



**A Study
for the Recognition
of Youth Workers**

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(in alphabetical order)



elan
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PERT
PROVINCIAL EMPLOYMENT
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QC
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Quebec
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Groups
Network



RDN
Regional Development Network
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INTRODUCTION

This research report is an extension of Y4Y Québec's previous report entitled "Study on Youth Workers and Youth-Serving Organisations" (2024). Not only was the previous text helpful in "valuing and understanding the crucial work done by all-youth serving organisations" (p.5, Y4Y, 2024) and presenting "new information on the landscape of youth-serving organisations and the dedicated youth workers serving the English-speaking youth in Québec" (p.17, Y4Y, 2024), the report shed light on the motivations and concerns of youth workers (p.16, Y4Y, 2024).

This new report focuses on the needs of the youth community sector. Both Y4Y reports in question were created with the intention of contributing to *La Coalition Interjeunes'* larger study entitled « Connaître, reconnaître et valoriser les métiers d'intervention en ACA¹ jeunesse. » *La Coalition* and Y4Y seek the recognition and validation of the profession of youth workers. We define "youth workers" as individuals of any age who work directly with Québec's English-speaking youth (ages 12-30).

This report begins with a portrait of Québec's youth sector. The data collected by *La Coalition Interjeunes* and, previously, Y4Y Québec, highlighted the tensions between the motivations of youth workers and the precarity of their profession, as well as their highly varying work conditions and resources at their disposal. How can we ensure the sustainability of this essential profession? To what extent do the precarious employment conditions of youth workers negatively impact their ability to meet youths' needs? In this report, we will present a clearer understanding of youth workers' crucial service to Québec's English-speaking youth (hereafter referred to as QESY), as well as present suggestions to effectively recognise youth workers' expertise and assist with their professional needs.

We wish to underline that this data, and our research at large, does not intend to pass judgement on certain organisations' practices. Instead, we hope our findings will allow for people to better understand the often precarious state facing the community sector.

1. METHODOLOGY

Y4Y Québec distributed a survey between September and October 2024. The survey (n=40) was filled out by youth workers² who work directly with at least one QESY (ages 12-30), in either a French or English-speaking community organisation. There are no age requirements to be a youth worker, and English does not need to be the youth's first language. We did not poll volunteers, nor people who worked with youth exclusively in a public-sector setting, as those would require more targeted research of their own. We did, however, include people who work on occasion with youth, such as workshops facilitators, for example, who are invited to present in schools.

¹ ACA : *Action Communautaire Autonome* (Fr), Autonomous Community Action (Eng).

² The term "youth worker" can be understood here as the translation of the French term "intervenant·e."

There are no identifying details in this report; youth workers' anonymity is fully maintained. Only Y4Y's Research Coordinator had access to their responses, and all personal information was deleted within 16 weeks after the survey's open period ended. Quotes are stripped of all personal information.

1.1. OUTREACH AND SAMPLING

Y4Y Québec interacted with various local and provincial network organisations for input throughout our research.³ An online information session was organised to present the survey, discuss its participation criteria, and receive feedback. For health regions where there was more difficulty experienced collecting responses, Y4Y Québec communicated with individuals directly, either by email or phone.

Quota and snowball sampling were used to select the participants. The selection process was not random, but intentional: we were looking for a specific population with shared characteristics (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995), across different health regions and workplaces (see Annex 1). While any youth worker who interacts with QESY was eligible to participate, we aimed to cover all health regions in the province, weighted in proportion to their population (see Annex 1). For those health regions where there were not enough participants to reach the weighted target number, we used snowball sampling by asking current respondents to connect us with other eligible regional organisations (Berger, 2015).

1.2. SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey was modelled on the one previously distributed by *La Coalition Interjeunes*. This network organisation led a research project with two different surveys: one intended for Executive Directors (or Executive Assistants) of organisations that serve Québec youth (ages 12–30), and one intended for youth workers, those who work directly with the youth of the aforementioned organisations. The goal of their research was to valorise and understand the crucial work done by youth-serving organisations across the province, as well as to advocate for the recognition of their youth workers.

Y4Y Québec's survey included 40 questions from over 120 included in *La Coalition Interjeunes'* data. Y4Y's survey takes, on average, 30–45 minutes to complete, and a \$50 monetary compensation was offered to all who did so. Skipping a question did not jeopardise the participants' honoraria, and they had the right to withdraw at any point.

To ensure greater accessibility, the survey was offered in both English and French. Moreover, participants could request an online meeting with Y4Y's Research Coordinator to complete the survey verbally.

³ 8 network organisations serving the English-speaking communities of Québec: AMI-Quebec, Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), English Language Arts Network Quebec (ELAN Quebec), Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), Regional Development Network (RDN), Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), YES Employment & Entrepreneurship.

2. RESULTS FROM YOUTH WORKERS SURVEY

This section shows the results of the online survey. It is divided into two components: the first presents quantitative data, and the second presents qualitative data.

2.1. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Profile of Survey Participants

The survey was completed by 40 youth workers from 12 of Québec's 18 health regions.⁴ Many of our respondents were youths themselves: 50% are younger than 29 years of age.

Fig. 1 - Respondents' Age

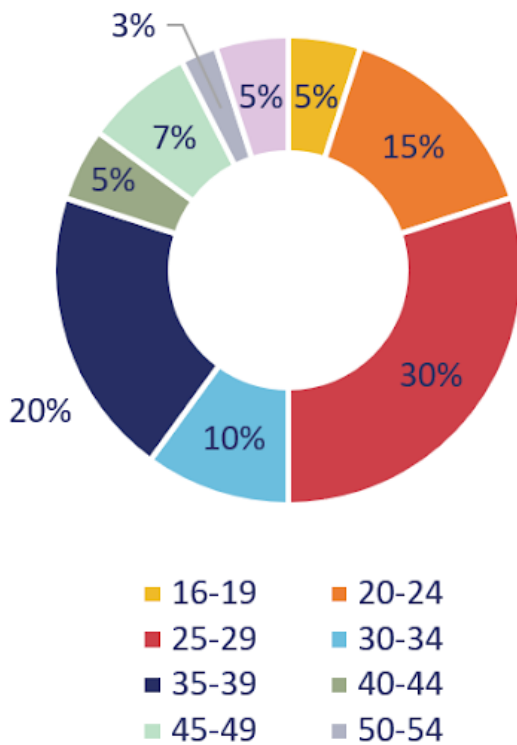
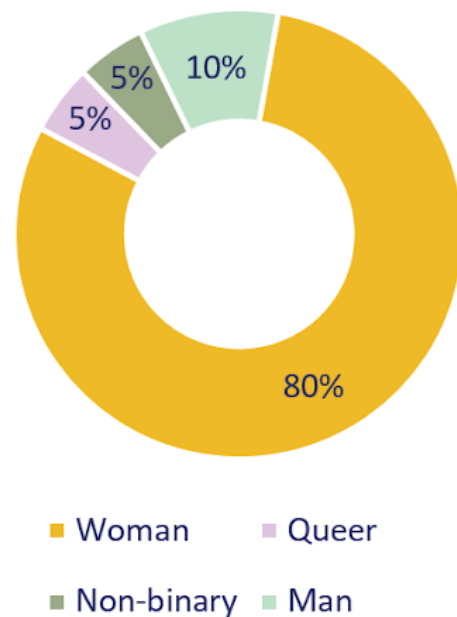


Fig. 2 - Respondents' Gender Identity



Participants were asked to identify their age within eight bracket options (see figure 1). A plurality of participants are represented by the 25–29-year-old age bracket. 8 of 10 are women.

All participants use the English language, to varying degrees, so as to interact with the youth they work with. 72.5% of respondents also use the French language to communicate at work. Other languages mentioned in the survey include: Indigenous languages (Cree and Inuktitut, 2 participants), Spanish (1 participant), and Punjabi (1 participant). When asked about their ethnicities,

⁴ See Annex 1. For more information on Québec's health regions:
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-402-x/2015002/maps-cartes/rm-cr05-eng.htm>

27 out of the 40 respondents selected “European” among the survey options (see Annex 2). Many participants selected multiple ethnicities, and “Hispanic/Latinx,” “South Asian,” and “Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)” were the three other most selected options.

Over half of the participants have completed a bachelor’s degree (57.5%). Other respondents have a master’s degree (15%), a CEGEP diploma⁵ (12.5%) or a diploma of vocational studies (DEP, 7.5%). The rest of the participants have either completed a high school diploma (DES,⁶ 5%), or preferred not to answer (2.5%).

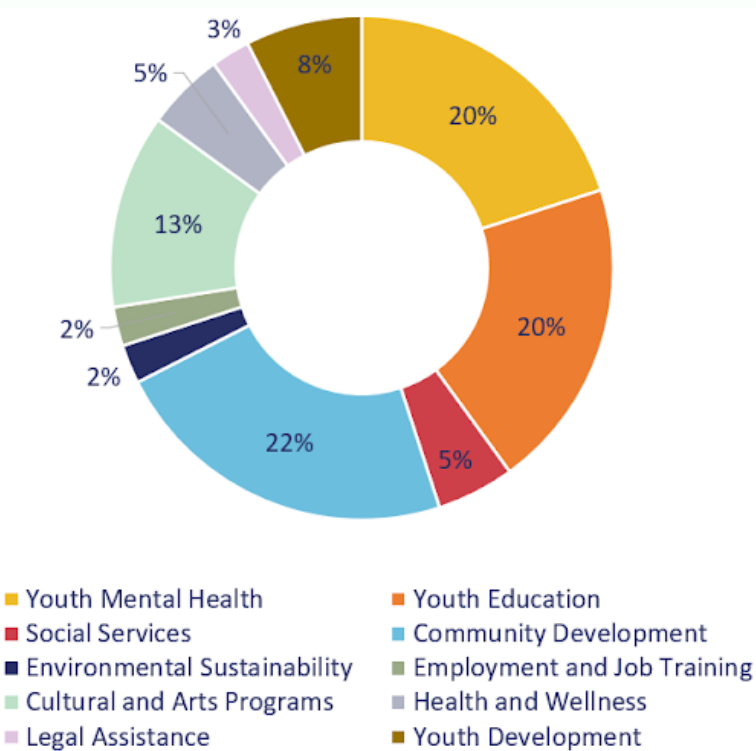
Is there a link between youth workers’ current job and their past job experience/studies? More than three quarters of respondents answered “yes.” Amongst the 9 (of 40) participants who answered “no,” their previous experiences were in the fields of creative writing, retail sales, environmental awareness, elementary/day care education, factory work, political science, and law.

Work Experience and Employment Context

To better understand the scope of youth workers’ current professions, we included a list of 14 job titles from which participants could select (Fig. 3). How did they first get into working with youth (Annex 4)? 22.5% entered the community sector following a career change, which is consistent with the 9 out of 40 respondents who mentioned that their past experiences were not related to their current field. 1 out of 4 respondents ended up working at the organisation that they were already making use of its services, or were hired by a similar organisation (lines 4 and 6, Annex 4). Only one participant out of the 40 selected the following option: “I turned to the community sector because it was the only option.”

How long have the participants worked in their current organisations (Annex 5)? Nearly a quarter have been at their organisation for less than a year (22.5%). Most of the participants have been in their organisation for 5 years or less (82.5%), with only four participants working in their organisation for eleven years or more (10%).

Fig. 3 - Field of work⁷



The size of the organisations in question vary greatly (Annex 6). A quarter of the respondents’

⁵ CEGEP : *collège d’enseignement général et professionnel* (Fr), General and Professional Teaching College (Eng).

⁶ DES : *diplôme d’études secondaires* (Fr), high school diploma (Eng). Both participants are 16-19 years old.

⁷ The two options not selected by participants were “Advocacy and Human Rights” and “Disaster Relief and Emergency Services.” For specific job titles, please refer to Annex 3.

organisations are composed of 1 to 5 employees, while 32,5% of them house teams of more than 25 employees. The two least selected brackets were 11–15 employees (10%) and 16–20 employees (7.5%).

