



Create **Action**

EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT

MAY 2024

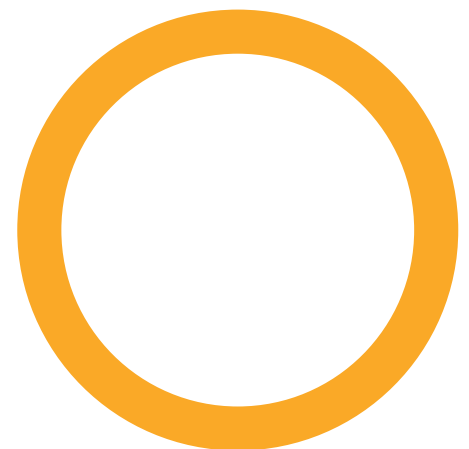


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***CreateAction* was a project in partnership between:**



Canadian
CED Network
Réseau canadien
de DÉC



National Association
of Friendship Centres
Association nationale
des centres d'amitié



1 - WHAT IS CREATEACTION?

This report summarizes the evaluation findings of *CreateAction*: Inclusive Social Innovation. *CreateAction* was led by the [Community Economic Development Network \(CCEDNet\)](#) in partnership with the [National Association of Friendship Centres \(NAFC\)](#) and [Social Research and Demonstration Corporation \(SRDC\)](#). The project was funded by the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Skills Strategy and implemented between August 2020 and March 2024.

The purpose of *CreateAction* was to help youth overcome barriers to employment and develop a broad range of skills and knowledge to improve their labour market participation. The project involved five cohorts and included four main project components:

- **Work placements** with organizations working in community economic development and the social economy, typically six months in length
- A **peer learning program** facilitated by *CreateAction* partners for and between youth that included community meetups, youth circles, and a Slack workspace
- An **employer support program** based on research, resources, and training. Activities included peer learning drop-ins, capacity building workshops, individual check-ins, and ongoing tailored support
- **Youth support activities** including individual check-ins and access to counselling through Inkblot Therapy

The evaluation supported project learning by assessing the design, implementation, and results achieved by *CreateAction*. Data collection methods included:

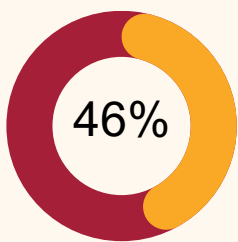
- Literature review
- Project administrative data
- Youth surveys: pre and post placement
- Employer surveys
- Youth focus groups
- Employer interviews
- Project partner interviews

2 - WHO PARTICIPATED IN CREATEACTION?

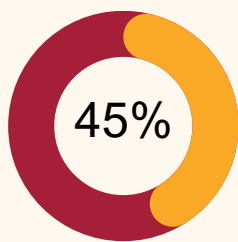
CreateAction aimed to reach youth (15-30 years old) experiencing one or more barriers to employment; not in education, employment, or training (NEET); and/or underemployed, as well as equity-deserving youth with geographic representation.

YOUTH

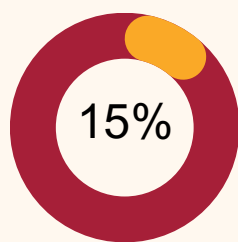
159 youth participated in CreateAction across 5 cohorts. Of these participants:



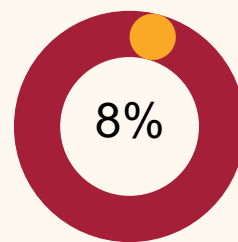
self identified as a visible minority



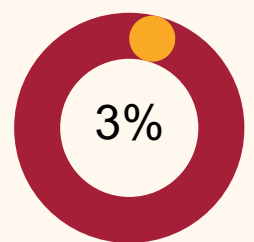
self identified as Indigenous



self identified as having a disability



self identified as a new immigrant



self identified as Francophone

- 71% identified as female, 26% as male, and 2% as another gender identity
- Youth represented all provinces and territories except for Yukon

