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Youth Employment, Unemployment and Under-Employment in Ottawa



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As part of "Youth Leadership for Change",
an initiative of the SPCO
November, 2013

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Introduction

The transition from school to work for young people has generally been captured as a complicated period of youth development from student to professional life. Statistical trends indicating the slow recovery of youth employment rates following the economic recession of 2008 show that this transition has been particularly difficult in the last five years.

Although quantitative data on unemployment in Ottawa exists for the youth age category (15-24), there is currently limited qualitative research on how youths in Ottawa perceive their own employment prospects. Even less is known about the ways that youths are negotiating with a relatively limited labour market to improve their employment prospects in the future.

This report is intended to illustrate the experiences of unemployed, underemployed and employed youth in order to identify gaps between employment services and the needs of youth when it comes to securing and retaining work. The findings are intended to produce a holistic understanding of how young people in Ottawa navigate employment pathways, experience employment barriers, and cope with temporary and chronic unemployment and underemployment.

Through a number of focus groups and interviews conducted with participants between the ages of 14 and 24, this study draws on the experiences of students, new graduates, and out-of-work youth as they transition from school to work, and sometimes back to school.

We would like to thank all the youth and community workers who participated in focus groups or interviews for this report.

In addition, thank you to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (Canada Summer Jobs), the United Way of Ottawa, and the University of Ottawa (Faculty of Social Sciences - Economics) for their support of this initiative.

Data were provided through the Ottawa Community Data Consortium, hosted by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa. This project and report are part of “Youth Leadership for Change” – an initiative of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

PART I: Youth and the Labour Market in Ottawa: facts and figures

About the Data

The data in this report is from two datasets from Statistics Canada: the National Household Survey and the Labour Force Survey (obtained via the Community Data Consortium).

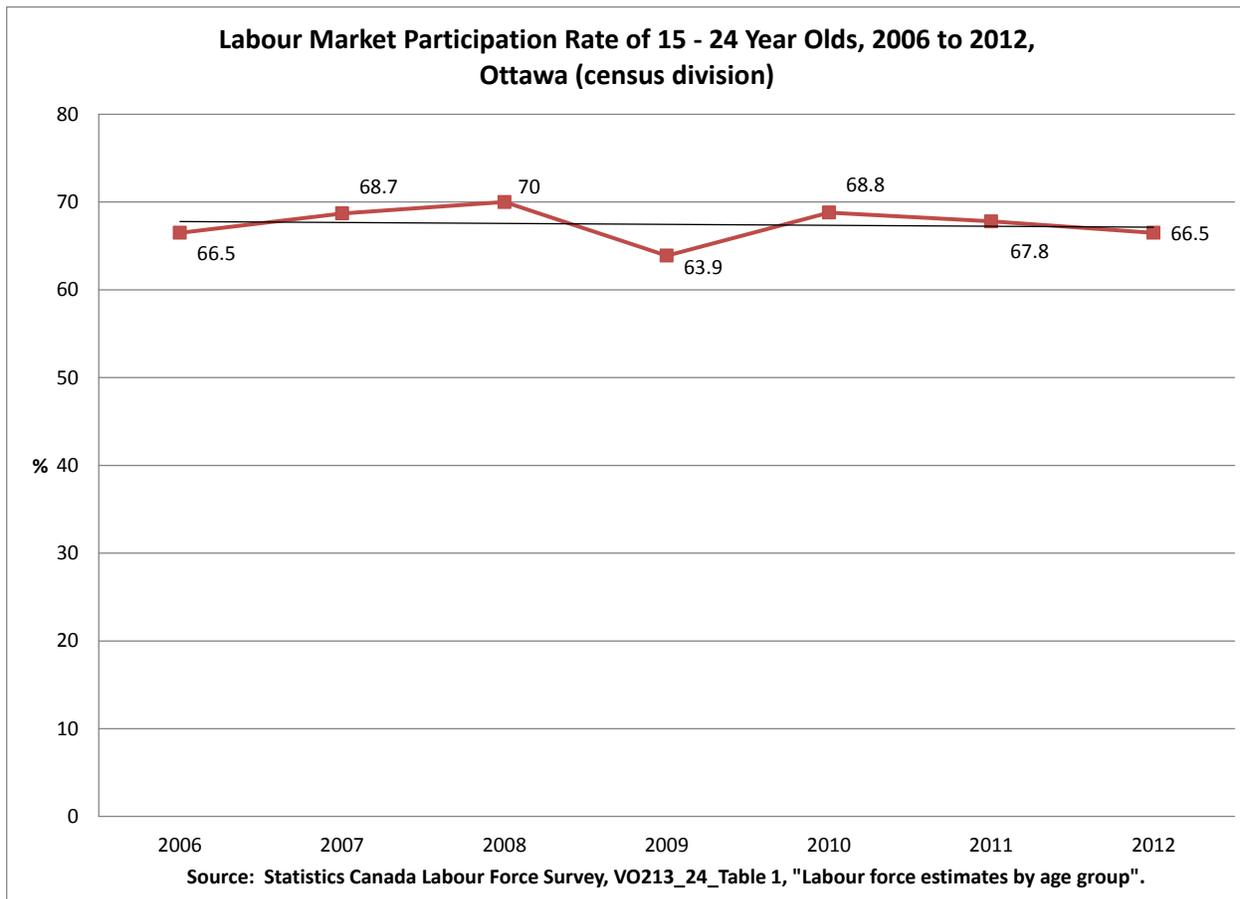
The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) is a voluntary survey of the Canadian population. Questions in the NHS replace those previously found in the "long-form" Census (prior to 2011). Because of the voluntary nature of the NHS, NHS data are subject to increased non-response bias compared to Census data. Further, information from the NHS cannot be compared to information from the 2011 or previous censuses. Income and employment data in the NHS refer to the year prior to the NHS, i.e. 2010.

Since we cannot compare over time using census or NHS data, we must use alternate sources to understand trends. Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) is an annual survey which is useful to identify labour force trends over time. However, the NHS and the LFS use different sampling methods and definitions, so the figures reported for the two datasets are different, and cannot be compared to each other. For example, the Labour Force Survey focuses on employment and unemployment in the week prior to the survey, whereas the NHS considers employment and unemployment in the year prior to the NHS. Further, the sample for the Labour Force Survey is significantly smaller than the sample for the NHS.