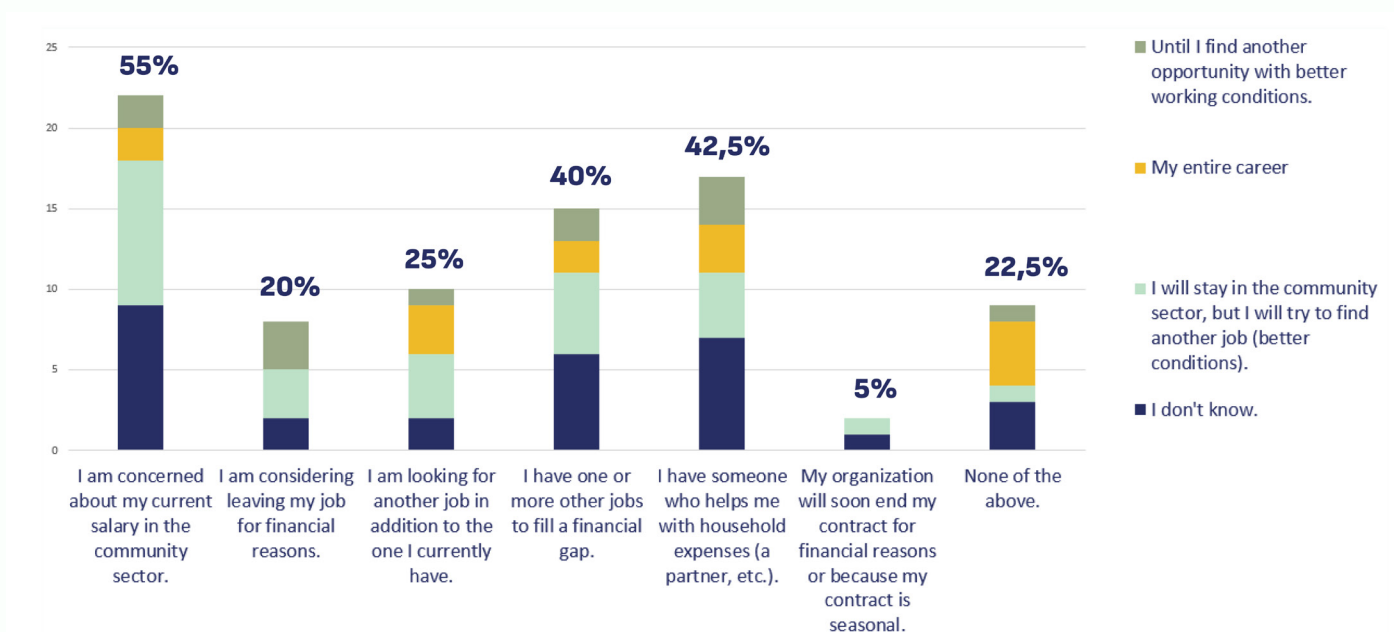
The size of the organisations in question vary greatly (Annex 6). A quarter of the respondents' organisations are composed of 1 to 5 employees, while 32,5% of them house teams of more than 25 employees. The two least selected brackets were 11–15 employees (10%) and 16–20 employees (7.5%).

We asked our participants about their types of contracts and work schedules. 50% of respondents are permanent and full-time (28 hours and +),⁸ and 43% are either contractual or project-based (upon request) (Annex 7). As for their work schedule, participants were invited to select multiple options from the following list: day shift (72.5%), irregular shift (37.5%), evening shift (20%), weekend shift (12.5%), and on-call (5%).

In terms of salaries, there are immense disparities: the lowest was \$17.07 an hour, and highest was \$500 an hour (for organising and facilitating a two-day workshop). The nature of the youth workers' professions, as well as our total number of participants, makes it difficult to establish a meaningful average. 40% of salary responses were in the \$20–\$29.5 an hour range, and 30% of responses were in the \$30–\$39.5 and hour range. One participant, whose work is project-based, mentioned that their hourly salary did not increase over the many years they have worked at this one organisation - in contrast to other workers' increasing salaries, and the cost of living.

Participants face a wide variety of financial realities. To better understand their situations, we asked participants to indicate all options that applied to them:

Fig. 4 - Participants' Financial Situation (in Relation to their Envisioned Professional Future)⁹



⁸ The "28 hours and + " definition of a full-time position comes from *La Coalition Interjeunes'* survey.

⁹ See Annex 8: "How long do you plan to stay in the community sector as a youth worker?"

We note that, while nearly 1 respondent out of 4 does not seem to be feeling any major financial stress, 1 out of 2 are concerned about their salary. 40% of participants have another job to make ends meet. When we asked “How long do you plan to stay in the community sector as a youth worker?” (legend of Fig. 4, or Annex 8), more than a third of participants responded that they “[...] don’t know.” Conversely, nearly 1 out of 4 answered “My entire career.”

What are the participants’ perceptions of their job descriptions? To our question, “Are you actually doing the work for which you applied?” participants were asked to pick from a scale of 1 to 5: “1 - Extremely” (37.5%), “2 - Rather” (42.5%), “3 - I don’t know/I’m not sure” (7.5%), “4 - Somewhat” (12.5%), and “5 - Not at all” (0%).

Regarding their current job description, more than half of the respondents considered their job description to be well-defined (62.5%). By contrast, 22.5% answered that their description is not, while 15% did not know, or were unsure.

Recognition of Youth Worker Skills and Professional Identity

In *Coalition Interjeunes’* survey, youth workers had the opportunity to write about the skills related to their profession that they would like to have recognised by society. From *La Coalition’s* word cloud with over 100 responses to the question, six areas of expertise are identified. Y4Y Québec’s survey asked participants to select 2 of the 6 areas of expertise for which they would like recognition (Annex 13). The most selected was “Interpersonal Skills & Communication” (nearly 80% voted for this as one of their two choices). We defined “Interpersonal Skills & Communication” in the survey as including:

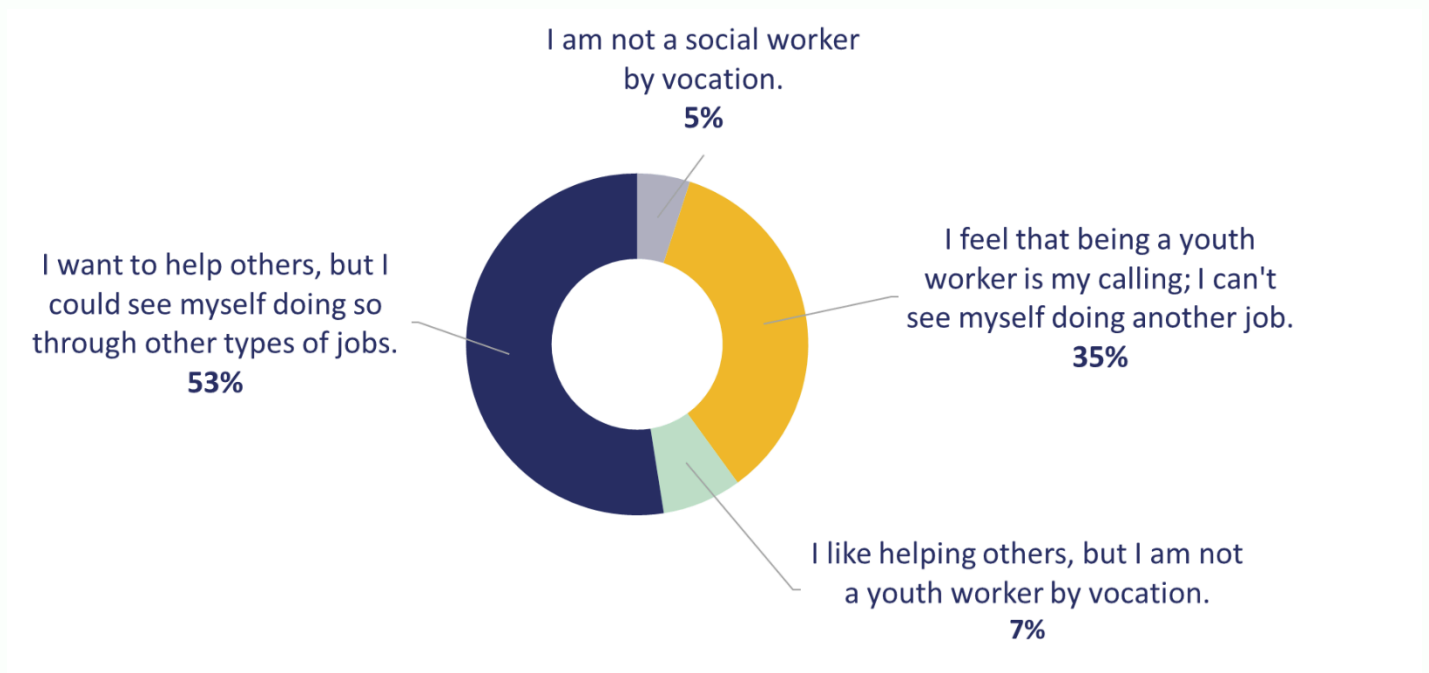
- Maintaining a connection with the youth and their team
- Developing a sense of belonging (for both the youth and the workers themselves)
- Empathy
- Patience
- Calmness
- Conflict management
- The ability to intervene (formal or informal)
- Active listening
- Unconditional welcome
- Tactfulness
- etc.

These responses will be further examined in the report’s discussion section.

There appears to be a tense relationship with the concept of “vocation” in the community sector.¹⁰ 88% of respondents appear to have a strong attachment to their field of work, including 35% who could not see themselves doing any other job (Fig. 5).

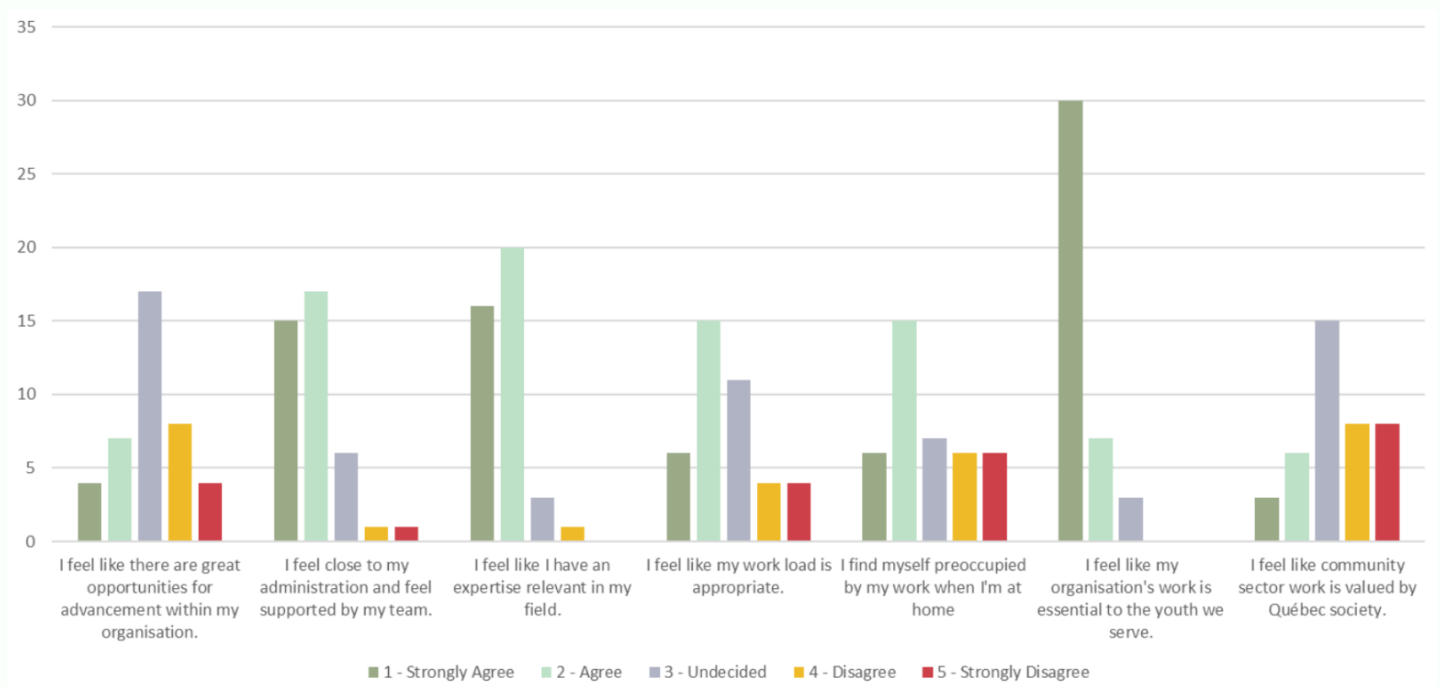
¹⁰ The term “vocation” should be understood here as “a type of work that you feel you are suited to doing and to which you should give all your time and energy, or the feeling that a type of work suits you in this way” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Fig. 5 - What is your Connection to the Term "Vocation"?