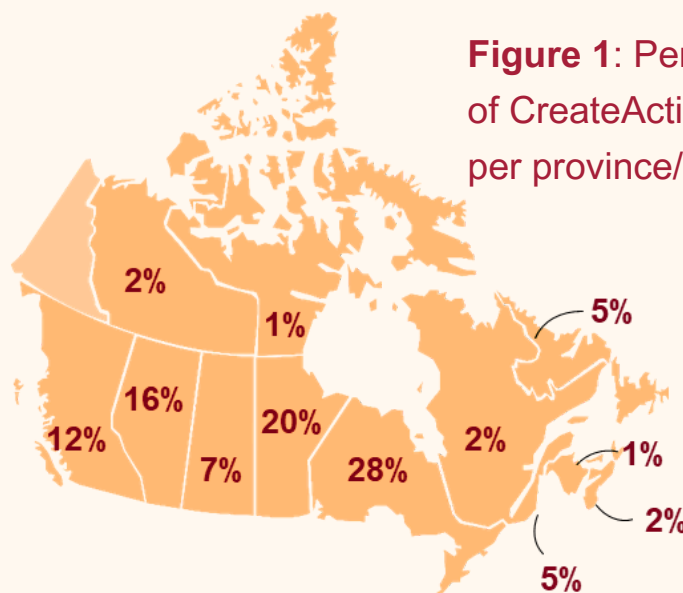


Figure 1: Percentage of CreateAction youth per province/territory

96%

of youth survey respondents indicated that they experienced at least one barrier to finding or keeping a job or taking part in an education or training program in the 12 to 18 months leading up to their *CreateAction* placement.

The most common barrier, and the one with the highest degree of impact on youth, was COVID-19, though the extent of its impact decreased with each cohort.

Following COVID-19, the next set of barriers were **employment-related**, including:

- Limited work experience
- Lack of skills in demand/required for jobs
- Lack of networks/connections
- Not enough education

These were followed by **personal challenges** that affect but are external to employment in their nature:

- Transportation issues, including lack of driver's license, vehicle, or bus pass
- Family obligations (care for family members)
- Physical or mental disability, injury, or illness



EMPLOYERS

140 employers participated in *CreateAction* across 5 cohorts.

The employers who participated in *CreateAction* operated within the CED and social economy sectors. Employers engaged in a variety of organizational activities and programming.

The most common activities reported by *CreateAction* employers was youth service/programs. Others included:

- Social services
- Advocacy
- Housing services
- Culture-based services
- Employment services
- Arts-based programming
- Environment/sustainability programming
- LGBTQ2S+ programming

The majority of employers reported that prior to their participation in *CreateAction*, their organization had experience supporting youth facing barriers to employment.

76% of employers had previously hired a youth with barriers to employment

81% of employers provide services for people facing barriers to employment

Although most employers had previous experience supporting youth, they were **diverse in their organizational capacity to support youth in the placements**, particularly in the following areas:

- **Staff time:** The amount time that staff members, especially supervisors, had available to support a youth varied across employers
- **Internal social supports:** Some of the *CreateAction* employers provided support services, such as housing supports, counselling, cultural supports, etc., to marginalized communities as part of their mandate
- **Location of work:** Some organizations operated entirely remotely, some operated only in-person, and some took a hybrid approach
- **Working hours:** Due to differences in work tasks, some employers had flexible working hours while others had a set schedule each day

3 - HOW DID YOUTH BENEFIT FROM *CREATEACTION*?

The baseline and end of program surveys were used to identify changes among youth based on their experiences with the different components of *CreateAction*. Youth were asked a series of questions covering five outcome areas - Career Planning & Job Path Finding Skills, Networks, Sector-Specific Knowledge & Experience, Transferable Employability Skills & Competencies, Personal Wellbeing. Statistical analyses revealed that some positive changes in the five outcomes areas among youth were statistically significant. To further understand their experiences and outcomes, youth were also invited to participate in focus groups at the end of their placements.

What is statistical significance?



Statistical significance is a way to measure whether the results of a study are likely to be real and not just due to chance. If a finding is statistically significant, it means that there is a low probability that the observed result occurred by random variation alone. For *CreateAction* youth outcomes, this means that the changes observed in youth were likely because of *CreateAction*'s influence rather than random chance. Where applicable, statistically significant changes are described in the following subsections

Overall, the evaluation showed that the *CreateAction* model has helped youth improve both employment-related and personal outcomes.

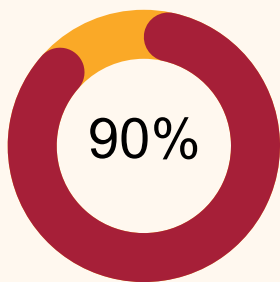
At the end of their placements, youth were asked about the impact of the different components of *CreateAction* on their lives (as shown in Figure 2). Youth's responses indicated that areas directly related to their placements - a pay cheque, supportive employer, and experience and skills - had the greatest impact.

