



## **Policy Paper**

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*Youth Unemployment Prevention and Response in the City of Brampton*

*Summer 2021*

*Prepared by:*

*Eytade Kunle-Oladosu, Co-Chair Take A Stand*  
*Lohit Kaushik, Co-Chair Take A Stand*  
*Shivohum Nar, Director of Legislative Committee*  
*Arham Ali, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Chenuka Arachchige, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Noordeep Cheema, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Jashanpreet Dhaliwal, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Richelle Furtado, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Shelby Ndongwa, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Fatima Panchbhaya, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Karanpreet Raja, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Gurpartap Thap, Legislative Committee Delegate*  
*Charu Unni, Legislative Committee Delegate*

## **About Take A Stand**

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Take A Stand is a youth-led policy provision organization composed of more than fifty students across the City of Brampton. Our team is passionate about politics and the stories of our community that can be expressed through public policy. We believe that communities are built on the backbone of storytelling. Take A Stand is founded on the idea that the stories of our community are multidimensional and multifaceted and therefore deserve to be told. Through our partnership with the City of Brampton and the Mayor's office, our vision is to provide research briefs and policy recommendations that assist in writing a new, nuanced and representative story for constituents of the City of Brampton. As dedicated youth from across the City, we have come together to voice our concerns, engage in meaningful dialogue and most importantly, take a stand on issues that we are passionate about.

This policy paper follows the same structure and formatting guidelines as the OUSA Gender-based and Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Policy Paper by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.

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## Executive Summary

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The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that “*everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*” The current rate of youth unemployment and existing work conditions for young people across the Municipality of Brampton demonstrates a flagrant disregard for this international principle. Young people must receive the same access to employment and labour protections afforded to other workforce members. The historic lack of support for youth employment has resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in revenue and prevented young people from acquiring the skills necessary to close the skill gap. This policy paper combines the concerns and voices of more than 50 young people across the City of Brampton with scholarly economic and labour policy research to offer recommendations that acknowledge the nuances and dimensions of the issue of youth unemployment. The recommendations were formulated through intensive primary and secondary research over four months. Although admittedly not an exhaustive examination of the issue, the Take A Stand team seeks to provide recommendations that address the pressing concerns of youth across the City of Brampton.

*Note: For this report, youth unemployment refers to the proportion of young people between the ages of 15-24 who are currently looking for work but unsuccessfully in attaining employment.*

### ***Principles, Concerns and Recommendations***

**Principle:** Youth should not face undue barriers such as discrimination based on gender, ability, race, sexuality or socioeconomic class when looking for employment.

**Principle:** All youth should be protected by legislation that demands equal and fair wages, safe working environments and equitable hiring and firing processes.

**Principle:** Community services and programming for youth should aim to maximize youth employability and address existing barriers to youth employment.

**Principle:** Youth should have equal employment opportunities.

**Principle:** Youth should have access to peer and industry support systems that increase mentorship.

**Principle:** Policies that address youth unemployment should recognize that these situations are nuanced and multidimensional.

**Concern:** Marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by youth unemployment and more likely to be victims of discrimination, which can be reflected in hostile work environments, pay disparities or impaired career mobility.

**Concern:** Programming that does exist to address youth unemployment is severely underfunded, ineffective or lacking in representation.

**Concern:** Current labour policy does not address the undue barriers to youth unemployment that exist like geographical location. The declined use of public transportation due to COVID-19 has exacerbated the geographical barriers of youth.

**Concern:** Youth workers do not receive the necessary mentorship or support from the education system and other public services to match their skills with the current labour demand.

**Concern:** The stigmatization of specific career fields like the trades and the inaccessibility of others like STEM has resulted in a skills gap that has the most detrimental effects for marginalized young people.

**Recommendation:** Immediate action must be taken to rectify the effects of COVID-19 on youth unemployment. This action can include increasing investment into youth programming and mentorship.

**Recommendation:** Undue barriers to youth unemployment must be addressed including geographical barriers. Public transportation should be expanded and there should be an increase in remote job opportunities for young people.

**Recommendation:** The City of Brampton should continue establishing programs that create job opportunities for young people in traditionally inaccessible industries. One of such programs includes the Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst and the Community Benefits Policy.

**Recommendation:** The City of Brampton should partner with small businesses to connect students with industry professionals, job opportunities and foster mentorship relationships. Such relationships can be established using the Brampton Entrepreneur Centre and similar programs.

**Recommendation:** The City of Brampton should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their existing programming targeted towards addressing youth unemployment.