In our survey, we wanted to better understand youth workers' perception of (a) advancement opportunities in their organisation, (b) the support they feel from their team, (c) their expertise, (d) their workload, (e) their work-life balance, (f) the importance of their work with youth, and (g) if Québec society values their work. Selecting 1 implies that participants strongly agree, while 5 implies that they strongly disagree.

Fig. 6 - Multiple Questions in Relation to the Recognition of Youth Workers' Profession



There are many conclusions to be drawn from this table. There are disparities regarding advancement opportunities across different community organisations, as well as a lack of awareness of what these advancement opportunities may be (nearly half of the responses were “3 - Undecided”). Respondents’ perceptions of their field of expertise, and the importance they place on their work, is very strong/positive. Responses indicate that, in general, youth workers find it difficult not to feel preoccupied by work-related issues once their days are done; achieving a work-life balance is challenging for some. Finally, many youth workers do not feel like the community sector work they do is valued by Québec society. 40% disagreed that the “[...] community sector work is valued by Quebec society,” while 37.5% were undecided, and 22.5% agreed.



I love contributing to a positive impact and helping people. I believe and am committed to the dismantling of all oppressive and colonial systems and structures, and having the opportunity to help community through this lens gives me hope and faith.

2.2. QUALITATIVE RESULTS

What do participants like most about their current jobs? Many mentioned the friendly work environment (particularly the collaboration and support from their team), their flexible working hours, their autonomy, a diversity of tasks that keep the job engaging, and the connections they cultivate with youth. A few participants felt that “creating a sense of belonging in the community for English-speaking youth” was the most rewarding aspect of their work.

Many responses included a statement about the rewarding nature of their work, highlighting the direct impact they feel they have, the empowerment they experience, their ability to transmit knowledge, and a sense of solidarity with their youth.

The challenges facing youth workers

We then asked about the negative aspects of their line of work. In our participants’ opinions, what are (or will be) the challenges they face as a youth worker? What are the challenges for people working in intervention? In what situations do youth workers feel powerless, uninformed, out-of-touch, or simply uncertain of what to do? Do they notice any inequalities, injustices, or inequities within their organisations, or the community sector more broadly, that deserve to be addressed? We grouped their responses into six categories: (1) resources limitations, (2) workload and training, (3) communication barriers, (4) administrative demands, (5) generational differences, and (6) inequalities in representation and accessibility.

1. Resource Limitations

All responses to the questions above made reference to a lack of resources in their organisations. This can refer to a lack of staff support, inadequate working conditions, and/or a lack of information about available services in their region. Many youth workers feel like they do not have the tools to support their youth effectively, as if they are “expected to “fix” [their youth] with one meeting.” A lack of time with youth was mentioned at least 13 times in the survey:

“Intervention is not a “typical” [job] which has tasks [that have a clear] start and an end. Sometimes, interventions may span for weeks, months and even years without tangible results. Respecting youths’ rhythm implies being patient, not expecting immediate results or feedback – even more important – not expecting results according to one’s own desires and expectations.”

A lack of time with each youth is compromising the outcome of the interventions. One participant explained: “The main challenges are building genuine trust with the youth and community. It takes time and some programs are very short.”



Services are sometimes non-existent, and we have to do more with less.”
“It feels and is impossible to meet all the demands.



There appears to be a shared feeling of powerlessness due to the “lack of available resources in the community and the health system[,] where [...] waiting lists are abominable.” Nine participants emphasised the challenges of “helping English-speakers in a predominantly French[-speaking] region[;]” respondents from the regions of Montréal, Estrie, and the Laurentides raised this issue most frequently. A participant shared that they feel most powerless when they do not know how to refer youth to the proper services, and when their youth are not able to afford certain workshops/programs/services. “I was powerless when my [organisation’s] space was taken away (at least 3-4 times over the last 12 years).”

Case work overload was consistently mentioned by various participants. One wrote:

“It’s important to show up well-rested, ready to engage and connect with youth, but this can be difficult to do when there’s so much work/prep/emails to take care of at home. It creates a cycle of exhaustion and the quality of the work is negatively affected by this lack of support.”

Six participants highlighted the lack of resources in the health or social sectors, particularly when it came to having resources accessible to English-speakers. Some wrote about “many English-speakers not [being] aware of what is offered in [their language],” while others pointed out that there is a lack of these resources across the board.

2. Workload and Training

Unrealistic workloads and insufficient support from supervisors or colleagues can lead to feelings of powerlessness, especially in crisis situations. Participants’ responses delved into those struggles, often focusing on working with youth who are “experiencing different levels of behavioural issues/neurodiverse participants/mental health struggles.” Other subjects were mentioned, such as discipline and conflict resolution, laws, domestic violence, immigration, neurodiversity, and a lack of knowledge regarding local external support (see the previous section discussing resource limitations).

Nearly every respondent to Y4Y Québec’s survey reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of tasks youth workers are required to do, and that the workload can be “unrealistic.” For project-based or on-call workers, there appears to be difficulty creating “boundaries around getting paid well for preparation[,] planning hours,” and travel time – especially for those with long-distance commutes. There are cases where a lack of knowledge around a job’s specific description, from “staff not understanding [the] role and misusing [the worker’s time]” – can create frustration. The community sector often appears to be an environment in which workers need “to wear many different hats at a time.” When asked to select their current job title from a list (which included the option of “other,” Annex 3), nearly half of the participants (18) chose more than one. Another consequence of youth-serving organisations lacking in both funding and workers is to put youth who desperately need the help on waitlists.

“ The main challenge is maintaining a work-life balance, and making sure to take time and space for myself so that I am ready and able to support youth.

All of this creates an emotional and physical toll on youth workers. Survey responses mentioned “compassion fatigue,” “burnout,” and “emotional and physical labour.”

3. Communication Barriers

Some of the complexity of youth engagement and interventions appears to be linked to communication barriers. The two most repeated concerns were “[not] knowing where your responsibility in a situation ends and lands on someone else,” and not knowing when, how, or whom to reach out to when feeling overwhelmed.

Another communication issue is caused by language barriers. Some youth workers may speak French, but might not be fluent “[...] [at] big table meetings where people speak so fast [...]” Furthermore, there is a lack of service accessibility when youth are English-speakers and services are being offered in French. Multiple youth workers have “major concerns” on this matter.

One participant wrote: “I many times feel powerless when English-speaking [y]outh and [families] share difficulties in accessing resources and information in English in Québec. However, due to language laws, I feel constrained in how much I can help.”

Another communication barrier, linked to generational differences, will be explored below.

4. Administrative Demands

Most youth workers are confronted with issues relating in some capacity to administration. To secure and maintain funding, there is a need for “constant administrative work.” Some organisations need diversified funding, requiring more hours to be spent on these administrative tasks, which, in turn, requires more funding to complete. This cycle is experienced by multi-

ple survey participants, particularly those working in small organisations (“1-5 staff” bracket, from Annex 6). Dealing with such administrative tasks often falls onto the shoulders of youth workers and “take[s] away from actual intervention with the youth that need the support.”

Moreover, there are various mentions of “misalignment between [...] leadership expectations and reality.” Multiple participants shared their frustration when having to follow decisions that do not feel compatible with their realities at work. “Sometimes, I feel powerless when I observe decisions [made by the] leadership in my organisation [...] that do not align with the reality our clients face.”

On a smaller scale, we observed discrepancies between youth workers and their supervisors or coordinators. A participant shared that they are forced to take accountability for “organisational mistakes.” This creates “a lot of stress and more work for [them] to take care of.” More broadly, youth workers feel undervalued “when there are changes that affect [their] job[s,] [and they are] imposed [through] a top-down approach.”

Some project-based youth workers mentioned sometimes experiencing a lack of support from the host teacher(s) when leading a project in school classrooms. These youth workers linked this struggle to a much larger issue: the perception that “the work of artists in schools/community centres doesn’t seem to be valued or understood” and that “[...] government funding for the arts receives more cuts every year.”

A few participants (3) mentioned the pressure of being self-reliant, and shared how tough it was to ask for support from colleagues. A participant shared that they felt ignored when proposing solutions to problems, which seemed more prevalent in larger organisations (“More than 20 staff” bracket, from Annex 6). Another participant highlighted the “[...] individualism [...]” that appears, to them, to taint the Québec community sector.

5. Generational Differences

When writing about the difficulties of their role as a youth worker, multiple participants wrote about the challenges of “effectively adapting programming to the lived reality of youth, [and] motivating youth to [attend their] programming.” A mental health youth worker mentioned their difficulties with reaching the male youth demographic, while another participant discussed their difficulties in “attempting to reach/engage parents in the process.”

Several respondents noted feeling out-of-touch with current youth trends, slang, and social media habits, which affected their ability to connect with the youth they serve. “I feel out-of-date in response to youth vocabulary, trends, [and] social media usage.” As mentioned previously, the central element of youth intervention is the relationship that is created. It takes time not only to have the youth come use the organisation’s services, but also to have them feel comfortable talking to staff members. There might also be a “*conflit de valeur*” between generations.

This generational gap, furthermore, is not only tangible between workers and the youth they are supporting. A youth and self-described “baby-faced” participant shared the feeling of being “oftentimes disregarded [or] not taken seriously [also] by colleagues.”

Finally, a few participants challenged the definition of “youth” in their survey responses. According to their community organisations’ definitions, they are youths themselves, offering services to other youths. One participant wrote:

“As a 30-year-old myself, who would be considered a “youth,” I feel this term does not accurately represent me, nor do I associate myself with it. I just question if this is a turnoff to other older adults in the communities that we are trying to reach? Maybe they also see the word youth and don’t associate it with themselves and thus miss out on opportunities for those aged 15–30. Additionally, 15–30 is a VERY large age group range. In my role, I have to decide if I keep it as one big group with different ages or divide it up further into teens 15–20 and 21–30. The lived experiences and needs of a 15 year old and 30 year old differ greatly.”



The reality is that these spaces are microcosms of society and they replicate the larger issues in their practices, biases, thinking, and actions.

6. Inequalities in Representation and Accessibility

We will now highlight the inequalities, injustices, and inequities in the community sector as presented by our participants. Many of them named larger societal inequities that persist in the community sector and the non-community sector alike: racism, colourism, ableism, transphobia, enbyphobia, and classism. There is a perception that the community sector reproduces society’s systemic oppressions, including those where “individuals are [...] judged based on their appearance, [including, but not limited to,] gender and ethnicity.”

There is a lack of cultural diversity in the sector. One participant writes: “[...] many intervention workers are white and the youth they’re interacting with is QTBIPOC,¹¹ which creates and exacerbates [an] existing power dynamic and reinforces white saviorism.” There are also very few youth workers hired from the LGBTQIA+¹² community. A participant wrote:

“[...] [We] are simply creating a mould of what a community worker should look like rather than what they can offer our communities. Our communities consist of so many backgrounds and it’s crucial to have that depicted in the workers we send out to work with them.”

¹¹ QTBIPOC: Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous People of Color.

¹² LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and more

One inequality that differentiates the community sector from many others is its lack of men, something mentioned by our participants on five separate occasions.¹³ From some of our participants' perspectives, there appears to be a preconceived notion that youth respond better to female youth workers than to male youth workers.