Figure 2: *CreateAction* components youth indicated had "a lot" or "significant" impact on them

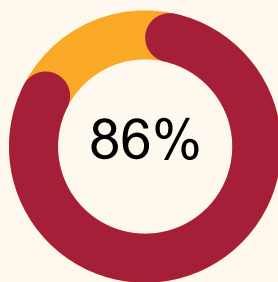


MEANINGFUL WORK EXPERIENCE

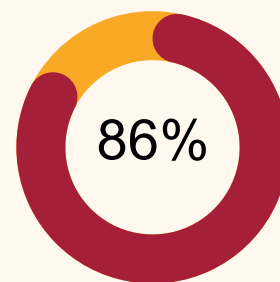
The evaluation identified that youth reported gaining meaningful work experience in a healthy work environment with a good wage through *CreateAction*.



of youth agreed that *CreateAction* has been important for advancing their career



of youth were satisfied with their employer and work placement experience



of youth were satisfied with the support that they received from their employer

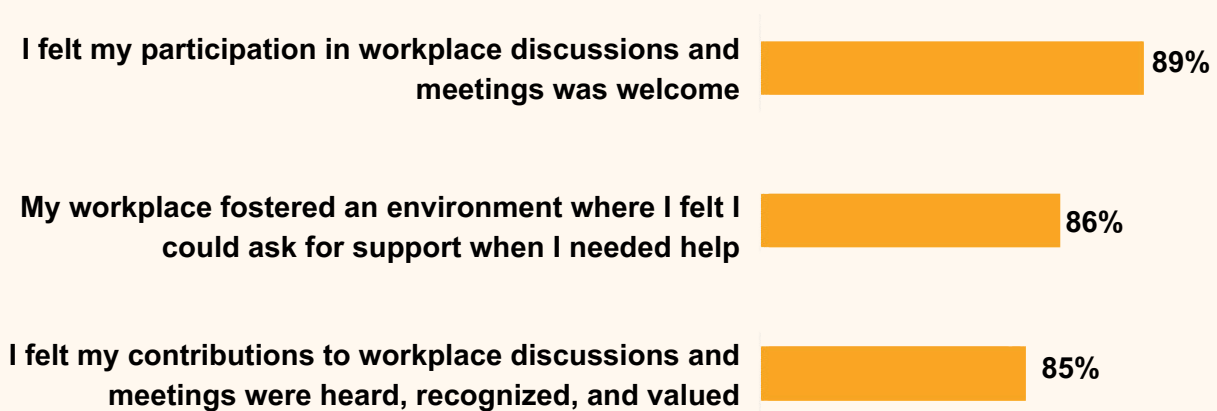
“This position really offered me a chance to get into a position that I wouldn’t have been able to otherwise and gain some work experience, which was really helpful. So now I have had six months of experience, and I am continuing on with my contract for a while now. It will be very helpful for my future, I’m sure. So, I am really thankful for that.” (Youth)



The evaluation found that youth felt valued at their workplace and that they could ask for support when needed.

“They allowed me to use that time to explore what hours and work settings allowed me to thrive the best. Which is not a flexibility that I have been provided before. And now I know the four-day work week is what helps me. I know having one day to work from home every week is awesome. I know what kind of office setting I need. So that allows me to hopefully in the future advocate for my accommodation now that I know what they are.” (Youth)

Figure 3: Percentage of youth who agreed with the following statements



Statistically Significant Youth Outcome:

! Survey results showed a statistically significant positive change when youth were asked to what extent they are “keeping up with financial obligations without any problems and managing to save some money”, suggesting that *CreateAction* improved youth’s immediate financial situation.

IMPROVED SKILLS

One area youth reported the greatest change was in their skills development.

The **top 3 soft skills** youth felt they gained through *CreateAction* were:

- Communication
- Leadership
- Working in a team

The **top 3 hard skills** youth felt they gained through *CreateAction* were:

- Digital
- Research & analysis
- Project management

93% of youth felt they had gained and/or improved skills as a result of their work placement

90% of youth agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they learned were important for advancing their career

Statistically Significant Youth Outcome:



Survey results showed statistically significant positive changes related to career decision-making self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in making decisions about jobs and their future career). This included confidence in:

- Deciding what they value most in a job
- Finding information about education or training programs in the area of work they are interested in
- Assessing how well their abilities match the kind of work they want to do
- Talking with a person already employed in the area of work they are interested in
- Finding information about jobs they are interested in

POSITIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS & NETWORKS

Youth further emphasized the positive working relationships and professional networks they experienced through their work placements.