## **CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***The COVID-19 Pandemic and Youth Unemployment***

According to Statistics Canada, “*Youth employment was severely impacted by the shutdowns – the percentage of 15 to 24 years old workers declined from 58% in February to just over 38% in April – by August, it had partly rebounded to just over 49%*” (Statistics Canada). For young people who were able to keep their job, there was a significant decrease in working hours. A survey from the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported a 23% decrease in working hours for the average young person (Wilson). With fewer hours comes lower wages; 43% of young workers also reported a decrease in their earnings since the beginning of the pandemic (Wilson). As economic recovery from the pandemic begins, part-time youth workers have seen a significant increase in job availability whereas Statistics Canada reports that full-time work among young Canadians is still down almost one-quarter from pre-pandemic levels (Statistics Canada).

### ***Gender Disparities in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Youth Unemployment***

Youth unemployment has the potential to affect a young adult’s cumulative earnings and also has effects on their flow of education, debt-payment, and living conditions. According to Statistics Canada, “*The Class of 2020 could lose between \$23,000 to \$44,000 in cumulative earnings over the next five years if this year's annual youth unemployment hits 28.0%. Losses are estimated to be between about \$8,000 to \$15,000 if the youth unemployment rate is at 19.0%. This could have impacts on the ability of graduates to repay their debts*” (Statistics Canada). Women are at a greater likelihood of being affected by this loss than men. According to Statistics Canada, the percentage of earning loss of women in 2022 could be as high as 10% whereas men would face a 5-6% earning loss (Statistics Canada). A major contributing factor to this is the societal expectation of women as the caretaker both at home and in the workforce. If someone in their household became sick, women were more likely to take time off to take care of them. A report from the International Labour Organization showed from February to April 2020, the unemployment rate increased by 20.4% for young women and 14.3% for young men, however for older workers the unemployment rate increased by only 6% (Goldin and Hobson). Women also occupy a disproportionate number of service roles and the vast majority of these jobs dissipated once lockdown was enforced (The Canadian Women's Foundation et al.).

These inequities are exacerbated dramatically for women living on low incomes and women who have faced pre-existing inequities based on race, class, ability, education or immigration status (The Canadian Women's Foundation et al.). For example, the existence of medical racism in the Canadian healthcare industry meant female-identifying people from racialized communities may have to take indefinite leaves of absence because their concerns were not heard initially. For others, the issue was a lack of local public transportation or a hesitancy to visit the doctor because of historic injustices against their community. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, women were also more likely to be responsible for unpaid care work and poor emergency responses to the pandemic made the mental and emotional labour of this unpaid care work overwhelming (UN Women). These issues have a disproportionate effect on people with intersectional identities and should be addressed accordingly.

### ***Recommendations Concerning the COVID-19 Pandemic and Youth Unemployment***

The existing Brampton economic recovery plan focuses on innovation, arts, culture and tourism, infrastructure and investment, however it does not outline how the plan will prioritize the interests of women, in particular those whose identities have been affected by compounded marginalization. These women are business owners, artists, and local organizers, therefore their welfare must be a cause of concern. Although labour policy is mandated provincially by the Ministry of Labour, the City must bring areas of concern to the Province, particularly as it relates to equitable working standards. Existing regional policy plans like the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan should be expanded to include investments into care sectors most likely to impact women (The Canadian Women's Foundation et al.).

Part-time work must be reexamined to increase the number of paid sick leave days made available to workers, particularly those who work in essential services. Job security for part-time workers should also be evaluated to minimize labour protection disparities between full-time and part-time workers. The concerns of young workers should be heard and addressed.

Childcare can transform the career trajectory of young parents. The City of Brampton should advertise the Child Care Subsidy offered by the Region of Peel and ensure parents are aware of this option.

Above all, the City of Brampton must prioritize hiring young people especially those who already faced systemic barriers to employment before the beginning of the pandemic. The City of Brampton's economic revitalization plan does not acknowledge the need for increased training and investment into youth employment opportunities. The economic recovery strategy should collaborate with existing organizations like the Brampton Entrepreneur Centre to focus more heavily on the needs of young people.

## ***Barriers to Employment for Youth***

The barriers in question refer to the aspects of the current employment system that work against youth in their search for job opportunities. The Government of Canada has acknowledged these barriers which include the lack of awareness, the stereotyping of youth, the absence of transferable skills within younger populations, various forms of discrimination and barriers specific to Indigenous populations (Government of Canada).

