a time. And then it all started to feel like me.”

Two years later, she was ready to step into an even bigger role, joining the board of the Britannia Community Services Centre in East Vancouver. She wanted to ensure young people had a say in the programs that affect them. When she doubted herself, she remembered Kathryn's words: “Your voice matters, and you are capable of making change.”

“

I kept finding myself one piece at a time. And then it all started to feel like me.

STEPHANIE

For her ongoing community work, Stephanie has been awarded numerous scholarships and now guides other youth through the process, helping them secure funding to pursue their goals. During evenings at Pathways Vancouver, students sometimes ask her the question she once asked her own support worker. *Why do you care so much?*

“I care because I can. I'm able to now,” she says. “Pathways gave me that chance to help other kids. That's the simple answer.”

Stephanie's story reflects the lasting impact of life skills development. Through learning to trust her voice and act on her ideas, she was able to move beyond her circumstances and create opportunities for herself while helping others do the same.

3 Fostering Career Readiness

Early exposure and guidance help students visualize future possibilities, make informed decisions, and translate aspirations into actionable plans.

As students approach their senior years of high school, they are expected to make decisions that will impact the rest of their lives. But as the labour market continues to evolve, many do so without a clear understanding of the post-secondary paths that lead to stable, meaningful employment.

Traditional career advice often emphasizes the importance of networking. Yet many students in low-income communities lack access to mentors, networks, and career role models that can influence aspirations and open doors. For those whose families may not have experience with post-secondary education or certain sectors of the labour market, navigating these decisions is particularly complex. This limited exposure to guidance and role models narrows perceived options and makes informed decision-making more difficult.

“

I'd always been interested in STEM, but I'd never thought it was an option for me. I didn't have any connections or the money to pursue that kind of career.

PATHWAYS GRADUATE

How the Pathways Program Responds

Through the Pathways Program, students gain consistent access to caring adults and career professionals who guide them as they set goals and make decisions about their futures. As students begin to explore broader post-secondary and career options, they take steps to build confidence and clarify their goals.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Career exploration

through career fairs, post-secondary campus visits, and skilled trades tours exposes students to industries and fields they might not have previously considered.

Individualized career planning

helps students connect their interests, strengths, and goals to concrete education and work opportunities.

Employability and workplace readiness

coaching helps with resume writing, interview preparation, and workshops that support success in the workforce.

Career guidance from relatable role models

helps students envision themselves in future roles and understand how education and career journeys unfold over time.

This approach helps young people build confidence in their future and make informed decisions as they navigate key transitions into post-secondary education, training, and early employment.





Local Adaptation: Pathways Regent Park



The Pathways Program first opened its doors in Regent Park 25 years ago and continues to be delivered by Regent Park Community Health Centre. Established in 1973, the Centre has long supported the health and well-being of people who live and work in the community.

Pathways Regent Park brings career readiness to life through partnerships that connect young people with post-secondary institutions, employers, and paid work opportunities. Students also benefit from opportunities to connect with Pathways alumni who share their experiences navigating similar barriers and pursuing their own educational and career goals. Hearing directly from Pathways graduates from similar backgrounds helps students feel that their own career aspirations are within reach.

Career exposure

Meaningful exposure to different industries and professions helps students make informed decisions about their futures. Through a long-standing partnership with St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, students are introduced to careers in medical sciences through panels, workplace visits, and inclusive programming such as the *Women in White Coats* interview series. These experiences help students explore potential career paths and better understand the steps required to pursue them.

Proven Results

A recent RBC-supported study examined how the Pathways Program is helping students build career readiness. Across four program locations — Hamilton, Spryfield, Winnipeg, and Vancouver — findings showed:

- **79 per cent** of students were optimistic about attaining the career they want.
- More than **70 per cent** of students believed they would be successful after graduation.
- Students' understanding of the skills needed to achieve their career goals **increased by 15 percentage points**, rising from 48 per cent at baseline to **63 per cent** in follow-up surveys.