Therefore, we provide data from the Labour Force Survey to show trends. We provide data from the 2011 National Household Survey to provide a clearer snapshot of the situation in Ottawa in 2010.

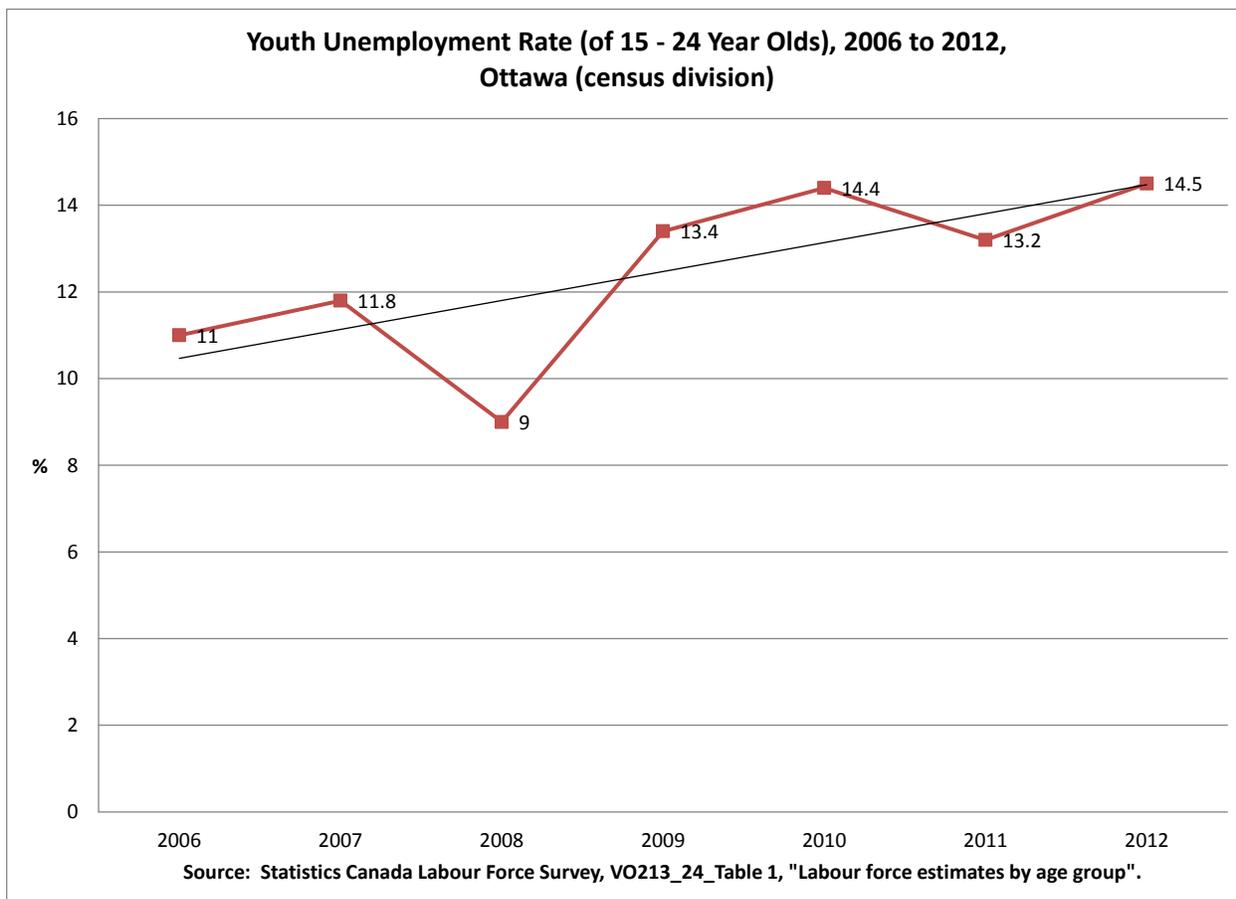
Labour market participation rate among young people

The participation rate refers to the proportion of the total population who are in the labour force, including those who are employed, looking for work or on temporary leave from work. It can include students, if they are working or looking for work. It does not include those outside the labour force, such as students not currently looking for work or stay-at-home parents not currently looking for work. The Labour Force Survey indicates that the participation rate of Ottawa youth aged 15 to 24 years has remained relatively stable over the past six years, showing only a very slight decrease. A decrease in the participation rate following the economic downturn of 2008, which saw a large number of young people leave the labour market, has now been corrected.



Unemployment rate

The Labour Force Survey shows that between 2006 and 2012, the youth unemployment rate (for 15 to 24 year olds) rose by over 3 percentage points in Ottawa (from 11% - 14.5%). The largest single-year increase in youth unemployment came in 2009, following the economic crisis of 2008. This means that the youth unemployment rate was increasing at the same time that the participation rate was decreasing. In other words, more youth were unemployed at the same time that many youth were leaving the labour force altogether. Unlike the participation rate, however, unemployment amongst Ottawa young people has not stabilized since 2009 and continues to grow.



Job availability in Ontario in 2013¹

A recent report by Employment and Social Development Canada shows a downward trend in Ontario's labour market. In July 2013 alone, Ontario lost some 10,600 jobs. Losses were especially significant in the goods- and services- production sectors owing to announced shut-downs and lay-offs at several companies. The finance, insurance, real estate, rental and public administration sectors also suffered significant job losses. The construction, building and business sectors saw job growth in this period.

Between June and July 2013, the number of employed young persons aged 15 to 24 in Ontario decreased by 24,500. The participation rate of youth also decreased in this period.