Youth are oftentimes oblivious to the employment opportunities that are available to them. This is the result of the poorly created government websites/applications that showcase jobs. They are difficult to navigate and hard to understand, which makes it challenging for youth. Moreover, there is an issue with when these websites/applications are updated with more opportunities, youth are usually unaware. Resultantly, only those that can regularly access the websites/applications know about any updates.

Youth have long been associated with negative stereotypes which deter employers from hiring them. Stereotyping youth to be lazy, or immature impacts the opportunities available to them. Employers would rather hire older populations because they are viewed in a better light which undoubtedly contributes to fewer opportunities. These stereotypes must be addressed for youth to have access to further places of employment.

An absence of transferable skills within youth is another facet that needs to be considered when examining youth unemployment. As a result of inexperience, most youths do not have the necessary soft skills to succeed in a work environment. Without these transferable skills, employers are reluctant to hire youth and without employment, it is difficult for youth to develop these skills.

There is also significant discrimination that exists, impacting the employment of youth. Approximately 12% of respondents to the Government of Canada's Panel have stated that discrimination is what made it difficult for them to get a good job (Government of Canada). The youths most likely to face discrimination were "*Indigenous youth, recent immigrant youth, LGBTQ2+, those who have disabilities, those with mental illnesses, racialized youth, those with criminal backgrounds and youth experiencing homelessness*" (Government of Canada). Irrespective of one's background, all youth deserve the opportunity to work and it is unacceptable for this discrimination to exist.

Indigenous youth "*continue to face a disproportionate number of barriers to training, education and employment compared to the non-Indigenous population*" (Government of Canada). These include but are not limited to the gaps in funding for education, the need to travel extensively for jobs and education as well as discrimination from employers. The intergenerational trauma of colonization has also severely impacted Indigenous youth hence impacting their ability to obtain employment.



### ***Recommendations Concerning Barriers to Employment for Youth***

The barriers mentioned above are limiting youth from reaching their full potential. They need to be addressed for youth to be employed. Existing initiatives like the City of Brampton's Summer Company Program should be continued.

The City of Brampton should create a user-friendly website that makes it easier for youth to navigate. The City can also create a mobile app for Apple and Android, making it easier for youth to apply. In addition, the City should publicize when their website/app is being updated with more job opportunities, which will help youth be aware of the forms of employment available to them.

To address the negative stereotypes surrounding youth, the City should expand on the number of workshops on transferable skills they hold for youth and provide certificates upon completion. This will allow youth to not only have a certification that proves that they are not lazy or immature, but have the much-needed soft skills that are demanded in the workforce.

The discrimination that exists when youth are seeking employment is a major factor that needs to be resolved. The City can take certain steps to provide the most marginalized communities further opportunities to find work and aim to improve the hiring process. The City must also take firm action when an applicant feels that they are being discriminated against by a possible employer.

### ***Geography and Youth Unemployment***

A significant barrier keeping youth out of the workforce is the distance to places of employment. Young workers often will not have access to a reliable car, since they may have less economic stability than their older counterparts (Scholars.org, 2018). Additionally, they may have to share their vehicle with other family members as well, making the vehicle an unreliable method of transport for a regularly occurring job. With this in mind, youth often find the places they can work confined within a small area of walking or bussing distance from their homes. This limits the job opportunities available to them.

Youth often rely on public transportation to reach workplaces. A 2015 study found that youth were about twice as likely to use public transportation compared to older workers (Scholars.org, 2018). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public transportation is no longer a viable option for many young people. The average ridership of people using Brampton Transit in 2021 is almost 50% less than it was before the pandemic (City of Brampton). This lack of public transport use exacerbates the geographical barriers faced by young workers, as their range of feasible workplaces shrinks to just locations within walking distance.

### ***Recommendations Concerning Geography and Youth Unemployment***

The City of Brampton has an ongoing partnership with the Region of Peel and the City of Mississauga to enact the Affordable Transit Program. This allows low-income families to receive a 50 percent discount on their bus passes. Considering the impact transportation has on youth employment, a similar program that focuses on alleviating the costs of transit for youth job seekers would help resolve the geographical concerns that come with youth unemployment. This subsidy would also help jumpstart the return to public transit after the risk of contracting COVID-19 has become minimal (Brampton Transit).