There appears to be a "need for more men in this field." However, a participant reflects: "I find male youth workers tend to be treated with less respect by female coordinators... especially men of colour." There appears to be tensions between the concept of "masculinity" and jobs involving caring for youth. There is a clear lack of youth workers who identify as men, although, according to our responses, there is no clear evidence as to the reason for their low numbers. More research ought to be conducted on this particular issue.

When discussing inequalities, nine participants wrote about funding disparities and accessibility issues for linguistic minorities. The "growing needs of [these] communities" seem to be confronted by "language barriers here in Québec." These barriers can take the shape of "turning away certified employees for failing a French test," or bilingual employees in Francophone positions turning down Anglophone case files. This last element emerged more frequently in urban contexts than rural ones.

The issue of accessibility to services in remote areas emerged on multiple occasions throughout the survey responses. There appears to be "no incentive to work rurally, where often the demands and difficulties can be accentuated due to lack of accessibility to services, socioeconomic status, education level, [and] limited employment opportunities." Two participants wrote that not only does employee retention seem to be particularly difficult in rural areas, but youth engagement too. A youth worker mentioned transportation limitations, including the lack of public transit, as one factor in whether youth can benefit or not from services.

As mentioned previously, youth workers who are themselves youth (up to age 30) can face certain issues because of their age. One participant shared:

"I think something really important to note is how many youth workers are actually youths ourselves. We are both at the frontlines, supporting our peers and simultaneously experiencing similar challenges as them. There is a lot of ageism in the community sector and youth perspectives are highly sought after but rarely valued. A big part of the burnout I've seen my fellow youth-workers face can also be attributed to the experiences they face personally and at work and, in particular, due to hostile and/or toxic work environments."

Multiple respondents mentioned that younger workers sometimes face their ideas or perspectives being shut down due to their lack of experience. "[...] [In] reality, some of the ideas they propose could be valuable (even if not in their original proposed form) due to their new

¹³ This emerged without any questions directly addressing gender representation.

approach/perspective.” There sometimes appears to be a “gap [...] between what many organisations practice and what they preach.”

When it comes to remuneration for intervention work, many respondents perceive inequalities between the public and non-profit sectors. According to our responses, the salaries in the community sector are “much [lower]” than those in the public sector. Multiple participants shared the feeling of being taken less seriously working in the community sector than they would have in the public sector. In the education system, community sector services are sometimes seen as “less important[,] and [as] a “bonus” rather than a key part [of a youth’s journey].”



Not all community organisations offer the same level of working conditions.

In the community sector, there appear to be major disparities in working conditions between organisations. The community sector “is far more underfunded and unstable than the public sector.” Some youth workers do “not have access to a pension or insurance of any kind.” For the same job, organisations offer “very uneven” salaries and benefits (including the number of paid days off). One participant wrote: “This needs to be addressed, and would make enormous steps towards [stemming the] attrition [rates] of skilled workers if we did address it.”

On the subject of pay disparities, one participant shared a positive experience they recently had at work: “a pay equity consultant/agent came in to evaluate the job positions and [formulated a set of] criteria [for workers to] receive [their] deserved pay (level of education, workload, type of job etc.)” This may prove to be one tool to address this particularly glaring issue in the community sector.

Another concern is the correlation between an organisation’s funding and its mission. A participant suggested that the more general the mission, the smaller the funding (see the Discussion section of this report). Multiple respondents highlighted the stress that comes from working in a sector that relies on “subsidies to be able to achieve [the organisation’s mission].”

Some survey responses suggested an issue of cohesion in the community sector. One participant reflected on the sector’s structure: “[it can be difficult when] community groups work in silos and do not [...] see how another service can complement what they have to offer.” Another response mentioned the need for more support and solidarity amongst community network organisations.

While acknowledging the aforementioned concerns, our participants shared various advantages the community sector still has over the public sector. These include more flexibility, being “better equipped to deal with crisis,” having more grassroots energy, and being more rewarding. On that last note, a respondent reflected:

“The community sector has more flexibility to adapt quickly and run programs that reflect the direct needs of people in the community. There are [fewer] hoops that you have to jump through in order to make an idea a reality. It’s easier to meaningfully engage the people so that the community feels as though they have an actual voice in our society. It’s also possible to be more progressive in our approach to many kinds of issues because we are not restricted by the same policies as the public sector, which can lay the ground[work] for meaningful societal change.”

Community workers will oftentimes get to know the youth far better than they would have in the public sector. A participant who worked in both sectors underlined the additional care and time they were able to invest in their connection with the youth in the community sector than in the public:

“A community sector–role can be for and by community. Community sector jobs should be dedicated to building up and supporting [the] community, and would therefore represent the plans, needs, and goals of the communities they serve. A public sector role is focused on representing the plans and goals of the institution it represents.”

We ought to mention that 11 of our 40 participants did not know how to answer what the differences were between working in the community sector and working in the public.

One of the issues with the profession of youth worker is having to challenge, on a daily basis, the preconceived ideas that society can have about the job. See more by consulting Annex 10.

Perspectives on Education and Experience in Community Youth Work

The survey responses indicate nuanced perspectives on the role of experiential knowledge versus formal education in community work. Many participants affirm that, while formal education provides valuable theoretical knowledge and tools, hands-on experience is equally, if not more, crucial for effectively engaging with youth. At least two participants shared that even though they do not explicitly use their theoretical knowledge daily, it was helpful in making them feel more confident in their positions and in their decision-making. Another participant mentioned that their diploma “reassures the clients” as well. Participants who favoured experiential knowledge stressed its pertinence in their “understanding of community issues,” developing crucial “soft skills such as empathy, communication, and problem-solving,” and in fostering a “genuine passion for helping others[,] and a commitment to the community.” One participant, instead, believed that the importance of each style of education depended entirely on the situation:

“I think [that having a formal training] simply makes it that you have more tools in your belt, so it’s easier to intervene with youth. But I’ve met individuals who do a fantastic job and they don’t have a background in intervention. I’ve also met people who have a background with intervention and don’t know what to do in certain situations. It depends on multiple factors.”

Participants' perceptions of the hiring process varies. Some organisations require "a certain level of education and experience prior to coming to work in intervention," even if they place a lot of importance on "how people carry themselves and if their personalities are aligned with the values of the organisation." Other organisations put experiential knowledge at the forefront of their hiring process, even when "many [employees] also have extensive education in related fields." Most respondents appear to agree that whatever formal education and experiential knowledge youth workers have, on-the-job training is essential.

Onboarding Needs and Support for New Youth Workers

1. Comprehensive Training and Support

There is a significant emphasis on the need for adequate training for and mentorship of youth workers. New youth workers often feel unprepared due to a lack of real-world cases, structured training, and shadowing opportunities with more experienced colleagues. One participant pointed out the "large discrepancy" between what they were taught while training to work with youth, and what to do when actually working with them. Other respondents underlined the lack of support during their onboarding: "[little] to no psychological support," a "lack of network," and a "lack of knowledge transfer." One youth worker shared feeling unsettled when they do not receive concrete training, especially when "liability [was] concerned[;] I think it's critical to properly train and prepare incoming youth workers." Solutions offered by our participants included: "support groups for knowledge and story sharing," "less 'top-down' dissemination of a structured curriculum," and "more [...] informal support network[s]."

Starting a job as a youth worker can be challenging because it is a process that requires both time and plenty of resources. Overlooked tasks can include: learning the organisation's mandate, deciphering the different commitments the role contains, understanding the various moving parts of the organisation's structure, and discerning "who to go [to] for what." Some roles are particularly difficult to define. One participant gave the example of outreach work: "it has to take several months for somebody new to start[,] to accommodate to what the practice really is[.] [This requires] proper support from somebody well grounded in the organisation[,] and patient enough to go through that process every week with the newcomers." The necessity of a mentor-type figure may overburden the more senior youth workers, unless funding and personnel can be spared for this role. A respondent shared:



[The main needs of people starting in their positions is] getting a hang of what the community needs. [...] You want to help and you [have] ideas, but it doesn't mean that the community needs/wants it.

"I think employee training is underrated and needs more investment. I have never been trained in my role [...] It was hell. I learned everything on the job, without guidance. I have witnessed many colleagues and interns leave the field due to the lack of training and support. It takes a long time to become a great [...] youth worker but it's hard to actually get to that point when people are given little to no guidance in their first year of employment. I would love for training to be mandatory and done on a monthly basis. I would love to see more training programs for community organisations that focus on supporting clients' mental wellness, crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques, DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] training to help people develop cultural fluency and sensitivity, budget, [...] time management, [and] personal development."

That plenty of youth workers "[...] come and go [...] doesn't encourage newcomers." The gap between what new youth workers need and what their organisations can offer them can lead to helplessness, burnout, and, ultimately, to feeling uncertain about staying in the profession.

The question of training is pertinent when discussing new youth workers, but also for the profession at large. One participant reflected: "I often find the training workshops are more geared towards new/onboarding staff and not expanding on existing skill sets. The training has met my basic needs, but I feel like we are not up to date with working with special needs/neurodiverse youth (which are a large part of our participants) and with some of the specialised skills that we advertise, but not all staff are fluent in offering these skills."

When asked about their employee training, survey responses highlight a diverse range of experiences. 6 participants did not receive any particular training for their specific role. 16 participants received some sort of training, ranging from minimal and "uninspiring" to not being tailored to their role or their realities. One respondent shared: "I received a 3-hour training before starting my position which was more [of an] info-session [...] than anything. I wish I could've worked [with] the person in the previous position for at least a week." Nearly half of the participants (18), however, did report receiving adequate training, with an average of one to two sessions or workshops per year.

The issue of finances regarding training also emerged. Some participants are able to sign-up to relevant training sessions in collaboration with their managers, during billable hours and with fees covered by the organisation. Others have had to enrol and pay for their training (on their own personal time), or resign themselves to having no tailored training whatsoever. One participant made clear that while training is essential to get specialised in their role, there is no pay raise "for being more skilled."

Most respondents expressed their preference for ongoing professional development, especially hands-on, applied training, over more theoretical sessions. Youth workers who receive this type of training reported feeling "fresh," being up to date with modern tools, and having pertinent, contemporary knowledge. Subjects on which there appeared to be a lack of

training included mental health, trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement. A participant mentioned that conferences in their regions are offered only in French, and called for training sessions to occur in English as well.

There appears to be a general consensus amongst our participants that more structured and comprehensive training is essential for enhancing youth workers' effectiveness and job satisfaction.

2. Clear Expectations and Boundaries

According to the survey results, many experienced youth workers, and many of those who are new to the field of work, struggle with unclear job descriptions and the pressure to perform without a comprehensible framework. Establishing roles, responsibilities, and boundaries is crucial to prevent overwhelm and ensure that youth workers understand their tasks and can prioritise effectively. In some organisations, it appears that it is difficult to “prioritise your needs as a worker, [know] how to put limits and say no, [and] learn coping strategies that work for [the employee].” An emphasis on the staff member's wellbeing is not always an organisational priority, so it falls to the workers to learn on their own.

Furthermore, knowing when and how to refuse to take on “more responsibility [than] is realistic” was discussed in our survey responses. It requires clear roles to understand if what a youth worker is being asked to perform is legitimately part of their job. The employee may “[worry] that if [they] say no or question something [they] will be seen as not [being] a team player and will be cut at the next opportunity.” A youth worker reflected:

“There is a lack of internal structure, which is then reflected in the lack of structure when working with youth. The description of tasks may be clear, but staff shortages can easily cause colleagues to deviate from their assigned duties. This leads to an overload of work and an increase in risk factors for burnout.”¹⁴

One solution that some participants suggested involved calling upon their organisations to “insist [...] on a structure for breaks[,] a break [that] doesn't include eating lunch with youth participants.” Developing certain boundaries with the youth can be beneficial for all involved. Moving away from appearing as “friends” may help create a new dynamic that respects the youth workers' needs and expertise, while allowing them to work more efficiently.