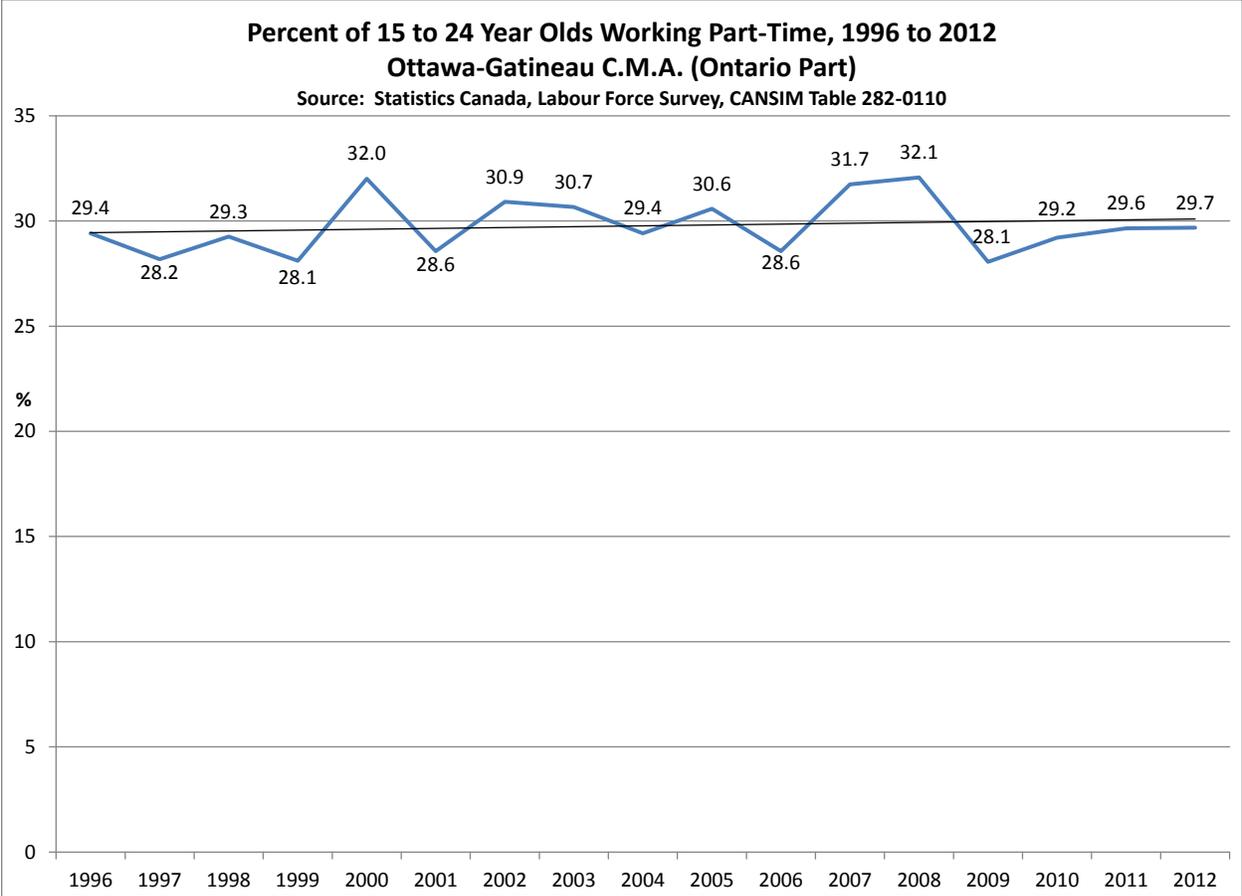
Summer employment amongst students intending to return to school in September dropped by 2.3% compared to 2012. Ontario students had a 20.1% unemployment rate during the summer of 2013, significantly more than the national rate of 16.6%. Participation rates of Ontario students were also among the lowest in Canada in July 2013.

¹ Employment and Social Development Canada (2013), *Labour Market Bulletin - Ontario: August 2013*.
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/lmi/publications/bulletins/on/aug2013.shtml>

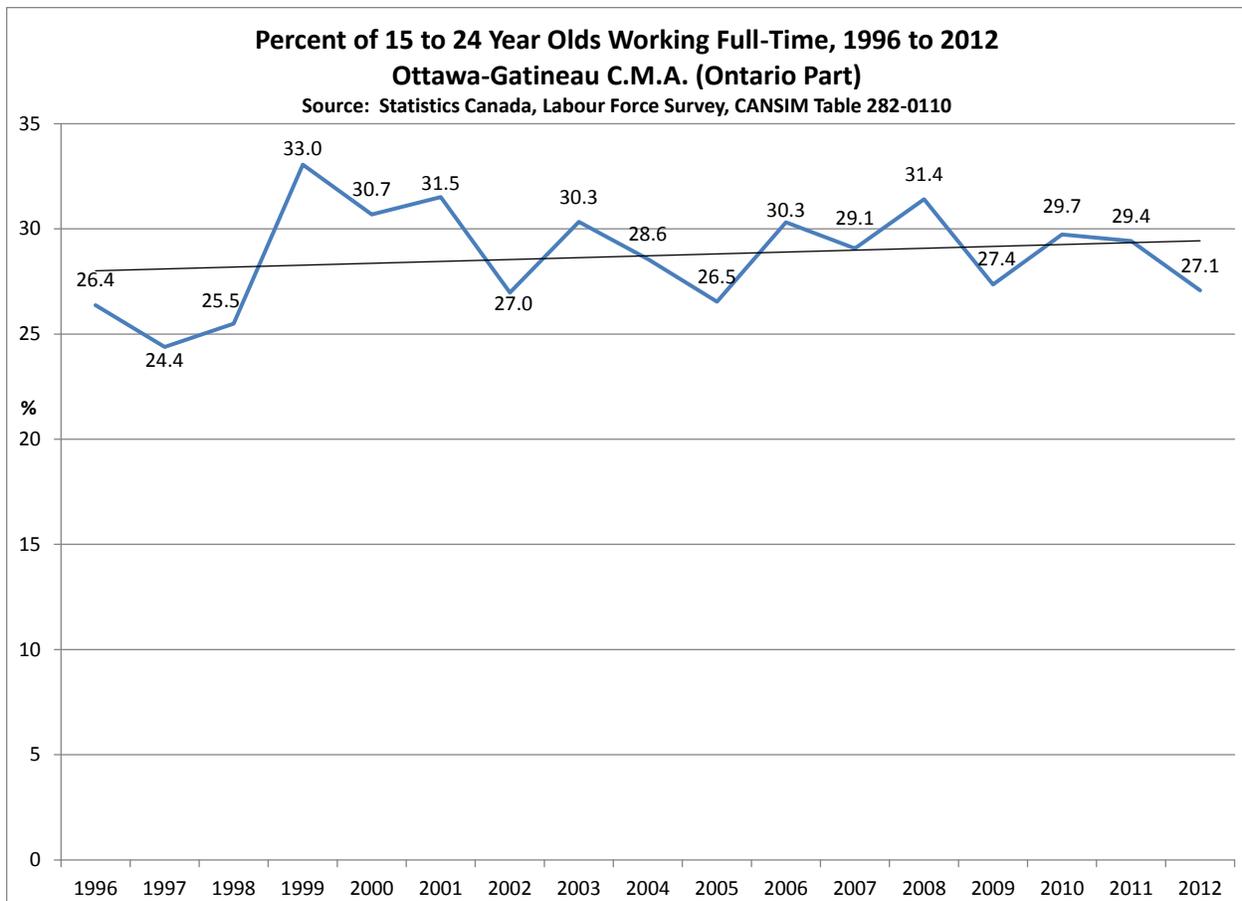
Ottawa has suffered the largest loss of jobs in all of Ontario in the last year. Between July 2012 and July 2013, Ottawa lost 16,700 jobs. This overall decrease has contributed to a general job scarcity which affects the ability of young people to find employment in Ottawa.