Another recommendation that would resolve the concerns above would be to increase the number of online job opportunities for youth through government programs and incentives for businesses to do the same. This solution would be a great way to overcome the geographical problems that youth encounter in their search for a job. Statistics Canada has found that after a 28% increase in employees who work from home, 76.9% of people from the age demographic of 15 to 34 years of age wish for at least half of their work to be from home (Mehdi and Morissette). Such a change would positively impact productivity since Statistics Canada has shown that only 8.6% of employees aged 15 to 34 accomplish less work, while 29.1% accomplish more work than usual (Mehdi and Morissette).

In addition, future planning of the city and its services must move away from auto-oriented decision making and instead, aim to be people-centric, focusing on addressing the needs of the people of Brampton. This includes an emphasis on making the city more accessible and traversable to its populace without the use of motor vehicles. If the city was more accessible through alternative means of transportation, such as through walking and biking, then it would be easier for youth without a reliable means of transportation to find employment throughout the city. This can be achieved by planning communities in the city to have all essential amenities and businesses closer to communities. Finally, city-wide initiatives to implement alternative methods of transportation, like biking, would help make these means of transportation more realistic for many.

### ***Youth Employment Programs and Career Readiness Programming Available to Youth***

According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate for Ontario youth (below 25) has consistently been about double the unemployment rate of adults (since 1978). Throughout the years, the Ontario government has implemented programs in an attempt to counteract this issue. For unemployed youth, there are currently very few training and support programs in place. However, these programs face a variety of challenges. For instance, many of these programs are severely underfunded, under-advertised, and not accessible to a wide variety of youth.

The first issue concerning youth employment programs and programming available to youth is underfunding. According to a report done by the international organization S4YE (Solutions for Youth Employment), services for youth employment currently tend to be underfunded and poorly utilized. (S4YE). This is a large concern as underfunding means that such programs are likely not able to last for a long time, due to the increasing costs of running them and a lack of funding to make up for it. This will go on to reduce the number and/or quality of programs available to youth for this issue soon.

Secondly, a large challenge for youth employment programs is under advertising. Currently, there is a large focus on digital media, especially amongst today's youth. With the changing times, it is important for advertising to evolve. While there are certain programs in place for youth, many of them take a more dated approach with traditional advertising techniques. However, this can mean that many youths are not aware of the resources that are made available to them, such as internships and several other forms of programs. ("13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada") Therefore, under advertising can be the basis of various other issues, most specifically the underutilization of the programs and resources available, on both the perspectives of the youth and potential employers.

### ***Recommendations Concerning Youth Employment Programs and Career Readiness Programming Available to Youth***

To combat these issues, there are a variety of possible responses. First, the City of Brampton could invest more into the existing and the creation of more training and support programs. This would positively affect Brampton youth, as it would allow the programs to be updated, better fitting current needs and concerns. It could also be helpful to those youth facing barriers such as geographical unemployment. Secondly, the city could focus more on advertising such programs by increasing their frequency on platforms such as social media and being advertised to schools. This would allow a wider range of youth to access, learn and benefit from these programs. With these adaptations, the youth employment opportunities in Brampton youth would significantly improve.

### ***The Implications of Mentorship and Support on Youth Unemployment***

The high demand for youth with specific skills in industries like the trades, social services, and sales is often matched with an alarmingly small supply of young people. This misalignment is known as the “skills gap” and it is a leading cause of youth unemployment. The disparity in the supply and demand of youth skills is a result of several factors, the most prominent being a systemic lack of structural support for young people seeking employment. Young people are oftentimes not given practical career assistance services during their elementary or secondary education and existing public services suffer from inaccessibility. The question then becomes; “*how do we match young people with the industries, skills, and technologies of the future?*” and the answer is mentorship.

In this context, mentorship refers to pairing a young person with a non-parental adult or older peer to establish a positive interpersonal relationship (Root Cause for MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and Open Society Foundations). Positive mentor-mentee relationships have the potential to not only create better-equipped workers but to also shape youth into successful adults. A 2011 joint study evaluated 73 various mentorship programs and found that mentoring has the potential to improve a young person’s social-emotional, cognitive and academic outcomes. When these mentoring relationships are introduced during early childhood education, they also serve as a means of prevention and promotion (DuBois et al., 57-91). Mentors who positively shape their mentee’s behaviour or social identity can provide one-on-one support in areas of career difficulty like leadership, interviewing skills, or educational resources. The approaches to mentoring also determine the nature of the relationship and its efficacy. Instrumental mentorship offers programs centred around achieving a specific goal or cultivating a skill for example educational achievement. However, developmental mentorship is catered towards more general positive development and does not always occur in structured environments; developmental mentorship can also look like a peer-to-peer, group, or online support system (Root Cause for MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and Open Society Foundations).