“I’ve met a lot of people through this placement that have helped me and that I’ve learned from. It has widened up the networks of people I know. Especially being in the non-profit, meeting a lot a people who work in this industry.” (Youth)

“One support that I have gained is my connections to my coworkers. They are super incredible people. It’s crazy that so many amazing people could just find each other the way that this team has. I will 100% continue to reach out to them when I need or want to.” (Youth)

“I have worked in a lot of places where I have been the only Indigenous person or where I felt like I had to take up a lot of space. Here I feel comfortable just doing my thing, doing my work. I don’t really have to worry about code switching or like anything like that. It just feels like home here. That is how comfortable I feel.” (Youth)

92% of employers agreed or strongly agreed that they plan to stay in touch with their youth, reflecting youth’s positive working relationships



ENHANCED SECTOR-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE & EXPERIENCE

Youth additionally showed enhanced sector-specific knowledge and experience as related to CED and the Friendship Centre Movement, a central objective of the project.

95% of youth indicated that they are interested in continuing to be involved in CED / the Friendship Centre Movement as a result of participating in *CreateAction*

Statistically Significant Youth Outcome:



Survey results showed statistically significant positive changes in youth's knowledge and experience related to the concept of CED and Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, diversity, and the land.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE, COMMUNITY, & WELL-BEING

Finally, the evaluation found that youth also experienced gains in their personal development, including their confidence, sense of community, and personal wellbeing.

- Youth described the **community** that formed through *CreateAction* as “safe,” “open,” and “with caring people.”

- A few youth highlighted the benefits of the **mental health supports** on their personal wellbeing, such as the mindfulness sessions offered through the peer learning program.
- Some youth also described how a **sense of stability and balance** had an influence on their personal wellbeing. For many, this feeling was attributed to their work placement and the sense of safety working within a healthy work environment.

“Thinking back, when I first got the job, it was such a huge relief. I was unemployed for quite a few months after university. I couldn’t find a job that was what I wanted to do or that felt fulfilling in any way. When I applied and got this job, it was finally such a relief after such a long period of stress and worrying about money... Thinking to this point how much my life has changed, I feel it’s almost a 180. I have challenges now, but it is completely not the same as it was before. I feel a lot more stable with my life, financially, school-wise as well. I feel like I have a better idea of where I want to go in the future. Because of the skills I’ve developed through this placement. It’s definitely a complete change. I’m grateful for it.” (Youth)

“[I now have] faith in what I am capable of and what others think I am capable of.” (Youth)

“I definitely feel like I have more balance. I feel very secure in where I am right now. I’m very happy my contract got extended... My supervisor is so awesome, she found another place for me to stay on.” (Youth)

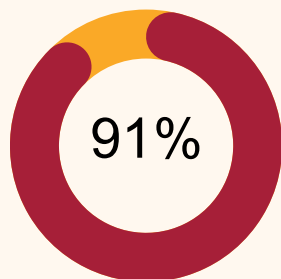


4 - HOW DID EMPLOYERS BENEFIT FROM *CREATEACTION*?

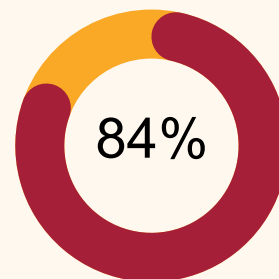
Employers completed an end of placement survey at the end of each cohort for each youth they supervised. Additionally, at the end of the project, a select number of employers were interviewed to discuss their overall experience participating in *CreateAction*. They described their experience supervising youth and engaging with the employer support program, and their perspectives on what they felt they gained through their participation in *CreateAction*.

SUPPORT FROM PARTNERS

In general, *CreateAction* employers felt supported by project partners throughout their involvement in the project.



of employers were very or somewhat satisfied with the support their organization received as part of *CreateAction*



of employers received one-on-one support through the employer support program and found it helpful

DIRECT WORK-RELATED BENEFITS

Employers reported direct benefits as a result of their participation in CreateAction.

74% of employers felt that the work completed by their youth had an impact on their organization to a great extent or significantly

“On our end of things, it gave us an opportunity to get some things done around here that sort of fall outside of the scope of our regular activities. So we've had opportunities to do some renovations and some more material projects around the place, which has been fantastic because those are things that are essential to our community and the end user experience. So we've gotten a big jump on a lot of those things that we just haven't had a way forward on.” (Employer)

69% of employers felt that having a youth work in their organization had an impact on their organization significantly or to a great extent

“[CreateAction] provided greater capacity within the team and also brought a youth perspective into our work; this helped us find a permanent staff member that really fits with our team.” (Employer)

“Bringing folks out to our program that hadn't previously been there...I think was something I found really valuable and something that I just recognized would not have happened had [the CreateAction youth] not been here.” (Employer)

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Employers also shared how their participation in *CreateAction* has helped to increase their immediate and longer-term capacity to hire and support youth who face barriers to employment.

Figure 4: Percentage of employers who agreed that participation in *CreateAction* increased their organizational capacity in the following areas



Some employers shared that *CreateAction* helped by providing financial support that allowed them to have the time and resources to hire youth facing barriers and support that youth in a good way.