Proportion of youth working part-time or full-time

The Labour Force Survey indicates that the proportion of youth working part-time in Ottawa has not changed significantly between 1996 and 2012. Despite slight increases in 2000, 2007, and 2008, the percent has remained relative constant, at about 30%.



Similarly, despite notable fluctuations year over year in the period 1996 to 2012, the trend with respect to the proportion of 15 – 24 year olds working full-time (30 hours or more) remained quite constant, just slightly under 30%.

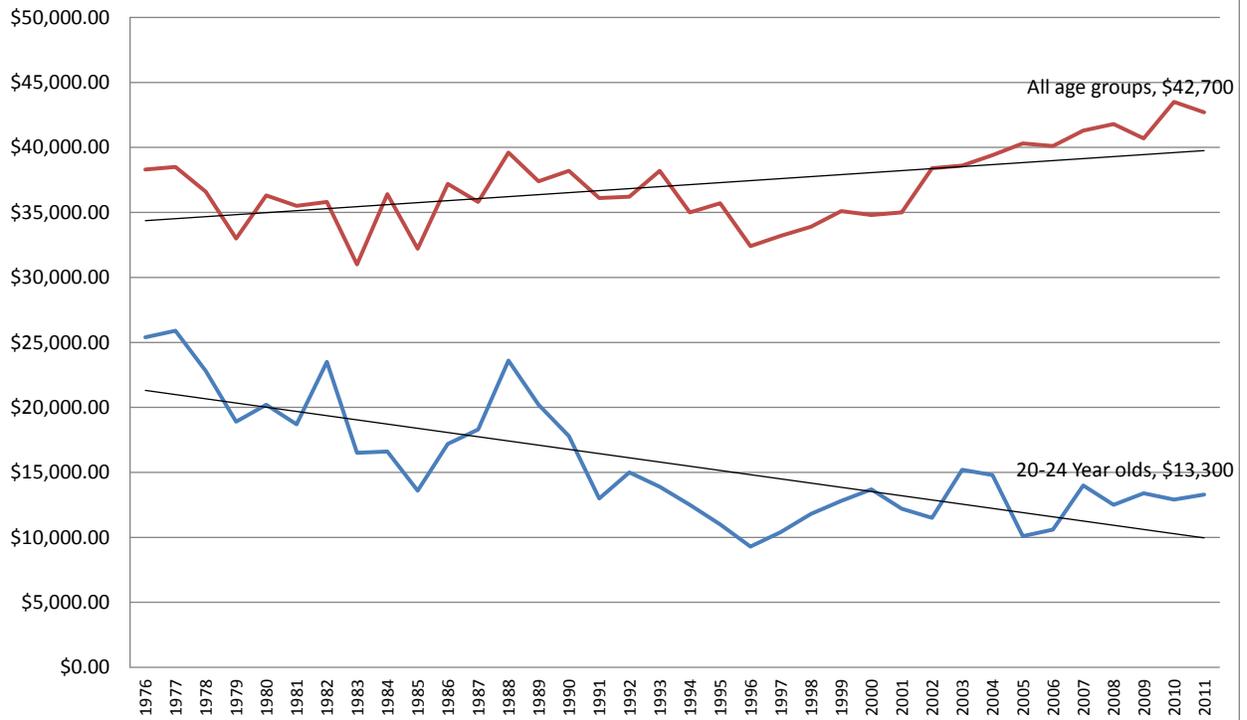


Median employment income of 20-24 year old workers compared to the general population

The Labour Force Survey shows that the median employment income from wages, salaries and commissions for youth has decreased significantly over the past thirty-five years.² In 1976 the median employment income for young workers aged 20-24 was \$25,400, but that number had decreased to \$13,300 by 2011. In the same period, the median employment income from salaries, wages and commissions of the general population rose from \$38,300 to \$42,700. This means that not only have youth experienced a significant reduction in real wages in this period, there is also an increasing income gap between youth and the general population.

² Median income refers to the income value whereby half of the population in question earns less than this amount and half of the population earns more. Median income differs mathematically from average income.

**Median Income from Wages, Salaries and Commissions (in constant 2010 dollars)
By Age Groups, 1976 to 2011,
Ottawa-Gatineau (census metropolitan area Ont. and Que. parts)**



Source: Statistics Canada, Cansim Table 202-0407

PART II: Youth Perspectives on Employment, Unemployment and Under Employment: youth focus group data

Summary of findings

The majority of young people who participated in this project have worked in the past and are currently working. Very few consider their current jobs to be “good jobs”, but there is a widespread acceptance that young workers are disadvantaged by their limited professional experience and the perception of young workers as “risks” compared to experienced workers.