The benefits of youth mentorship include promoting academic engagement and achievement, improving youth employability, and assisting in the development of non-cognitive skills. Students who are mentored are more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem and believe in the importance of formal education. These young people have a smoother school-to-work transition and feel a greater sense of career readiness (Linnehan 40-54). Mentors provide guidance, confidence and if necessary they can coordinate interventions for youth who they believe are at risk of being left behind. These relationships allow young people to set meaningful goals, experience career exploration, and perhaps most importantly, a mentor provides a sense of reliability for the mentee. So long as the mentor is present, the mentee knows that they have someone on their team, advocating for their success. In a recent study, 51% of respondents reported that their mentor-mentee relationship was “very helpful” and 28% reported that it was “fairly helpful” (Bruce et al.).

### ***Concerns for Youth Mentorship***

Young people from marginalized communities face youth unemployment at a disproportionate rate, with this disparity being alarmingly high for Black, Indigenous, and disabled young people. In the Peel Region, 30% of Black youth from the ages of 15-24 are unemployed and for Indigenous youth of the same demographic, the rate is 35% (Trillium Health Partners and Healthy City Stewardship Centre).

While mentoring can remove the barriers to career opportunities this is only meaningful if mentorship programs are invested in and made easily accessible. Young people of colour and youth workers from other marginalized backgrounds including those with disabilities or queer youth, face barriers to employment that must be accounted for when offering mentorship services.

Youth mentorship programs are also severely underfunded and as a result, the quality of these programs suffers. The most glaring problem is the severe lack of available mentors for such programs. The mentor recruitment process should be focused on finding individuals from a variety of diverse fields who will best reflect the cultural, environmental, or lived experiences of the young people in the program. These recruitment programs should also be coupled with training programs so that the standards relating to cultural competency, diversity, and inclusivity are sufficiently clear. The second problem is the insufficient funding provided to these types of programs. Mentorship programs are not just a social service but an investment into the future of the young people in our City. The grant and subsidy application process for organizations seeking to establish or better their mentorship programs can be extremely convoluted and this is worsened by the fact that such subsidies or grants are few and far between. The lack of funding contributes to the inaccessibility of such programs.

The effectiveness of mentorship programs increases by 32% when they occur for one year as opposed to just six months (Bruce et al.). In short-term mentorship programs, young people do not have the time to build a meaningful relationship with their mentor which can decrease the effectiveness of the program.

### ***Recommendations Concerning the Implications of Mentorship on Youth Unemployment***

The City of Brampton must invest in its existing youth mentorship programs. For example, existing partnerships with youth mentorship organizations like the HammerHeads program should be expanded and there should be a focus on encouraging young people who are underrepresented in these industries like women and racialized youth to participate. This can occur through media campaigns, pushing the program via local recreation centers or other locations where members of the community frequent. Subsidy and grant programs should be established to increase the accessibility and the quality of youth mentoring. Local organizations working at the grassroots level should be communicated with regularly to have a better understanding of their needs and how City funds can be used to fulfill these gaps.

There must be a greater emphasis on ensuring at-risk youth and marginalized youth have access to mentorship programs. This can be achieved by partnering with local businesses to provide research opportunities to young people from these groups. Partnerships with businesses should go beyond simply job training but instead, extend into character development and the creation of strong relationships. Young people should leave the mentorship sessions feeling a sense of emotional and career-related fulfillment. To track these developments, the City of Brampton should research the effectiveness of existing community programs, examining specific factors like graduation rate, employment rate, and gender. These reports should be released to the public.

### ***Costs of Employing Youth and the Investment into Youth Employment for Small-Medium Enterprises (SME's)***

Many businesses prefer to hire experienced individuals due to its efficiency to the business as a whole. Especially with Small Medium Enterprises, many prefer experienced individuals with real-time experience in the industry over inexperienced and young people who are just entering the industry. The reason behind this is that experienced individuals have an in-depth understanding of the true dynamics of the work environment and can execute their tasks at a greater efficiency rate compared to a new person just entering the industry. As a result, the experience appeals to SMEs and that's why they prefer experience over anything. For example, if they decided to go with an individual just entering the industry, they could potentially pay them less, but the work produced could be of a lower quality, take more time, or have more mistakes compared to if a person with lots of experience performing the same task. Thus, these are some costs that SMEs want to avoid and that is why youth may not be considered during the employment process. Due to this, the unemployment rate in Brampton has been on an upward trend, rising from 9.2% in Q4 of 2019 to 33.2% in Q4 of 2020. Not only this, but the government also expects that *“Peel's unemployment rates are expected to remain elevated in the medium term.”* The pandemic has a great responsibility for this rise but due to the cases reducing rapidly, we could expect the rates to stabilize again as Brampton was on a downward trend before the start of the pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Recommendations Concerning the Costs of Employing Youth and the Investment into Youth Employment for Small-Medium Enterprises (SME's)***