Workplace experience

Pathways Regent Park students gain direct experience through programs that combine training with exposure to real work environments. The *Moving Towards Opportunity* program is a 14-week pre-employment experience for youth aged 16 to 18. Program facilitation is shared amongst local partners, including Daniels Group, City of Toronto, Toronto Community Housing, and Pathways Regent Park. Upon completion of the program, youth can access eight weeks of paid employment in industries including financial services, health care, real estate, legal, and social services.

“

Although part of the program is getting academic support, it's also about developing a mentorship relationship with somebody who parallels your journey so that you can see yourself in university, too.

PATHWAYS STAFF, REGENT PARK

Mentorship

Mentorship helps students build the knowledge and connections needed to take their next steps. Through a city-wide partnership led by Boston Consulting Group and Pathways Rexdale, students in Regent Park are matched with volunteer mentors who support the development of practical career skills, including resume writing and interview preparation.

Collaboration with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) further supports students' transition to post-secondary. For the past three years, a P2E x TMU Community Tutoring initiative paired Pathways Regent Park students with undergraduate mentors for one-on-one and small-group sessions. TMU mentors are now training senior high school students as the next generation of peer tutors. Regent Park students also visit TMU's campus for a “day in the life” experience, offering a first-hand look at university life and helping them envision themselves in post-secondary spaces.

Pathways Regent Park demonstrates how the right support can help young people prepare for life after high school, giving them the confidence to pursue their ambitions while ensuring they never have to navigate important decisions about their future alone.

4 Reducing Financial Barriers

Access to financial support can help young people pursue post-secondary education, expand their career opportunities, and build long-term financial stability.

When young people have access to the resources they need, they are better positioned to pursue further education and achieve their long-term goals. Yet rising tuition and living costs, complex financial aid systems, and a fragmented scholarship landscape continue to create significant barriers for many students.

During consultations for our recent Pathways Program Review, some students reported limiting their aspirations because they believed post-secondary education would be financially out of reach.

How the Pathways Program Responds

In the final years of high school, when young people need to confirm their next steps, affordability concerns often determine their choices. Delivering scholarship support and personalized guidance on securing financial aid can turn a student's post-secondary dream into a realistic and achievable goal.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Direct financial support through Pathways' National Scholarship Program, which provides students with up to \$2,000 toward their post-secondary goals.

Financial aid and scholarship guidance to help students identify sources of funding, understand eligibility requirements, and complete applications.

Financial literacy and planning workshops to prepare students for independent living and financial pressures.

Program Partners also collaborate with post-secondary institutions and corporate partners to help students and families build clear financial plans for post-secondary costs and navigate complex systems, such as financial aid or immigration services that affect access and affordability.



Local Adaptation: Pathways Kingston



Kingston Community
Health Centres
Centres de santé
communautaire de Kingston

The Pathways Program in Kingston is delivered by Kingston Community Health Centres, a multi-site provider of integrated care and community well-being services.

Pathways Kingston serves students living in the city's North End, where longstanding socioeconomic inequities have been compounded by rising costs of living and food insecurity. Many students in the community identify as first-generation learners and face added financial uncertainty, navigating post-secondary options with limited guidance on costs and financial aid. To address these barriers, Pathways Kingston works with local partners to reduce immediate challenges and help students pursue long-term goals.

Increasing access to public transit

In 2012, Pathways Kingston participated in the development of *Y2K: The Kingston Youth Strategy*, a community-wide plan to support the well-being of young people in Kingston. Through this process, students identified transportation costs as a major barrier in accessing learning and employment opportunities. In response, the City, Kingston Transit, and local school boards partnered to provide free transit for high school students, increasing mobility and supporting greater independence.

Supporting food security

Pathways Kingston provides grocery gift cards and meals at evening programming to ease immediate financial strain and ensure students can stay focused on learning. Through a food share partnership with local farmers, families also receive fresh produce boxes during the summer months, extending support beyond the school year and increasing access to healthy food.