Youths possess a range of knowledge about work culture. They identify effective employees as individuals who demonstrate an excellent balance of team and individual work skills. Employment is seen as a highly social environment where appearing likeable and agreeable is important to workplace success. This may be a reflection of how youths are drawing from their experiences with customer service jobs and using this knowledge to develop self-improvement strategies to appeal to prospective employers in other fields.

Many youths are also struggling to find the resources that will allow them to take steps toward realistically competing for the jobs that they want. The limited number of entry-level job openings and the lack of networking opportunities and resources available to familiarize young people with professional contact building were identified as significant barriers to employment.

Presently, youths strategize to improve their future opportunities by educating themselves on the opportunities around them, taking advantage of co-operative education programs, seeking mentorship opportunities with professionals and counselors and recognizing the importance of horizontal networking with peers to find employment.

Methodology

In order to produce this exploratory report, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa moderated four focus groups with female and male youths between the ages of 14 and 24. Discussion questions were designed to provoke honest and open conversations between youths from Canadian-born, Aboriginal, newcomer and other ethno cultural backgrounds about challenges in finding employment. The focus groups served as in-depth data gathering tools as well as opportunities to promote shared learning between youths situated across a spectrum of employment experience. To this end, discussion moderators worked with flexibility around predetermined themes and participants were encouraged to speak on issues they felt strongly about and on which they possessed experiential knowledge.

The youngest group of participants consisted youths between the ages of 14 and 17 and were selected from a summer employment program run by a partner community organization. The other three groups consisted participants between the ages of 17 and 24. Discussions ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. One group was conducted in French and three were conducted in English. All youths were recruited with the help of Ottawa ethno cultural organizations and community agencies that expressed interest in youth employment research.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Perceptions of work culture

Workplace skills and professional etiquette

Youth participants were asked how they would describe a good employee as a method of surveying their knowledge of workplace skills. They offered a multitude of skills and personality traits, which are presented in Table 1:

Hard skills	Soft skills		
	General	Working with others	Professional appearance
Being well-trained	Committed	Teamwork skills	Ability to display confidence without appearing arrogant
Being educated	Being hardworking; having a strong work ethic	People and interpersonal skills	Ability to demonstrate "professional" body language, such as good posture
Computer and software skills	Ability to work independently, without supervision	Ability to be respectful to superiors, coworkers, and clients/customers	Ability to demonstrate that you are a pleasant person, e.g. "by smiling"
Internet skills	Multitasking skills	Ability to manage others' expectations, e.g. "being able to handle people who are upset"	
	Positivity and optimism	Trustworthiness	
	Creativity; being interested in coming up with new ideas	Reliability	
	Ability to take initiative		
	Flexibility		
	Time management skills		

Table 1. Skills and traits of effective employees as identified by youth participants

This selection of identified skills reveal youths' diverse perceptions of workplace culture. They were explored further to draw observations about youths' perceptions of workplace culture, including the navigation of professional power relationships, the importance of teamwork and social skills, the "performance" of employability, job satisfaction and definitions of "ideal jobs", and the present levels of job preparedness among youths. These key areas are elaborated below.

Power relationships

Youths demonstrated knowledge of workplace power relationships and the importance of understanding one's role in an organization. They offered a range of commentaries and rationalizations about appropriate professional decorum. This most prevalent insight was the importance of balancing being friendly while practicing professional etiquette around supervisors and coworkers.

"There should be respect in the work environment but there is a line [of friendliness] you should not cross. Be friendly, be nice, but do not befriend people you work for."

Relationships of mutual respect between employers and employees were considered to be essential to positive work environments. Hierarchical management structures were also seen as normal and acceptable forms of supervision. However, youths observed that "abuses of power" also occur frequently, not only in sectors where young employees are overrepresented, but in work in general.

Teamwork and social interaction

Significantly, youths saw possessing teamwork skills as one of the most valued traits within the workplace. A high proportion of soft skill answers were directly related to teamwork. Youths observed that it was not only important for an employee to be *able* to work with others, but also capable of demonstrating that they were individuals whom others would enjoy working *with*. Marketing one's sociable qualities to hiring managers and employers was a key self-marketing strategy.

The additional emphasis on the importance of being able to manage difficult interactions with others, such as "being able to handle people who are upset" and "being able to manage people's expectations", reflected perceptions that employers favour employees who are effective at facilitating group cohesion and managing conflict.

Performing employability

Youths felt that individuals who do not openly display enthusiasm or who appear unhappy are viewed by employers as less productive. Employability and professionalism are performed on a daily basis through bodily behaviours, such as displaying good posture and "appearing pleasant by smiling". These forms of self-monitoring reflect a sense among youths that indicators of employability are not only reflected in formal evaluations, but also in appearance and the observable manner in which one accomplishes work.

Work schedule

Youths perceived time to be regimented differently in the workplace than in school, co-op work placements, and volunteer positions. Time and effort at work have to be distributed over many tasks at once. Youths anticipated dire consequences if an employee is inefficient at multitasking, and many agreed that not being able to do several jobs at once could cause an employee to be fired. Participants also felt that the average workweek schedule was rigid. This posed an obstacle for youths who anticipated working multiple jobs due to being given insufficient hours and low wages.

Job satisfaction

Youths had mixed experiences with their employers. Most participants had previous work experience or were working their first jobs. Recalling both positive and negative experiences, youths prioritized camaraderie and teamwork, employer friendliness, existence of a supportive learning environment, being shown respect, and receiving clear instruction as important elements of ideal work environments.

Very few youths would leave a “bad job”. Youths qualified their tolerance for poor working conditions in different ways: “I would leave a bad job if I was being abused”; “I would leave a bad job if I had another opportunity lined up”, “I would accept a bad job in the short-term”. The majority of youth participants who have had jobs in the past tolerated exploitative conditions and considered it to be a common experience among youths who work “survival jobs”.

Job instruction and preparedness

Many youths voiced that they would prefer to receive on-the-job training in order to be fully prepared for a job, but they also acknowledged that workplaces have limited resources to deliver this training.