Probationary programs with subsidized wages: Such programs will be created to support youth and allow them to gain the experience they need to be successful in their work life. Additionally, having subsidized wages will support the youth financially and allow them to have some financial freedom. By gaining real work experience from these probationary programs, youth can excel in other aspects of life in the future as they are building relationships and learning constantly. This program can be implemented through requiring businesses to hire a specific number of youth members, as it will give youth the opportunity to gain real life work experience and allow businesses to grow as well. SMEs and also large corporations should be influenced to hire youth due to the lower cost for businesses and work experience for the youth, which makes this a win-win situation for both parties.

City of Brampton co-op programs (Brampton Entrepreneurship Office existing programs): By narrowing our focus and establishing partnerships with corporations or willing small and medium-sized businesses who are willing to hire youth will have many benefits. The government can work towards creating co-op programs for youth to be a part of while they are in high school or completing their education. By being a part of these programs, youth can gain real-life work experience, build strong relationships and also be prepared for the future. For instance, the City of Brampton currently has a program called *“Summer Company,”* which allows youth to get funding for their business as well as mentorship and training. Similarly, additional programs like this can be created to support the youth and allow them to gain real-life work experience. By continuing to offer programs that maximize accessibility or professional programs and close the skill gap, we are taking one major step in the right direction for the future and this will allow youth unemployment rates to drop and actually give the youth a great opportunity to excel in life.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Figure 1.0 in Appendix A

## Appendix A

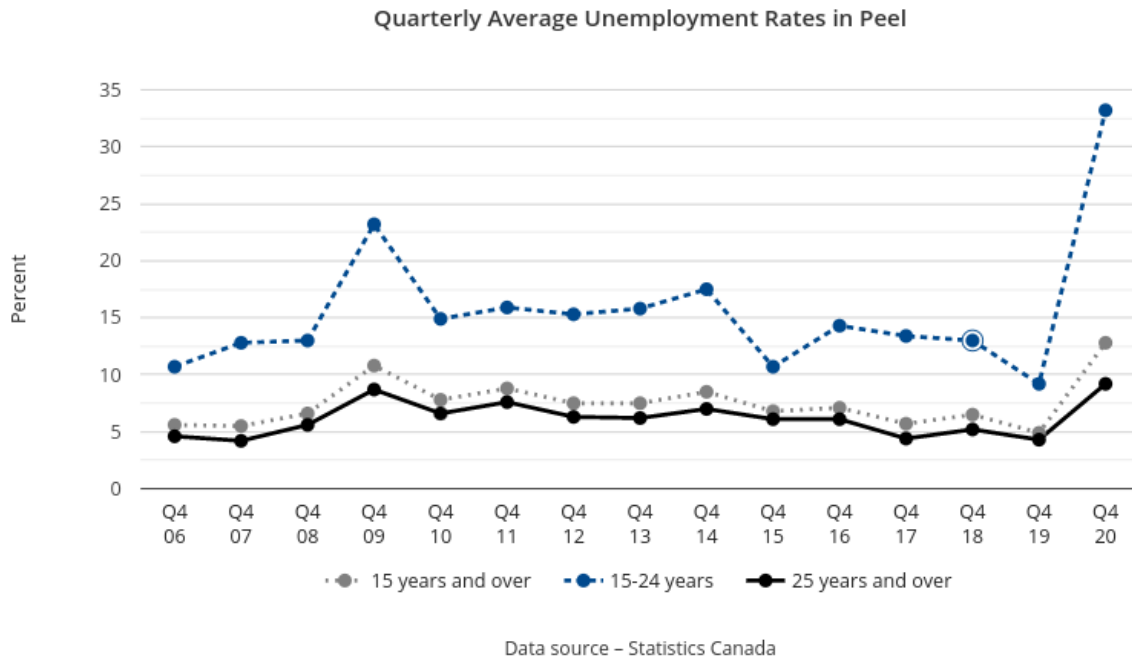


Figure 1.0: Quarterly Average Unemployment Rates in Peel, Statistics Canada

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