Let us now briefly address the situation of youth workers who engage in more occasional projects with youth, such as artists who facilitate workshops in schools or community organisations. There does not appear to be any established standards for what the facilitation

¹⁴ Original text: « Il y a un manque de structure interne qui se reflète ensuite sur le manque de structure auprès des jeunes. La description des tâches peut être claire, mais le manque d'employé peut facilement faire déroger les collègues de leurs tâches attitrées. S'en suit alors par une surcharge de travail et l'augmentation des facteurs de risque face à l'épuisement. »

process should be, which can be very challenging for these artists. Our participants discussed the tension between being appropriately remunerated (expenses, taxes, presentation time, travel time, preparation time, etc.) and turning down a job because these expenses are not covered.

Even in situations with clear contracts and expectations, many artist facilitators are experiencing difficulties in getting the respect they deserve. Many respondents mentioned the difficulties they have undergone in establishing a good relationship with schools and organisations. In an article published in *Le Devoir* entitled “Schools are taking their time to pay artists” (Carbasse, 2024),¹⁵ artist youth workers mentioned struggling to get paid on time after facilitating a workshop, as well as the additional stress of having to “chase after” their remuneration (Cara Carima, illustrator, as cited in (Carbasse, 2024)). Author Chloé Varin shared this feeling: “What I resent is the mental burden of always having to handle our affairs, doing constant follow-ups in the hopes of getting paid” (Carbasse, 2024).¹⁶ The lack of structure and recognition of artist facilitators deserves more research beyond what this report can offer.

3. Resource Availability and Network Building

New youth workers face challenges stemming from limited resources and funding, which directly impact their ability to perform their roles effectively. Building a professional network, and accessing ongoing education, seem to be partial solutions in order to mitigate these challenges and enhance their capacity to support youth. When starting a new job without proper guidance and mentorship, one may feel as if they must do everything “from the ground up,” including “familiarizing [themselves] with the community,” “building [relationships, and] a network of youth.”

The onboarding needs for new youth workers are met with varying degrees of success across community organisations. The elements presented above are not only valuable for the early stages of a career in youth work – they will also help ensure personnel retention in a sector where the average length of career is not long.

Empowering Youth Workers: Overcoming Challenges and Recognising Expertise

What can organisations do to address the main challenges facing youth workers? In order of most to least selected, our participants answered: higher salaries (31), more psychological support for staff (20), better training/education (18), better structure with clearer definitions of tasks (16), more financial resources (20), fewer additional tasks not included in job descriptions (14), and more staff (13) (Annex 12). Other elements mentioned by participants included improved access to health and social services, and clinical support.

¹⁵ Original text: « Des écoles tardent à payer des artistes. »

¹⁶ Original text: « Ce que je déplore, c’est la charge mentale de devoir toujours être à nos affaires, de faire des suivis rigoureux dans l’espoir d’être payés. »

There are calls for higher salaries and equitable pay for community workers, often being compared unfavorably to similar roles outside of the community sector. These calls also come with demands for better job security, benefits, and the recognition of community work as a profession (rather than a “voluntary,” “fun,” or “easy” position) (see Annex 10). There is a pressing need for public awareness about the importance of youth workers, the complexity of their roles, and their



day-to-day realities. It is a job that in many cases involves intense emotional components. As previously mentioned, scrambling to maintain an organisation’s funding while navigating the more negative connotations surrounding community work is a reality faced by various youth workers.

**[...] more than
just verbal
appreciation;
actual
change is
necessary.**

We asked our participants what elements of their professional expertise they would like more recognised. To do so, we gathered the 100+ self-reported skills from *La Coalition Interjeunes’* survey, and grouped them into six categories. We asked our participants to choose two categories they would like society to understand as essential youth worker expertise. Our results were as follows (from most to least votes): (1) interpersonal skills and communication, (2) originality and personality, (3) professionalism and organisation, (joint 4th) commitment in the field, (joint 4th) academic/knowledge-based expertise, and (5) emotions and balance (Annex 13).

Is it possible to see a job in community intervention as a life-long career path? Responses were polarised, with some strong “yeses,” “nos,” and many were unsure or undecided. Those youth workers who defended the long-term sustainability of their career often mentioned the idea of a “calling.”¹⁷ They also specified that changing jobs *within* the sector might be the way to sustain a life-long career: “[we] may need to make different choices at different times in our lives [in] order to take care of ourselves (change jobs for better job security, or stepping into a more administrative position if the emotional toll is too high at a certain time), but this is normal in any career.”

Participants who expressed doubts about the long-term viability of this career path pointed to many issues previously discussed in this report, including better working conditions and acceptable pay. A participant mentioned: “[our remuneration] isn’t commensurate with that of other fields with similar qualifications and responsibilities.” It is not a question of having a “luxurious” life-style: it is, instead, about being able to afford the ever-increasing cost of living without having to rely on savings, multiple jobs, or financial support (see Fig. 5). One respondent wrote:

“When youth workers leave the field, it is often due to a lack of respect in terms of compensation, recognition for their time and efforts, or inadequate support for their mental and physical well-being. If these issues were addressed, I believe the community sector would be taken more seriously and could drive more meaningful change.”

¹⁷ A “calling” refers to “an activity that is a person’s most important job, esp. one in which the person has an unusually strong interest and ability” (Cambridge Dictionary). The term is often used as a synonym to “vocation,” but places less emphasis on the time and energy spent on the particular endeavour.

More information about job insecurity emerged in response to our questions about long-term job stability. Participants shared their feelings of powerlessness in the face of job instability: “[our] jobs are not deemed “essential” and [...] are always up for abolition when budgets are cut.” This stress adds to an already frequently emotionally demanding job. A youth worker noticed that their colleagues “last an average of 3 - 5 years [in the sector] and sometimes even less.” This aligns with our survey average of 1-5 years (Annex 5).

A participant shared their reflections on the particular case of working with English-speaking youth: “I would like to think [that youth work] is [sustainable as a profession], but with the language laws in Québec I think financial uncertainty is a real risk for English-speaking organisations.”

3. LIMITATIONS

Our research presents pertinent information about the job of English-speaking youth workers in Québec. However, it is essential to underline its limitations.

First, the size (n=40) and the nature of the survey sample prevents us from making sweeping statements, or point towards global trends regarding the profession of English-speaking youth workers in Québec. Time and resources were limited when it came to conducting this research report. While we sought to include participants from all health regions, we did not have any respondents from 5 of the 18 regions (see Annex 1). This may have hidden unique regional realities from us, where certain issues might have taken on greater importance. This report does not pretend to fully represent the large and diverse population of youth workers across Québec.

Second, our sampling method influenced the survey population. To help us both increase our participant count and reach specific participant characteristics (i.e. youth workers’ regions), we used the quota and snowball sampling methods. The snowball method relies on participant referrals, which may limit diversity and skew responses based on existing networks. Furthermore, our survey participation was voluntary, meaning that those who responded could skew towards individuals with more strongly held opinions than others.

Third, a word about the survey’s accessibility. At 30-45 minutes with 40 questions, its length may have deterred potential participants who found it overly time-consuming, despite the financial compensation offered. This could have biased our sample toward youth workers who are more invested in, or available, for such research. Despite strategies being put in place in order to make this survey as accessible as possible, its length and complexity remain a possible hindrance.

A fourth survey limitation involves the nature of self-reported data. Our responses relied on self-reporting, which may involve bias – particularly if participants feel pressured to provide socially desirable answers or are hesitant to share critical views, even if done anonymously.

4. DISCUSSION

Let us elaborate on five key elements we believe ought to be highlighted.

First, when discussing the job of youth worker, terminologies and definitions are particularly important, and sometimes difficult to navigate. It is a title that few of our participants officially hold, and as such, we frequently repeated our definition in the survey so as to avoid any uncertainty around its meaning. Is it a term that should be used as a job title in the community sector? Would this facilitate advocacy?

Another definition that elicited confusion, at times, was “youth.” A few participant shared similar perspectives on the term:

“I always struggle with the definition of “youth.” [...] As a 30-year-old myself, who would be considered a “youth,” I feel this term does not accurately represent me, nor do I associate myself with it. [...] Additionally, 15-30 is a VERY large age group range. In my role, I have to decide if I keep it as one big group with different ages or divide it up further into teens 15-20 and 21-30. The lived experiences and needs of a 15 year old and 30 year old differ greatly.”

There are many differing age brackets used to define youth. Y4Y Québec, for example, defines youth as between the ages of 16 to 30, while *La Coalition Interjeunes* uses 12 to 30. The *Carrefours jeunesse-emploi* (CJE) defines youth up to age 35. This tension can begin to explain why some people have a hard time associating themselves with the term.

Second, “interpersonal skills and communication” was the area of expertise that youth workers wanted to be most recognised for. After analysing our participants’ feedback, it is clear that this area of expertise ought to have included far more than the qualities we had initially attributed to it in our survey (see Annex 13). For example, the ability not to “[be] afraid to say no because if not the job will play an emotional toll,” as well as recognising the resilience that comes with “[k]nowing that not everyone we meet will succeed but we do our best to support them.”

Third, youth workers feel most valued during moments of verbal appreciation and positive feedback (Annex 14). That said, youth workers also made it clear that what would be even more appreciated would be better working conditions with adequate psychological support, clearer task delegation and organisational structures, and the provision of relevant trainings.

Fourth, there is a lack of funding for the community sector. One participant suggested that funding may suffer due to the vagueness of certain organisations’ missions, such as the Maisons des Jeunes (MDJ). While the MDJ play a vital role by working to empower youth and by tackling sensitive issues like mental health, the more general nature of their mission often unfortunately limits their financial resources, thereby constraining their ability to adequately fulfill their mission.

However, one participant discussed how increased recognition of their profession may increase its staffing shortages and exacerbate stress: “As this work is becoming more recognised and appreciated, organisations are requiring workers to have higher post-secondary education and qualifications[;] however, they are [still] not able to compensate their workers adequately.”

Finally, it is important to underline that the community sector exists in relation to other sectors, such as education, and health & social services. Cuts in these parallel sectors have a direct impact on youth workers’ abilities to do their jobs properly, stripping them of various tools. If their youth need to wait months to have their health addressed, much of the youth worker’s efforts may become irrelevant.

CONCLUSION

This research report sheds light on the critical yet underappreciated service of youth workers to Québec’s English-speaking youth. By exploring the challenges they face – the lack of funding, little job-specific training, and precarious working conditions – our findings corroborate the pressing need for major changes to ensure the continued viability of this essential profession. If the gaps discussed in this report are not addressed, youth workers are at risk of burnout, diminishing their capacity to effectively meet the needs of Québec’s English-speaking youth.

Moreover, the testimonies from youth workers gathered in our survey highlight the deep professional and personal commitment they bring to their role. Their dedication often goes beyond formal job requirements, highlighting the emotional and relational aspects of their work. This dedication, and not “vocation,” must be met with recognition and concrete support, such as stable funding, opportunities for professional development, and policies that address workforce retention.

We wish once again to emphasise that this data, and our research, does not seek to judge the practices of any particular organisations. Instead, our intent is to shine a light on the state of the community sector, in relation to the youth populations who need it the most. By sharing this data, we hope to highlight the pressures faced by youth workers, and present the support that is urgently needed to preserve and strengthen this essential profession.