Inadequate job training was identified as a key contributor to the difficult relationship between, on the one hand, requesting clarification or further instruction to perform a job correctly, and on the other hand, appearing inadequately prepared to work. Youths felt pressured to work independently in order to demonstrate that they possessed problem solving skills and were capable of working independently. However, youths also experienced situations where attempting to work based on incomplete information resulted in serious penalties, including having losses taken out of paycheques.

Participants who suffered financial losses due to making errors at work shared with others that the most important part of starting a new job is thoroughly reading and understanding work contracts. Many agreed that contract terms can be overlooked by young workers who have limited prior experience with workplace conditions.

Transitioning from school to work

Labour market

Youths made important links between workplace culture, school and the labour market. They possessed a range of career interests, different levels of awareness of labour trends, and significant levels of

pragmatism in regards to weighing personal interests against job availability. One prevalent insight was the importance of adapting to the changing labour market and diversifying, enriching and upgrading one's skillset.

A proportion of youths referenced the unemployment rates of new university graduates as an indicator that university education offered skills that were too narrow to allow graduates to adapt to the changing labour market. One participant, a recent university graduate, noted, "You can't learn practical skills in school."

This was echoed by participants in other focus group sessions who considered college and trade school to be their preferred post-secondary option, as they felt that these institutions would provide them with hands-on experience that would effectively prepare them for jobs that are in demand.

Yet other participants voiced the importance of pursuing fields of study and work that interested, inspired and challenged them, even if the job search would be difficult and they would likely work in unpaid and temporary internship positions before securing permanent work.

Younger youths between the ages of 14-17 tended to view the fields of medicine, education, law and information technology to be relatively stable labour environments where professionals would consistently be in demand regardless of the economy. In this sense, the job market was considered to be relatively unchanging among youths who were at the early stages of developing their areas of interest and future employment paths. Excelling in advanced education programs in graduate and professional schools was seen to be the most critical factor in employment success among these professions.

Work as learning environments

When youths were asked about their thoughts on how well the school system prepared young people for employment, youths revealed that they felt there was there a disconnect between skills taught in school and skills required in the workplace. There were also significant differences between the way schools tend to train students to work and the work habits that are expected in the workplace.

For instance, youths described the culture of learning in school as "passive" and it was contrasted against the "active" learning that is required at work. Students are disciplined to absorb information and accept a clearly defined school routine. In contrast, employment requires individuals to independently discipline themselves to understand and meet to the expectations of employers.

A number of youths described the school environment as lax and unregimented. This posed challenges to youths' ability to develop teamwork abilities and accountability in the working world. Youths felt that other students in both high school and university could not be relied on because they often lacked motivation and respect for teachers. One participant reflected that because it is "hard to fail" in high school, students feel a limited sense of responsibility for their effort and participation. Another participant commented that being able to complete minimal work and pass high school can build a sense of self-entitlement among students.

Youth identification of employment barriers

Lack of recognized experience

Youths identified their lack of *recognized* employment experience as their most significant barrier to employment. While some noted that co-op education, internships and volunteering opportunities provided learning and networking opportunities, these experiences were not necessarily recognized as valid workplace experience. Immigrant youths faced additional barriers in the lack of recognition of non-Canadian acquired skills, education and experience.

Furthermore, youths pointed out that entry-level positions are requiring increasing levels of experience. In some instances, entry-level work requires specialized qualifications involving the completion of training programs that are expensive and which do not guarantee employment. As one participant noted, the lack of access to employment advancement among youths can become a long-term problem when “survival jobs” in precarious and low-wage positions become permanent jobs.

Newcomer barriers

The lack of recognition of foreign credentials, cultural differences in the workplace, imperfect handle of the English language, and even possessing an accent are all factors that have limit opportunities for employment and employment advancement among newcomer youths. One participant perceived that discrimination against ethno cultural groups can begin as early in the recruitment process as when a hiring manager observes a non-Anglophone name on a resume.

Discrimination against youth

Youths feel that one of their greatest barriers to employment is the widespread prevalence of negative perceptions regarding young people’s expectations and skills.

"I think another issue is that a lot of the older generation thinks that the current one [of youths] is lazy and entitled. But really, the issue is, I'm not asking for a lot, but I can't get even that. Because we can't get a job we are seen as lazy, and then it's even harder to get a job."

Participants felt that being unemployed or underemployed did not reflect the scarcity of jobs, but rather their own character: that they themselves lacked the skills, motivation, knowledge and work ethic necessary in professional environments. Youths felt that the incidence of unemployment and underemployment among young workers reinforced ideas within mainstream society that young people are unwilling to work, learn new skills, apply for jobs outside of their fields of interest or accept jobs with modest pay.

Youth strategies to improve employment prospects

Employment resources

Youths identified a variety of job and career resources, including co-op education opportunities, internships, volunteering positions, and mentorships with professionals in their fields of interest.

Building relationships and being aware of the opportunities that any environment can offer were also important ways to find gainful employment. One participant identified the importance of horizontal networking between youths and the role that organizations and agencies can adopt in developing opportunities for youths to serve as resources and supports for one another. It was also suggested that organizations should work to create spaces for youths to share experiences, strategies, training resources, employment programs and job postings.

Very few youths had accessed formal employment services. Those who had primarily found they provided standard training programs in resume writing and interviewing. Some participants felt that these programs were basic and provided limited new information, while others found these workshops helpful and would recommend them to others. There was a combination of lack of awareness of these services and a lack of faith in their usefulness among participants who had never accessed them.

Continuous learning

Youths recognized that all work experiences can provide learning experiences regardless of the nature of work. Definitions of "good jobs" also varied between individuals. Jobs that appear to be impressive on resumes do not necessarily guarantee good working conditions, while jobs that appear to be low- or unskilled can provide meaningful and enjoyable working experiences.

Many who had similarly negative experiences in specific jobs, including jobs in gas stations, retail and fast food, alerted others to hidden terms and obscure language on contracts, which can obscure the reality of a job's working conditions. Youths reiterated the importance of understanding the conditions of any job before committing to work.

Older youths (17-24) tended to describe professional development as a series of progressions through jobs with increases in responsibility and learning opportunities. In contrast, the strategies of younger youths (14-17) were more abstract and generalized. Youths in this age group located a distinct threshold between school and career as a defined transition between student and professional life.