Reducing financial barriers to post-secondary education

In partnership with Queen's University, Pathways Kingston supports students in planning and financing their post-secondary education. Queen's *Financing Your Future* workshop provides information about the costs of post-secondary studies and funding options such as OSAP, scholarships, grants, and bursaries. Pathways graduates across Canada who attend Queen's are also eligible for the *Pathways to Education Award*, a renewable scholarship worth up to \$10,000 over four years.

Hogan's Story

How financial support helped Hogan take the next step toward a career in the trades

"I was always obsessed with cars," Hogan says, recalling childhood drives with his mom. She'd point at passing vehicles and ask, "What's that one?" and he could often tell her the make, model, and year. Even at night, he could recognize a car by its headlights alone.

In high school, Hogan worked closely with his Pathways Kitchener mentor, Sonia, to lean into that interest. He knew he wasn't meant for desk work. What he needed was something hands-on, a new challenge every day.

"My passion was auto class," Hogan says, remembering the first time he swapped out an engine — the only student who managed it on the first try. "That's when I realized what I wanted to do. I loved taking things apart to learn exactly how they worked."

But the path into the trades wasn't straightforward, despite strong demand for skilled trades workers across Canada. Hogan weighed his options, including college programs, pre-apprenticeship training and apprenticeships — but each route came with its own challenges. College could provide training, but wouldn't necessarily lead to a job, while most entry-level positions required hands-on experience, which was hard to gain without first being hired.

"It was kind of scary," he says. "You go from high school into a whole other world where you're expected to be focused on something specific, and you're trying to figure out what that is."

As the first in his family to consider college, Hogan was glad to have Sonia as a sounding board. She researched different entry points into the trades, connecting with contacts at local colleges who could explain the pros and cons of each route. Hogan finally decided on a pre-apprenticeship course at Conestoga College, which would help him build the skills needed to secure an apprenticeship and start working toward his certification.



After graduating from high school and completing the Pathways Program, Hogan used half of his Pathways National Scholarship to cover his pre-apprenticeship program, and the other half to purchase his first toolbox.

“I didn’t have anything at that time, so it made a big difference. It gave me a start,” he says. “Once you get started, it’s easier to keep going.”

That toolbox lasted him throughout his apprenticeship and early jobs. Only when his collection of tools outgrew the space did he decide, reluctantly, to trade it in.

Today, Hogan works for the City of Kitchener, where no two shifts are alike. Whether it’s a lawnmower, snowplow, or heavy-duty truck, each machine presents a different problem — and that’s exactly what he likes. A repair can take days of trial and error, with frustration and small breakthroughs along the way.

“But when you finally do figure it out, I can’t even describe it. It’s the best feeling ever,” he says. “And if the same problem comes up again, you can identify it immediately, and then your brain’s like, ‘okay, I got this.’”

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HOGAN

In recent years, Hogan has built a following of tens of thousands across social media by sharing advice and diagnosing vehicle problems. He’s made hundreds of videos aimed at helping others make informed decisions and avoid unnecessary costs. Drawing on his own experience, he also walks people through different paths into the trades, comparing costs, requirements, and timelines.

“I try to guide people through the process — where to start, what I would do,” he says. “If you’re starting at an entry level and buying tools at the same time, it’s super expensive. In the beginning, you just need some support.”

Hogan’s story highlights how reducing financial barriers can help young people pursue their goals. With support to cover some of the upfront costs of training and equipment, he took the first steps toward building a career that aligned with his skills and ambitions.



A Call for Collective Action:

Invest in Proven, Community-led Solutions

Expanding access to the supports that help young people stay engaged and on track

This report highlights how Pathways Program Partners are adapting their work to meet local needs to ensure young people are engaged in school and equipped to pursue brighter futures. This approach is working. Across Canada, 31 program locations are demonstrating what is possible when evidence-based supports are combined with deep community knowledge.