“We may not have given [the youth] an interview just based on their resumé and their previous work experience because it did not necessarily reflect the role. ...So I'm so happy we were able to welcome them into the organization where we may not have otherwise been able to [without CreateAction].” (Employer)

“I found someone with multiple barriers, a young person wanting to get into the trades who didn't have the experience...So we had all this time, and did not have to stress about it because [normally] we'd have a production timeline... but with [CreateAction] we're able to just go 'no problem, what can we do to support you? What do you want to learn next?'” (Employer)

By increasing employers' immediate capacity through the financial support, employers shared how they were able to build their longer-term capacity to employ youth who face barriers to employment by:

- Increasing **staff knowledge** on how to provide supportive and flexible work environments
- Providing **first-time experience** to employers on hiring youth who face barriers to employment
- Implementing **new organizational practices** related to onboarding and supporting youth

“Some of that encouragement through CreateAction was the reason that we gave the youth a second chance for the interview. I think that some of that learning and teaching of just giving people grace and allowing people to have second chances is something that will carry forward.” (Employer)

“Some of the supports that were needed for that particular employee ended up creating a bit of a shift in culture around the office in general and in the organization...it made it more of a priority and gave us a chance to sort of address that collectively and put some things into play that we're still using today and continuing to use today.” (Employer)



5 - WHAT WERE THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM *CREATEACTION*?

THE *CREATEACTION* MODEL

- A key strength of *CreateAction* was the integration of **an adaptive and flexible model** whereby employers and partner staff were highly supportive and responsive to youth's needs. Although this flexibility does provide administrative challenges, fully integrating this flexibility in the program model can ensure that all youth are equitably able to participate in all aspects of *CreateAction*.
- The **supportive six-month work placements** were the most impactful part of *CreateAction* for youth. Strengthening the workplace component of *CreateAction*, such as exploring options for longer placements, could lead to even stronger outcomes.
- Many **employers wanted to continue employing youth** after the placement, but couldn't due to lack of funding. Supporting employers to access other funding sources could help them to continue employing youth beyond the placements.

PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

- While the participation rates were on the lower side for some aspects of *CreateAction* (e.g., Youth Circles, employer workshops), the feedback from those who did attend **highlights the benefits of attending and the value of multi-component programming**. This highlights the importance of seeking youth and employer input on options for workshop topics at the beginning of each cohort and tailoring workshops to their interest and schedule.

RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

The success of a model like *CreateAction* is heavily influenced by the recruitment and selection of employers.

- **Effective communication with employers is critical**, including information about the project objectives, the required administrative time, the expectations related to employer engagement, and the capacity required of employers to provide supportive and meaningful placements for the desired youth population.
- The importance of organizational capacity – particularly, supervisor availability/time, a flexible work environment, and employer understanding of and experience employing or providing services to the target demographic – suggests the **need for having a robust and thorough recruitment and selection process for employers** to understand their expectations and motivations for being part of *CreateAction*, as well as their organizational capacity to provide supportive and meaningful placements.
- **Flexibility around the criteria for inclusion of youth** allowed for a high degree of adaptability to varying contexts facing employers and youth across the country. However, **that flexibility at times also made it challenging** to clearly and measurably assess if youth were the right fit for *CreateAction*, and to ensure highly tailored, relevant, and responsive programming and supports for all participants.
- This highlights the importance of having **a clear definition, with appropriate inclusion criteria**, of the desired youth population that aligns with the goals and capacities of the *CreateAction* model, which can easily be communicated to potential employers and youth.

SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH

- Evaluation findings suggest there were opportunities to **strengthen the availability of specialized social supports for youth** as well as the strengthening of mechanisms and processes to address any challenges that may arise. This could include increased partner capacity to provide support to youth, such as engaging professionals with specific expertise (e.g., social worker, employment counsellor), providing professional development opportunities to *CreateAction* staff (e.g., training), and strengthening policies and processes for when placement issues arise.
- **Strengthening post-placement transition planning**, such as support services available at the end or after the placements, through employers, partners, or an alumni network, could help facilitate learning transfer and set youth up for continued success, especially for youth without employment post-placement. This could include formalized check-ins with youth conducted by employers or partners at regular intervals near the end and after the placements, referrals to an employment counsellor or other employment supports, or regular workshops throughout the peer learning program focused on finding and sustaining employment.





Create Action



Canadian Community Economic Development Network
www.ccednet-rcdec.ca

National Association of Friendship Centres
www.nafc.ca

Social Reserach and Demonstration Corporation
www.srdc.org

Funded by the Government of Canada

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