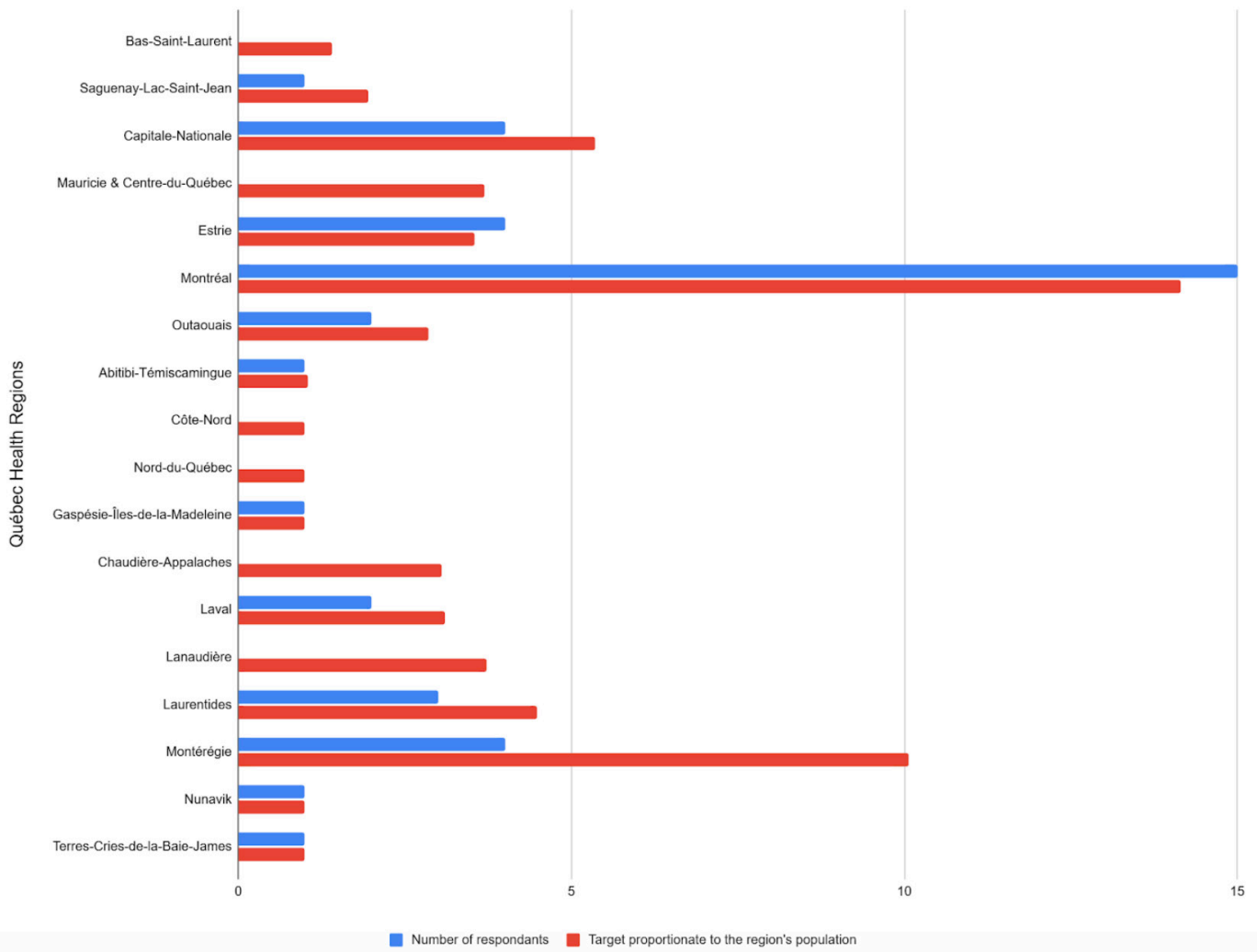
This report is a call to action for policymakers, organisations, and society to collaboratively champion the recognition, validation, and valorisation of youth workers. Strengthening this profession will not only empower the workers themselves, but will enhance the well-being of the youth they serve, ultimately contributing to the sustainability of Québec’s youth sector.

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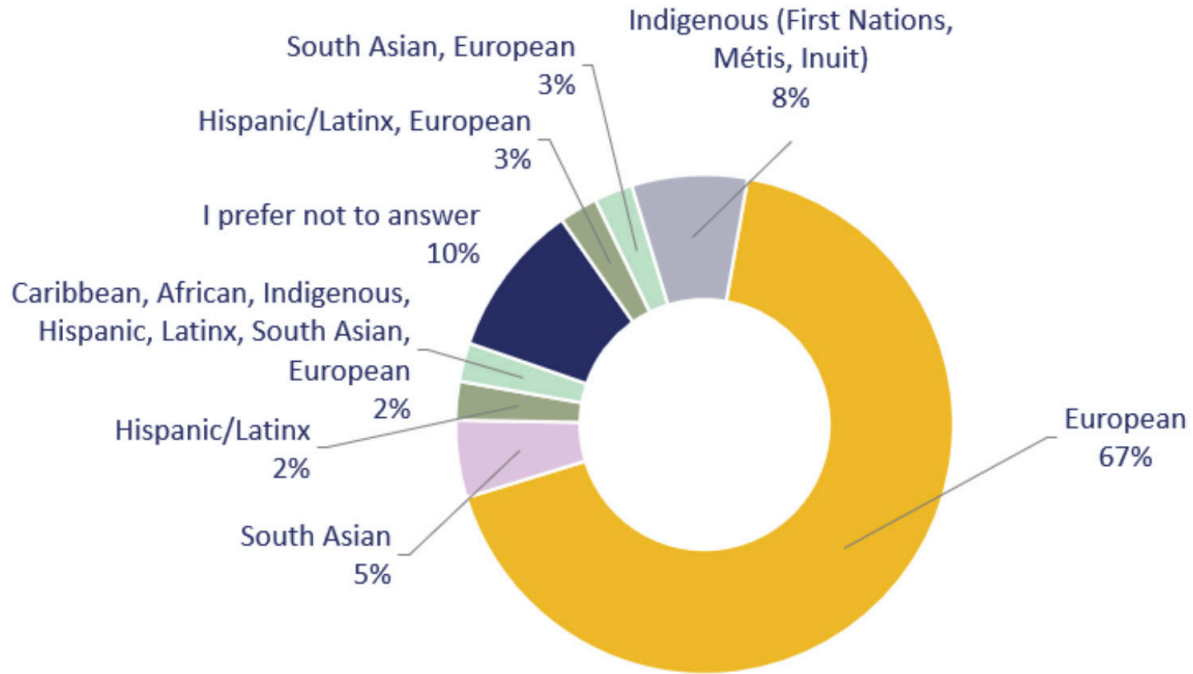
APPENDIX

Annex 1 - Number of Respondents per Québec's Health Regions

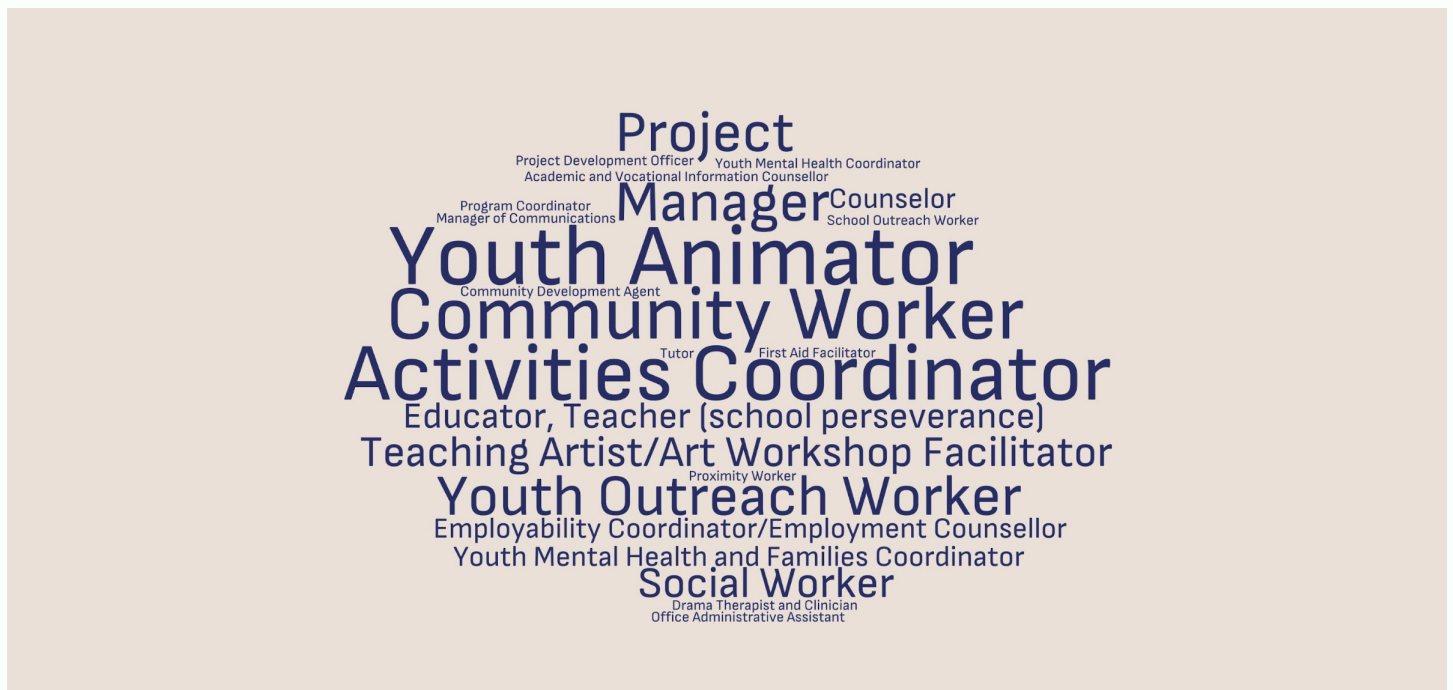


Annex 2 - Ethnicities of Participants

Options (participants could select multiple): African, European, East Asian, South Asian, South East Asian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), Hispanic/Latinx, Middle Eastern, I prefer not to answer, I don't know, Other.