Building networks

There was consensus among youths that networks are important for employment. Participants reflected that starting to work earlier in life give youths competitive advantage in the labour market, as they would possess more experience and larger networks than their peers.

However, youths had limited insight into how and where networking takes place. The practice of networking was in particular limited to job fairs. Parents were also identified as key resources within

youths' networks, particularly among youths between 14 and 17. Parents were seen as key influences in youths' exposure to work opportunities as well as their perceptions of work.

High school career counselors are another resource in youths' networks, although many students agreed guidance counselors tend not to be very effective resources due to the volume of students they assist and lack of personal attention they are able to provide to individual students.

Conclusion

By gathering firsthand accounts from youths about how they have experienced employment, this report was intended to present a more nuanced relationship between young people and work in order to complicate homogenous representations of youths as underprepared, unwilling and unready to confront the challenges of employment. Although there are gaps in knowledge, there are also structural challenges that youths face in advancing past low-wage and precarious jobs.

PART III: Youth Employment Challenges: perspectives from ethno cultural and community agencies

Summary of organizations interviewed

Seven community and ethno cultural organizations were interviewed for their insights into youth employment and unemployment in Ottawa. The majority of organizations that were chosen to participate in the project had existing relationships with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa and all work with youth and employment in varying capacities. The majority of organizations refer youths to employment placement programs run by other agencies. A smaller proportion work directly in youth employment by hiring youths or running paid employment placement programs for youths.

Organizations varied significantly in their size, access to funding, and capacity to provide services. Core organizational structures ranged from volunteer-run groups to agencies with full-time paid staff. A mix of ethno cultural organizations serving immigrants and general community organizations supporting both newcomer and general Canadians were included in the study.

All organizations provide a range of support and mentoring services, including afterschool educational and physical activity programs, counseling services, and immigration and settlement support services. All organizations also provide or hope in the future to provide conventional employment resources such as resume and cover letter assistance, job search guidance and interview skills training.

Employment barriers

Access to information

One of the greatest obstacles for youth in search of employment is a lack of access to relevant and useful information about immediate job availability as well as long-term career planning. Organizations linked this lack of information to disconnections between the academic disciplines youths choose to pursue and the types of jobs that are currently in demand.

Organizations observe that youths tend to underutilize employment counselors and services because they or their peers had poor experiences with them in the past, found them unhelpful and repetitive, or they are unaware of these services.

Networking and access to information

The most significant barrier to accessing information about employment is the lack of networking occurring among youths. Networking is considered by organizations to be the most important avenue for accessing key employment opportunities.

Almost all organizations observed that youths between 15 and 24 tend not to recognize networking as a significant employment resource. Young people in particular undervalue being recommended for work through “word of mouth”. Youths are more comfortable and familiar with using formal job search methods, such as searching online job postings, than forming relationships and building potential employment contacts. The lack of opportunities for youths to develop and practice networking skills, and their infrequent exposure to networking events during middle school, high school and in some circumstances, university, are major factors that prevent youths from growing accustomed to the culture of forming professional relationships.

Some participants viewed networking as encompassing activities broader than professional networking and included all forms of civic participation, including volunteering in community initiatives, attending community events, keeping up with local politics and gaining an awareness of potential employment leads where one resides. Searching for local and community-based work opportunities was one of the most fruitful ways for relatively inexperienced young workers to gain exposure to the working world.

Newcomers and access to information

Some ethno cultural organizations observed that newcomer immigrant youths had less access to accurate and correct information about work culture and job postings than their Canadian peers.

One organization recognized that in some cultural contexts, parental power is exercised and symbolized through the restriction of outside information on children. In some circumstances, youth professional development is discouraged as a means of protecting one’s children from negative societal influences. In particular, parents discourage young people from working out of concern that youths, especially young men, will permanently leave school in their pursuit of work.

Lack of access to employment resources can have intergenerational effects when parents experiencing barriers to the access of current and relevant information about the changing labour market also face challenges mentoring and assisting their children in the job search. In these circumstances, organizations believe that actively making information accessible to both youths and parents will produce lasting changes in youth employment trends.

Newcomer youths are advantaged compared to their Canadian peers in other ways. Organizations observed that although it is not always the case, immigrant youths and their families tend to be more active in cultural and religious communities, whether they are formal religious institutions or socializing groups. These collectivities in themselves can provide an environment for relationship building akin to networking and youths who have ties to their communities tend to be able to begin networking with greater levels of comfort and confidence than those who do not have similar forms of membership.

Employer perceptions of young workers' experience and skills

Organizations that run employment programs that place youths in work placements or closely support youths in their application to work programs run by other organizations, through providing writing assistance or alerting them to prospective opportunities, generally found that youths were advantaged by their level of perseverance, comfort with technology and willingness to learn new skills and improve on old ones. It was however also a common perception that given youth inexperience, youths have unrealistic expectations of the nature of jobs they are qualified to do as well as rates of compensation for student jobs.

Compared to the general labour force, youths are significantly disadvantaged by their relatively low levels of professional experience. Organizations recognized that although volunteering can serve important functions in workplace exposure and skills learning, volunteer experiences alone are often not enough to convey to employers that young people are employable.

As a result, employers tend to view young workers as excess time investments and risks. When the perception that youths require more guidance and training compared to experienced workers is coupled with the lack of training resources available within the workplace, there are significant structural factors that influence employers against hiring youths.

Some community workers observed that at present there are few opportunities for young people to work in their community doing small jobs. In turn, this lack of exposure to work can follow youths into their teenage years. Few organizations referenced the slow recovery of youth employment rates when compared to the employment rate of the general workforce. The resultant heightened competition for fewer jobs will continue to disproportionately disadvantage youths with limited work experience.

Another observation was that there is a lack of youth awareness regarding how to “package” one’s skills and experiences into recognized accomplishments. However, the relative inexperience of young workers compared to older workers, the finite number of job openings, systemic discrimination and non-recognition of non-Canadian credentials are issues that must be concretely addressed in a framework that extends the analysis into a wider economic context beyond the situations of individual youths.

