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From School to Career – Canadian Youth Need Navigational Help

Ottawa – The path from school to a satisfying, well-paid job is not a straight or simple one. Young Canadians face a bewildering line-up of career choices. And, they need to know which path is right for them – should it be university, college, vocational, apprenticeship or on-the-job training? Of course, those choices only exist if young people are aware of them.

A new research paper published by the Canadian Policy Research Networks and the Canadian Career Development Foundation shows that most young Canadians don't have adequate access to career development services to help them choose the best paths to a successful working life.

Career Development Services for Canadian Youth: Access, Adequacy and Accountability is part of CPRN's *Pathways for Youth to the Labour Market Project*. It finds that career development services can reduce the drop-out rate, especially for disadvantaged youth; change attitudinal barriers that limit career choices (programs to support young women entering science and technology careers, for example, have extremely positive results); and reduce poverty and unemployment by improving the chances for youth to earn more by being able to find and keep a job.

But the paper finds no consistent access to career development services from province to province, or even from school board to school board. A number of provinces have reduced the services. Even high school guidance counsellors have little time to help students with career choices as they're swamped by personal crisis counselling. Youth who've left school and youth in rural or remote areas have an especially hard time getting help.

Today's youth will not be making a single career choice, but many over their working lives. The paper's authors, Donnalee Bell and Lynne Bezanson, say that means, "...career management skills are no longer optional but are recognized as essential skills for youth today." They say there are pockets of promising practices across the country, but "...a system of coherent and comprehensive services for youth and young adults, whether in or out of school, simply doesn't exist."

The authors say critical steps must be taken to correct the problem – including:

- Legislate student entitlement to career development services;
- Map the career development field in Canada so there is a known foundation to build on;
- Require that teachers take at least one course on career development;
- Begin career development earlier, at least by grade six.

This is the first research paper in CPRN's *Pathways for Youth to the Labour Market Project*. The Project will develop policy options to improve the ability of young people to identify, navigate and choose pathways that lead to success.

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