Annex 3 - Current Job Titles

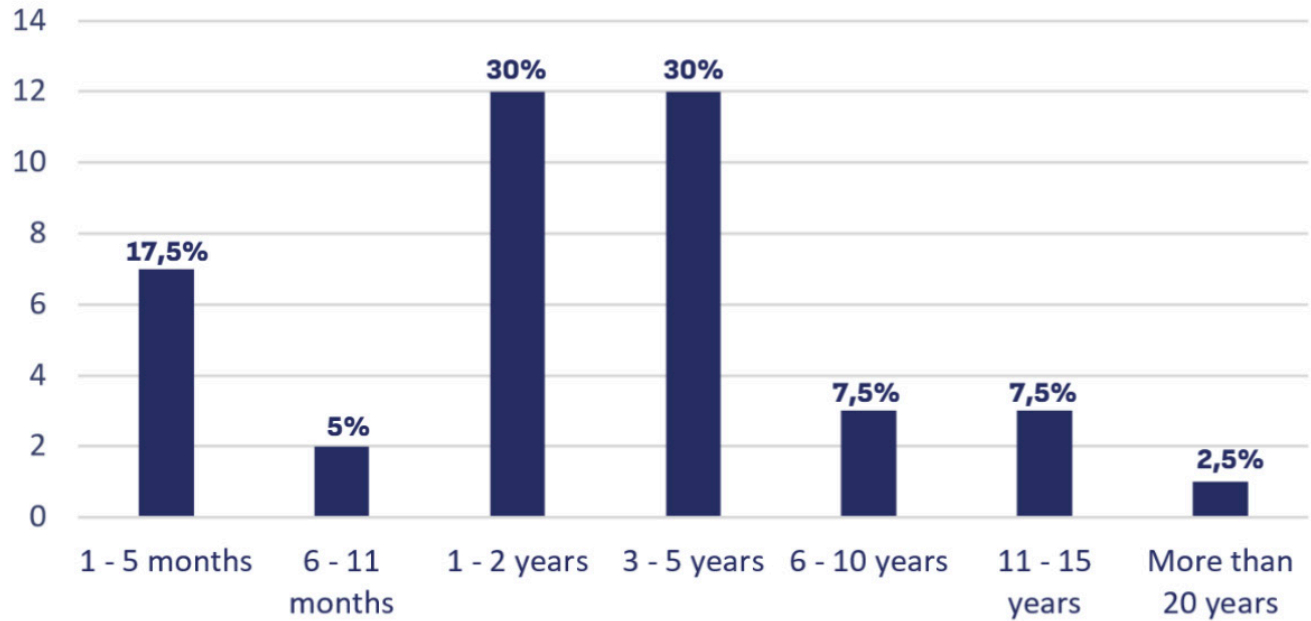


Annex 4 - How did you get into Working with Youth?¹⁸

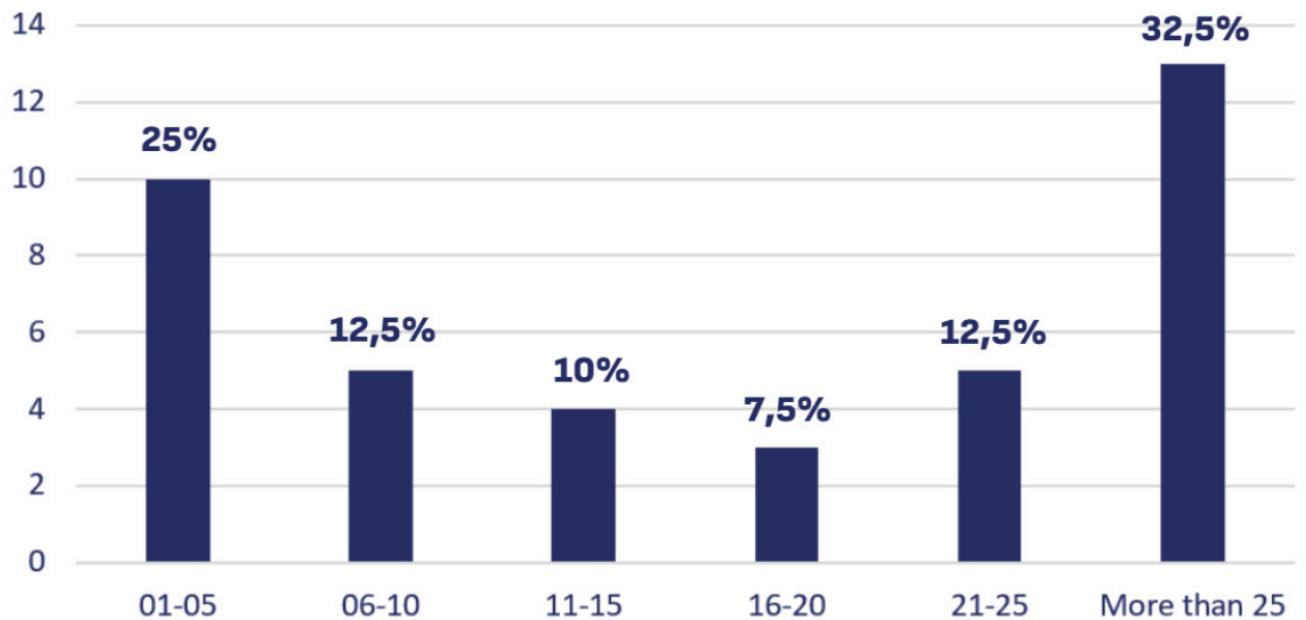
I began my career with a job in the community sector.	35 %
I entered the community sector following a career change.	22.5 %
I turned to the community sector because I knew someone who worked there.	17.5 %
I have previously attended/used the services of an organisation similar to mine.	17.5 %
I entered the community sector through an internship.	12.5 %
I have used the services of my organisation before working there.	7.5 %
I turned to the community sector because it was the only option.	2.5 %
Other: spending time working with youth, active in student associations, "I felt a strong value alignment, being a youth myself who faced barriers to employment as I began building my career	35 %

¹⁸ It was possible to select multiple answers for this question.

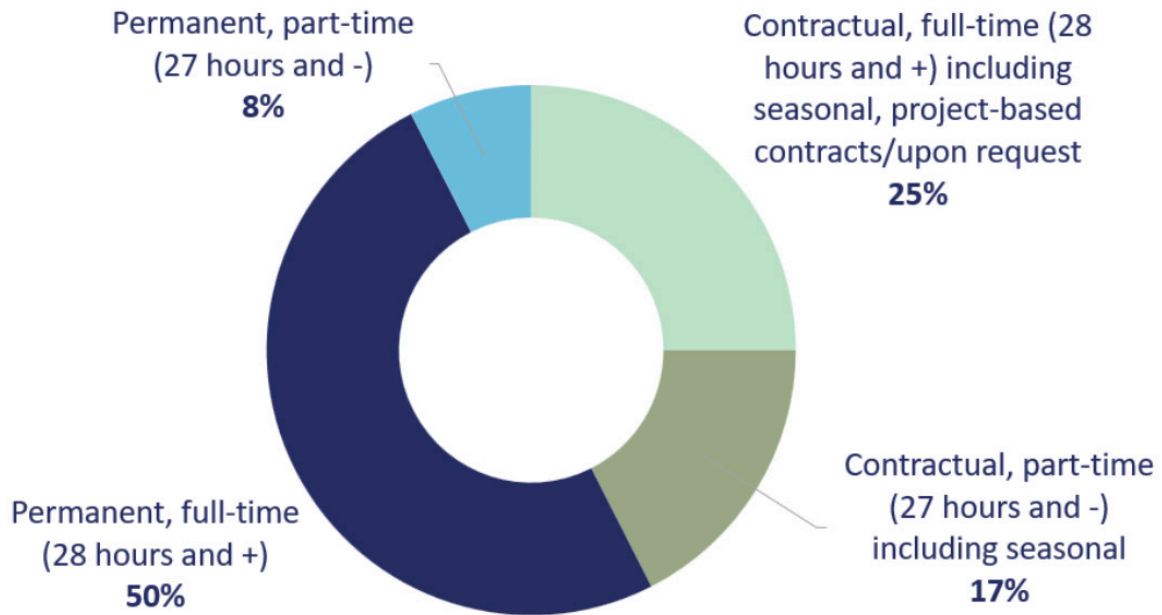
Annex 5 - Length of Service in your Organisation



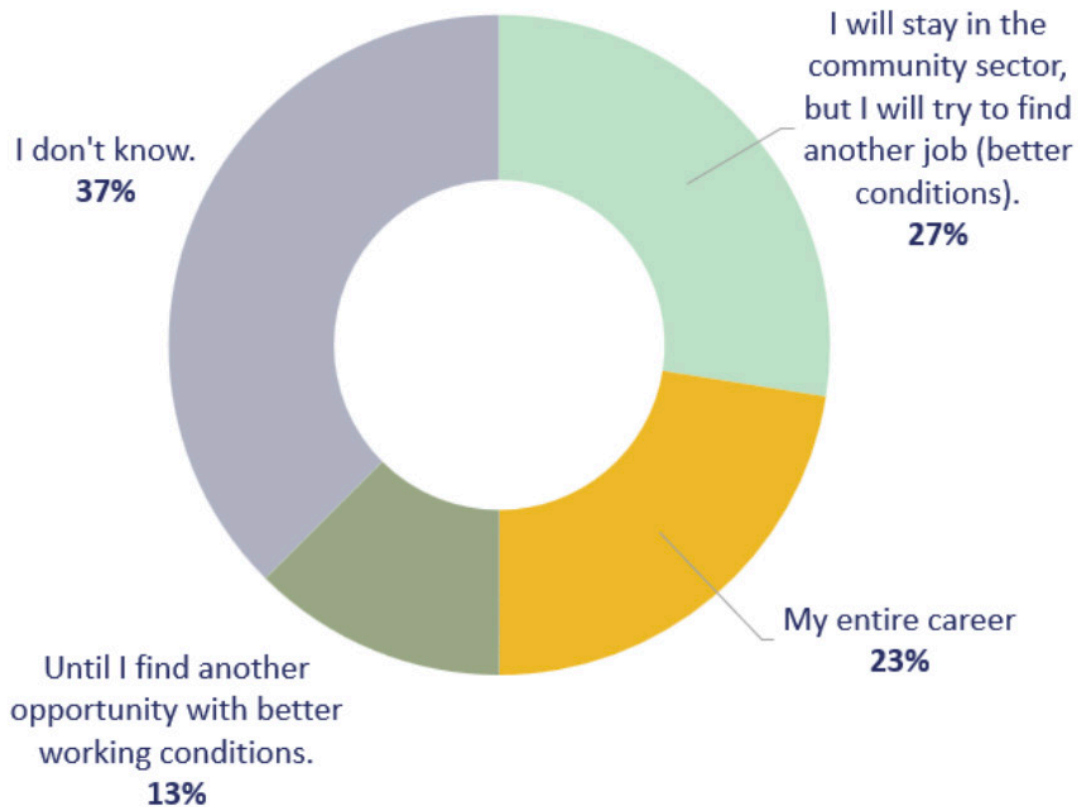
Annex 6 - Number of staff employed in the organisation



Annex 7 - Type of Contract



Annex 8 - How long do you plan to stay in the community sector as a youth worker?



Annex 9 – What is the participants’ relation to the public sector, more specifically the school and health networks?

Their answers go as follows:

For the school network:	For the health network: ¹⁹
I also work for the school network: 30%	also work for the health network: 7.5%
I have already worked for the school network: 35%	I have already worked for the health network: 12.5%
I would eventually like to work for the school network: 15%	I would eventually like to work for the health network: 15%

Annex 10 – What are the Preconceived Ideas or Prejudices that People have about your Job?

Fun

We are not really helping
It’s easy and anyone can do it

Only people that are energetic & playful are the best suited for working with youth.
« Les gens peuvent penser qu'on ne fait que de l'animation, comme dans un camp de jour. »

We are enabling certain behaviors by not reacting immediately or trying to stop them.
Arts education is not important; that it does not lead to any learning, growth, building of life skills or key values for youth.

Equivalent to volunteering (work for no or very little pay)

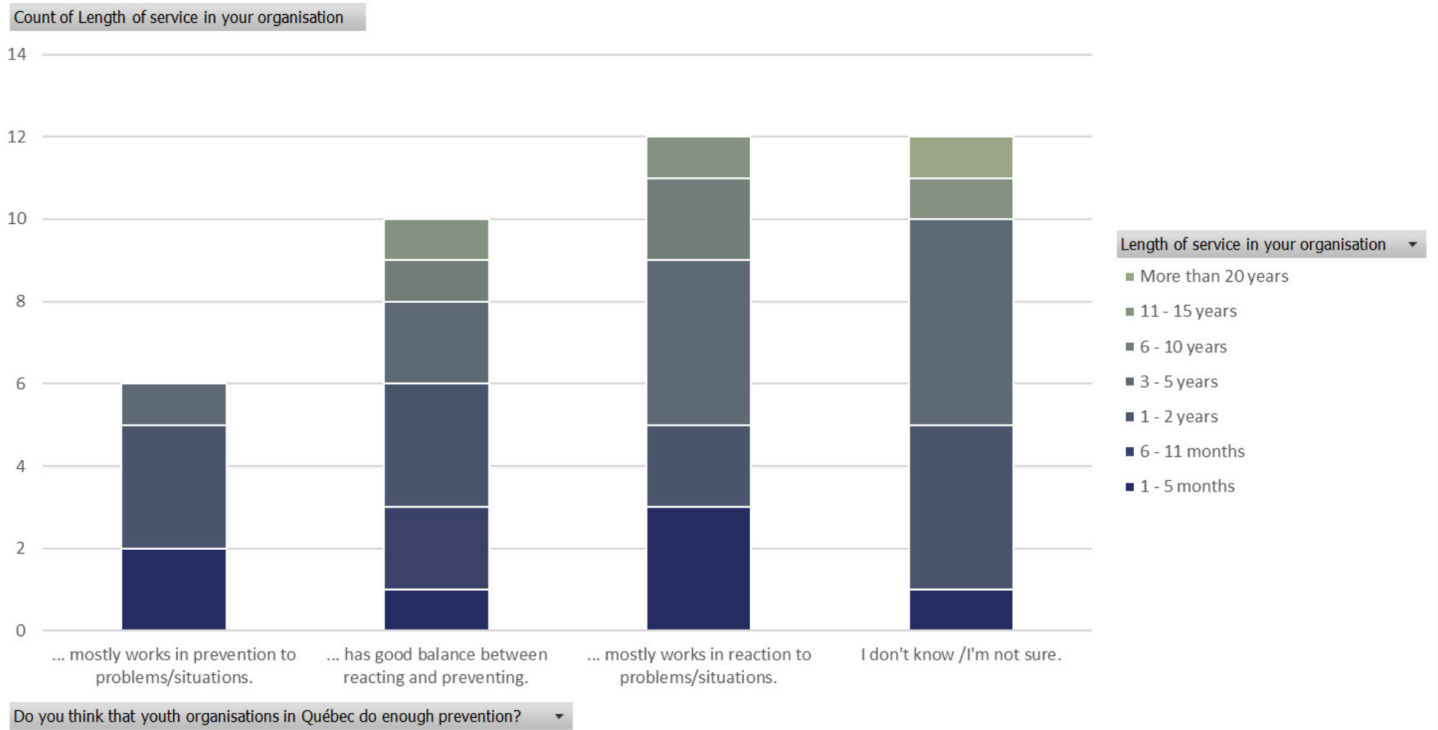
What are the **preconceived ideas**
or **prejudices** that people have about your job?