Cultural and identity factors

Cultural conflicts and conflicts in identity were critical barriers to newcomer youths finding employment within organizations that worked with immigrant youths. In addition to culture shock, language barriers, a long and sometimes difficult period of social and economic adjustment amidst an environment of familial expectations, new Canadians balance a multitude of pressures that influence the process of renegotiating one's identity.

While language barriers, cultural barriers and the non-recognition of non-Canadian education and credentials are commonly represented as compartmentalized barriers to social and economic integration, the fundamental shift in social norms and their encompassing impact on everyday "ways of working", including conducting oneself in ways that others find acceptable, prove to be under-acknowledged challenges for newcomer youths finding work. The complex process of immigration and settlement involves dimensions of alienation and adjustment that need to be understood and communicated as deeply interrelated factors that impact the job search experience.

Organizations working with immigrant youth, particularly high school aged youth, observed that youths underwent extended and often difficult periods of adjustment in the process of learning and adapting to the cultural norms of education systems. The presence of racial discrimination and lack of sensitivity toward cultural difference are common challenges for immigrant students. The quality of daily interaction with authority figures in school impacts the level of trust youths place in authority figures, and the social experience of education also impacts decisions that youths make about their leisure and non-academic activities. A negative experience may impact youths to conceive of an ideal workplace as one with minimal supervision and where one experiences levels of autonomy and decision-making power that are unrealistic for youth jobs.

The task of self-marketing and "selling" one's abilities and skills also has cultural connotations. Organizations recognized that marketing one's abilities can imply that one possesses a lack of humility within some communities. Discomfort with this practice can result in an avoidance of learning how to communicate one's skills in ways that Canadian employers recognize as demonstrating interest and competence.

Strategies and recommendations

Based on interviews with organizations, a number of key strategies and recommendations for increasing youth employability and employment emerged.

- Increase opportunities for youth to learn and practice networking skills, and increase awareness about these opportunities.
- Create opportunities for mentorship between youths and professionals in their fields of interest to expose them to career options, to the education and experience required to work in specific fields, and to the daily culture, expectations and routines of work.
- Fund and develop culturally appropriate and safe spaces and events for mutual peer support to address cultural barriers of newcomer youths.

- Increase opportunities for co-operative education programs which support students in finding work placements.
- Increase awareness and opportunities to supportive employment, on-the-job training and coaching. Organizations find that youths become increasingly adept at understanding how to ask for the information they need when they are given explicit and clear instruction at their earliest jobs.
- Improve funding structures for cultural and religious organizations that, through their work with communities, are well positioned to understand the issues their communities face and provide robust services for youths.
- Integrate culturally appropriate learning forums about self-marketing to address negative perceptions of selling one's skills and abilities as a behaviour signifying a lack of humility.
- Increase the availability of information and skills training workshops geared toward youths that "remain relevant" and "avoid repetition".
- Improve access to employment information and career development to parents as well as youths to help mitigate some of the intergenerational barriers to gainful employment.
- In an organizational capacity, encouraging youths to be autonomous by treating them as equal participants with meaningful responsibility in the job search process can be effective in developing accountability and ownership over the employment process.

Appendix: A Snapshot from the National Household Survey, 2011

Labour Market Participation Rate, 2010	
15 – 24 year olds	64.7% ⁱ
15 – 19 year olds	46.7% ⁱⁱ
20 – 24 year olds	80.5% ⁱⁱⁱ
15 – 24 Year Olds Attending School	59.4% ^{iv}
15 – 19 Year Olds Attending School	45.3% ^v
20 – 24 Year Olds Attending School	76.6% ^{vi}

Unemployment Rates, 2010	
15 – 24 year olds ^{vii}	18.2% ^{viii}
15 – 19 year olds ^{ix}	23.1% ^x
20 - 24 year olds ^{xi}	15.7% ^{xii}
15 – 24 Year Olds Not Attending School	12.2% ^{xiii}
20 – 24 Year Olds Without High School Completion & Not Attending School	21.2% ^{xiv}
20 – 24 Year Olds with Apprenticeship or Trades Certificate or Diploma	7.2% ^{xv}
Unemployment Rate of 20 – 24 Year Olds with College, CEGEP or other Non-University Certificate or Diploma	10.3% ^{xvi}
Unemployment Rate of 20 – 24 year Olds with a Bachelor's Degree	14.2% ^{xvii}
Unemployment Rate of 20 – 24 Year Olds with a Master's Degree	11.2% ^{xviii}

Median Incomes, 2010	
15 – 24 year olds (after tax)	\$9,578 ^{xix}
From wages and salaries (after tax) of 15 – 24 year olds	\$8,742 ^{xx}
From wages and salaries of 15 – 24 year olds working full year and full time	\$26,162 ^{xxi}

Additional Information, 2010	
% of 15 – 24 year olds living below the Low Income Measure After-Tax	17.4% ^{xxii}
% of 20 – 24 Year Olds Without High School Completion and Not Attending School	4.9% ^{xxiii}
% of 20 – 24 Year Olds Without High School Completion and Not Attending School and Not In the Labour Force	1.5% ^{xxiv}
% of 15 – 24 Year Olds Working Full Year and Full Time	12.3% ^{xxv}

ⁱ Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{iv} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^v Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{vi} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{vii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{viii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{ix} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^x Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{xi} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xiii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{xiv} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{xv} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011037_Age_Educ_LM_NHS.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xvi} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011037_Age_Educ_LM_NHS.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xvii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011037_Age_Educ_LM_NHS.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xviii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-012-X2011037_Age_Educ_LM_NHS.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xix} Statistics Canada, Table 99-014-X2011041.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part)

^{xx} Statistics Canada, Table 99-014-X2011041.IVT

^{xxi} Statistics Canada, Table 99-014-X2011041.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part). Full year is 49 – 52 weeks, Full time is 30 hours or more per week)

^{xxii} Statistics Canada, Table 99-014-X2011043.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part).

^{xxiii} Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{xxiv} Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, Table 99-012-X2011047.IVT

^{xxv} Statistics Canada, Table 99-014-X2011041.IVT for the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ont. Part). Full year is 49 – 52 weeks, Full time is 30 hours or more per week)