But the need for this work has never been greater. Across the country, Pathways Program Partners are responding to increasingly complex student needs at a time when charitable giving remains under pressure. This is resulting in a growing gap between the demand for support and the resources available to provide it.

Meeting this growing demand will require sustained investment and stronger coordination across the systems and institutions that support young people. Policymakers, donors, and community partners all have a role to play in ensuring more young people can access the support they need to stay engaged in school and beyond.

It has always taken a village to raise a child, but today that village is under increasing strain.

We're calling on:



Governments and policymakers to invest in multi-year support across adolescence, recognizing that school engagement is built over time and cannot be addressed through isolated or short-term policy responses.

Governments across Canada are increasingly focused on strengthening the workforce and addressing labour shortages in key sectors. Achieving these goals requires investment earlier in the pipeline. Young people who are engaged in school and supported through critical transitions are better positioned to pursue post-secondary education, training, and employment. Integrated, wraparound supports should be recognized as an essential part of Canada's long-term workforce and economic development strategy.



Funders and corporate partners to provide flexible funding to community-based approaches that are proven to support youth success in high school and beyond.

As student needs become more complex, nonprofit organizations at the forefront of addressing them need the flexibility to respond to local realities while maintaining the core supports that drive long-term impact. Flexible, multi-year funding allows organizations to invest in the people and partnerships that make coordinated support possible. For corporate partners, these investments also represent an opportunity to advance social impact and community investment goals, helping to empower the next generation.



Educators and youth-serving organizations to deepen cross-sector collaboration so young people experience continuity and coordinated support as they transition from high school into post-secondary education, training, or work.

Young people's needs do not fit neatly within a single system, and neither should the response. Greater collaboration across education, community, employment, and social service sectors can help create a stronger continuum of support while reducing fragmentation and duplication. A more unified voice can also help to elevate the needs of young people in public conversations and build momentum for the policies and investments required to support their ongoing success.

No single sector can address these challenges alone, and meaningful change requires shared responsibility. Working together, governments, funders, educators, and community organizations can help ensure more young people have access to the support they need to achieve their goals.



A Shared Vision for the Future

Throughout this report, we have seen how a sense of belonging, opportunities to build life skills, exposure to career paths, and access to financial supports help young people stay engaged in school and focused on their goals.

We have also seen that these outcomes do not happen by chance. They are the result of schools, families, employers, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, governments, and caring adults working together to create opportunities and remove barriers. When those supports are connected, young people are better able to navigate challenges and move toward the futures they want for themselves.

The challenge now is ensuring that these opportunities are available to every young person who needs them. As the barriers facing youth continue to evolve, so too must our collective response. Sustaining and expanding this work will require continued collaboration and long-term investment in approaches that have been proven to make a difference.

Behind every young person who succeeds is a community that refused to let them face life's challenges alone. Please join us in strengthening the village that surrounds young people, so that every student has the opportunity to realize their full potential.

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Pathways gave me the space to learn, to make mistakes, and to speak in my own name, which is a very important thing — to speak in your own name and with your own voice.

PATHWAYS GRADUATE



Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to our network of Program Partners across Canada, whose expertise informed the best practices and recommendations presented throughout this report.



We are also deeply grateful to the Pathways students, graduates, families, and youth workers who are at the heart of this work. Their lived experiences and perspectives continue to guide our work.

Our Commitment to Indigenous Youth

We are committed to building honourable relationships and partnerships with Indigenous students, families, and communities. We understand our role is to continue to build our competency to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that are relevant to our role in education and youth programming. We acknowledge the significant responsibility we have been granted by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities as a resource that will support Indigenous students to graduate from high school and realize their true potential. We understand that this must be done with a culturally respectful and relevant approach, and we will continue our learning, engagement, and relationship-building so that our practice is the very best it can be.

Pathways to Education

For more information about Pathways to Education and the work we do to support youth in low-income communities, please visit pathwaystoeducation.ca

Contact

info@pathwayscanada.ca

Website

pathwaystoeducation.ca



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