Low-level (you don’t need to be skilled or to have a degree)
Community work isn’t impactful / isn’t a profession / not important
We are all working for the DPJ, we are only there to take children away from their families
The school system has failed them so how are we able to help them
It’s a job that teenagers do for summer employment.
Informal, loose and not effective approaches
Our job is just talking to people

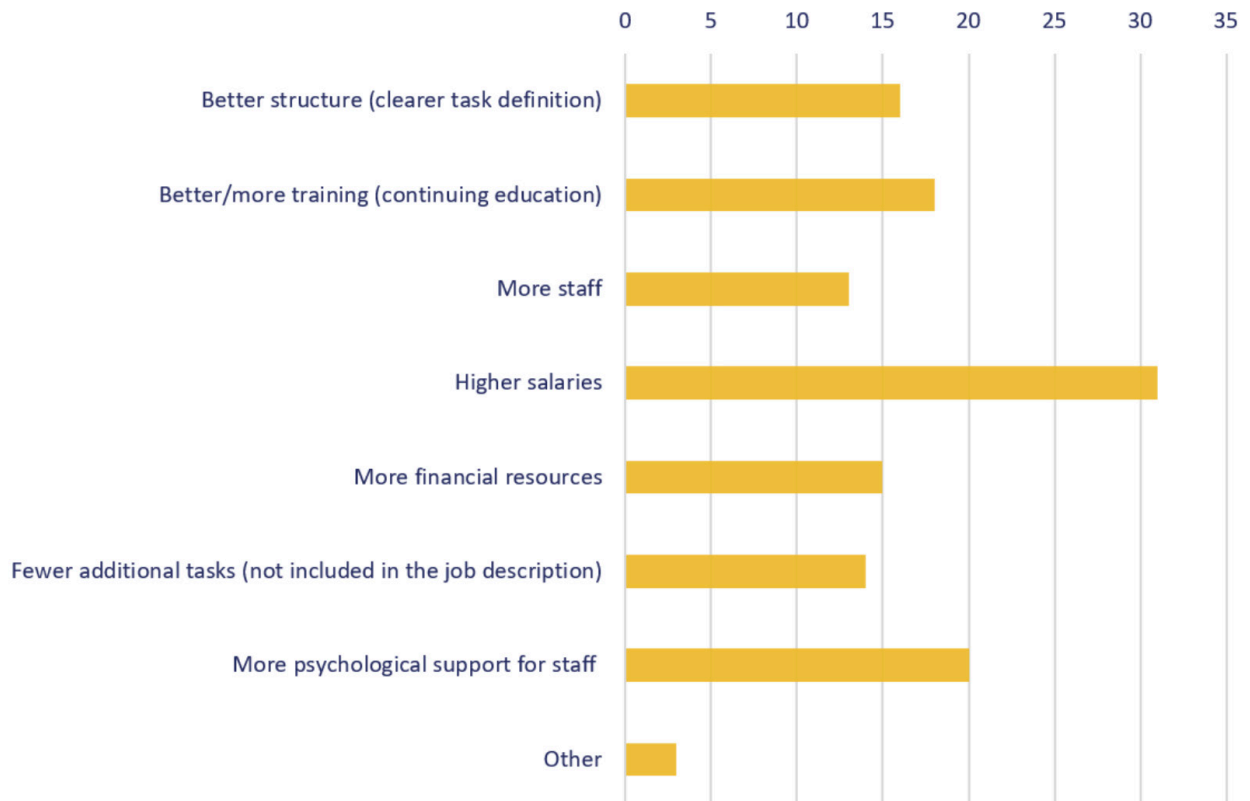
Easy

¹⁹ Includes CISSS (Integrated Health and Social Services Centres), CIUSSS (Integrated University Health and Social Services Centres), CLSC (Local Community Services Centres), DPJ (Directors of Youth Protection), etc.

Annex 11 - Do you think that Youth Organisations in Québec do enough Prevention?



Annex 12 - What can Organisations do to Prevent and/or Overcome some of the Main Challenges Facing Youth Workers?



Annex 13 – What are the Two Areas of Expertise you would like to be more Recognised for?



INTERPERSONAL SKILLS & COMMUNICATION: maintaining a connection with the youth & team, developing a sense of belonging (within the youth and within ourselves), empathy, patience, calmness, conflict management, intervention (formal or informal), active listening, unconditional welcome, tactfulness, etc.

PROFESSIONALISM & ORGANISATION: time management (tasks, deadlines), event planning, multitasking, critical and ethical judgement, confidentiality, rigour, continuous training, autonomy, discretion, trust in the team, integrity, etc.

COMMITMENT (IN THE FIELD): field expertise, resilience, preventive work, pride in oneself and one's job, long-term vision, showing-up day after day/endurance, reliability, hopefulness, perseverance, etc.

EXPERTISE: academic skills and knowledge in your specific field (e.g., intervention techniques, knowledge about multicultural environments, judicial system, youth rights, intersectionality, LGBTQIA2S+ resources, etc.), recognition of diplomas/certificates, etc.

EMOTIONS & BALANCE: managing one's emotions (stress, anxiety, feeling of helplessness), emotional maturity, mental health, self-care, self-compassion, work-life balance, knowing when to let go/to step back, setting boundaries, etc.

ORIGINALITY & PERSONALITY: adaptability, creativity, ability to do a lot with little, curiosity, self-confidence, authenticity, humour, initiative, leadership, assurance, proactivity, group facilitation, charisma, etc.

Annex 14 – When do you Feel Valued in your Work? When do you Feel most Undervalued in your Work?

When do you feel most valued in your work?

"I feel valued when parents and children thank me and express how much of a positive difference this has made in their lives or when my supervisor recognizes my work."

Being made to feel part of the team, my boss asking me for my input, my team and boss often tell me that I am an asset to the team

Meaningful gestures, including thank-you cards, holiday gift, or receiving a bonus

A supportive and appreciative workplace culture, shared celebrations and lunches.

Satisfaction from helping youth reach their goals, feeling of belonging to the community, and significance in the role of youth worker

When former partners come back wanting to work together again

Positive feedback from youth (verbal or through end of project/program evaluation)

At the end of a season we do a "celebration circle" where each staff sits in the middle and receives positive feedback from the rest of the staff. It feels really good and supportive.



When do you feel most undervalued in your work?

Misunderstanding of roles, lack of consultation

When I'm not treated with respect from supervisors...
When I am judged purely on my young age, without acknowledgment of my work experience.

Lack of Recognition, absence of acknowledgment for work, both from supervisors and peers.

When pay raises do not even reflect the increase in cost of living

Insufficient constructive feedback from colleagues and management

Lack of participation and support from families, colleagues, or administration during important events or initiatives

Lack of respect for professional insights, especially when input is solicited but not acted upon, contributes to feelings of insignificance.

When work goes unnoticed and feelings of being overwhelmed are brushed off.

When someone is shocked by what a day rate is to implement a program with youth. People don't know the amount of preparation and followup goes into preparing for that one day, and so the day rate sounds very high if they don't understand what goes into it.

Overworked, especially when they are accomplishing things that aren't in their role/task/responsibility.

When people express how insignificant mental health is for them.

Pay disparities, being underpaid compared to others in similar roles



Annex 15 – Is it Possible to see a Job in Community Intervention as a Life-Long Career Path? Why?

“[R]ecognition of the importance of this type of work more than just [verbal appreciation] is needed. **Actual change** with solutions/suggestions from people working in this field.”

“This work is usually done on **low entry-level pay** and is contractual, leaving workers with a sense of **job insecurity** as most of the time they are getting paid through funding projects that sometimes last 1-3 years.”

“Yes, although the **low pay** even in the best of work-life balance often ends up shortening the path. [...] I don't even have enough money at the end of each month to take advantage of the benefits I am paying for (70% coverage of a massage, psychologist, etc.).”

“Yes, but better support systems and higher pay would ensure longevity. The current pay requires a lot of work hours, and balancing different jobs. The volume of work required can threaten work-life balance and prevent arts educators and community workers from properly taking care of their **mental and physical health**. Emotional toll and risk of burnout are tremendous concerns. “

“[At] this moment, I am unsure if it is realistic to see community intervention as a life-long career. It takes a certain individual to be **resilient** to the type of obstacles and hardships that can come with this type of job. [...] This can cause a lot of strain on your mental health. You are often faced with situations where you have to react in a way that may not resonate with your values, or in situations where you feel like you are one person trying to change/take on **systematic dysfunction**. Constant advocacy for change is overwhelming, frustrating and the outcome usually leaves you feeling defeated & exhausted. Working in community means working on the ground-level and knowing the realities of your community, but constantly being shut down or ignored leads to burnout. [...] Youth turn to youth workers for support in areas that youth workers may not be able to help or support, leaving some workers feel helpless. In essence, community workers are left to support and 'fix' the holes/cracks in the system as the resources are not adequate enough to support all those in need.



“I think so, if there a balance between work and other parts of life. If not, and you are bringing work home, there is a **high chance of burnout** or an emotional toll that can affect all areas of your life. Moreover, I believe many community workers are getting **underpaid** for their efforts in helping others, something that should be talked about more.

With that being said, I think there is a possibility to do this as a life-long career, and it is an **extremely awarding profession** in many aspects.”

“Possibly not as a life-long career path as there isn't much opportunity for career progression. Salaries are definitely not as competitive in the community sector as the public sector. **Community work isn't always guaranteed** due to reliance on grants and therefore not full financial security. Our work depends on needs and we need to be flexible to divert into other programs when needs change. We often hear people say "our job is to work ourselves out of a job" as we aim to improve access to services and resources, and the aim is to improve things to an extent that our role is no longer necessary.”

“[I]t is **very difficult** to find a fair payable full-time position in the field I am in in community organizations.”

“Also **Quebec** is the only place where I can get a lot of support for cultural work. If I want to move back to my family in Ontario I would not be able to do this job as efficiently or as easily as there are no organisations like Artists Inspire or Culture in the Schools.”

“For me, as much as I would love to work my whole life in my current career. The amount of contracts I have to take on to make a living solely from this income is a lot. Eventually as I get older, maybe have a family. I don't think I will have the **energy mentally or the physical capabilities** to do this job forever.”

“Not really, it feels as though I can't picture a solid future in this profession. The salary tends to cap out close to what I'm at now and I'm finding that that's barely enough to pay my bills and try to save some money for retirement and things like buying a house, travel, education, and retirement. You do so much in this kind of job - you need to be very **resourceful, adaptable**, and giving in ways that can sometimes feel exhausting and much harder than what people do at other jobs that pay double. To feel as though there's a chance that you'll put all of that work in and you might not even have a job in a couple of years because the funding is gone is very discouraging. I love being in a position to give back to the community and **make a real difference** in the lives of youth and the school environment, but for me I don't think the profession will feel sustainable enough for me to continue working in for more than a couple more years.”

“Often times, community intervention is a **transition** towards something else such as coming from a community org and going to the social and health network with better salaries and job stability (not necessarily better work conditions, though). Burnout and emotional toll are also very real consequences of working in this type of career if no care or support is offered by the organization to lessen the challenges that can be encountered.”



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