



HireUp Employer Guide

Supporting HireUp employers through the hiring and onboarding process

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Founded in 2001, Impakt is a Toronto-based corporate social responsibility consultancy. We work with corporations and non-profit organizations to develop social purpose programs.

We believe that business is good for social change, and social change is good for business.

In 2015, in partnership with The Home Depot Canada and Workopolis, Impakt created HireUp, Canada's first national hiring portal for youth who have experienced homelessness.

This HireUp Employer Guide was developed by Impakt to support employers through the hiring and onboarding process.

For more information about HireUp and the opportunities available for your corporation, please visit www.hireupyouth.ca or contact Lesley McMillan at lesley@hireupyouth.ca

Introduction

"I have a confession to make. My kids live in transitional housing. It's called my home. My wife and I provide them with shelter, food and a modicum of income. We encourage them to stay in school (they have) and to have a job (they do). We provide them with adult support and mentoring, and they get a good dose of life skills. They are encouraged to take chances, but also are forgiven for mistakes because they will learn from them. Eventually, they are expected to move out and live independently." (Gaetz, 2012:2)

Youth with lived experience of homelessness are not only missing a permanent address, they are also lacking parents to help them navigate the various systems they encounter. Youth-serving organizations (YSOs) try to fill this gap. Many of these youth need an opportunity to gain meaningful work that will support them to live independently.

HireUp has been designed as a way to connect youth who have experienced homelessness to meaningful work with employers who are committed to participating in their communities and youth-serving organizations who can support youth to be successful employees.

Why commit to hiring youth who have experienced homelessness?

Many corporations are looking for effective ways to contribute to their communities. For this reason, Corporate Social Responsibility has become an increasingly core function of business. Most companies are seeking effective ways to produce positive social change whilst still meeting their business objectives.

This is why Impakt began extensive research, in conjunction with The Home Depot Canada Foundation, into finding ways that corporations can help end youth homelessness in ways that also support their business objectives. Informed by this research, employment was found to be amongst the most effective ways that corporations can drive positive change in the communities they operate. Through targeted employment programs, corporations can create opportunities for those who are often excluded from the employment market, and positively affect their lives and the health of the overall community.

Currently, the highest unemployment rate in Canada is among youth. In fact, the unemployment rate for youth is often double that of the general population. Among the most vulnerable of these youth are homeless youth. These youth have a very important role to play in the labour market and offer talent that corporations benefit from. Youth who have experienced homelessness can offer diverse skills and experience, as well as an unmatched resilience that can make them valuable and loyal members of your team.

What is HireUp?

Impakt developed HireUp to provide an easy way for employers to hire youth who have experienced homelessness and are now ready for employment. HireUp connects employers with youth-serving organizations across Canada that offer effective employment programs and offer support for youth after they've been hired.

Going beyond building these connections, HireUp's objectives also include:

1. Increasing awareness about the issue of youth homelessness in Canada.
2. Providing a convenient and exclusive way for the private sector to benefit from employing youth with lived experience of homelessness.
3. Collecting data to increase understanding about the issue, help inform policies, practices and programs related to hiring youth, and improve outcomes – for businesses, YSOs, government, and the youth themselves.

Purpose of the guide

Companies who have not previously hired youth who have experienced homelessness may have concerns about how they will integrate into their positions. The youth who participate in the HireUp program enter the workforce with many external supports that the average new employee does not have. Social service professionals support youth through the transition to employment and are eager to work with employers to ensure success and deal with any challenges that may arise.

One of the benefits to being a HireUp employer is that much of the work required of a social hiring program has already been done for you. HireUp has identified youth-serving organizations throughout the country that offer outstanding support services to every employee hired through the site. Initially, getting to know your local youth-serving organizations is an important step in the process. This however, is an investment that will save you time and money in the future. When a youth-serving organization understands your business and the type of employees you are looking for, they will do all the pre-screening for you, sending only the most qualified candidates. They then support the employee through their onboarding to ensure a successful transition, saving your location in costs of turnover and time re-training new staff in the long run.

The purpose of this guide is to leverage promising practices across Canada and start scaling small successes into a fully operational, large-scale employment program for youth who have experienced homelessness. HireUp will enable your company to hire youth using a consistent, low-risk, and cost-effective approach. It will help your company successfully meet your diversity and inclusionary benchmarks, and allow you to help prevent youth homelessness in the communities where you operate.

Is your company ready to hire a youth who has experienced homelessness?

Hiring a youth who has experienced homelessness is not unlike hiring any entry-level associate. In general, there is often extra time and care required in training young hires. That said, the following checklist may act as a guideline to assess your company's readiness:

Team

- Does your company have a strong team dynamic?
- Does your company have an accepting and diverse team?
 - Youth who have experienced homelessness have often encountered a great deal of marginalization and discrimination. Your company's culture should be accepting of the young person and allow them the opportunity to thrive in their work.
- Does your company maintain a supportive and welcoming community?
 - Many young people who have experienced homelessness do not want to be identified to their co-workers as homeless. Your company's management must therefore be willing to be mindful of the youth's privacy and ensure they are given an opportunity to be successful in their work environment.

Direct Supervision

- Is there a supervisor who can act as a mentor to the young person joining your team?
 - This should be someone who can be support to the youth throughout the onboarding process. Ideally, this is also someone who the new associate can feel comfortable approaching if any difficulties or questions arise.
- Is your management staff open-minded and able to understand that these youth may have more barriers than many of their other employees?
 - For example, a HireUp youth may not have strong family support; they may also be juggling school and employment while taking on other responsibilities that are typically beyond what most youth their age deal with.

Training

- Do you have the capacity to offer detailed and attentive training to new associates?
- Could you designate an employee coach to support onboarding and ensure the new hire understands all the key points of training delivered?
- Does your training clearly articulate the expectations of employees?
- Does training allow newly hired employees the opportunity to ask questions?
- Are you willing to spend extra time to ensure that new employees understand what is required of them?

If you answered yes to the majority of these questions, your company has the ability to become be a great HireUp employer!

The following guide outlines some of the recommended steps to hiring a youth through HireUp.



Finding a candidate on HireUp

HireUp is a website – powered by our partners at Workopolis – that connects employers with youth-serving organizations across Canada that deliver exceptional employment and support programs for youth who have experienced homelessness. Through these youth-serving organizations your company will be able to connect with talented youth.

After your company has signed up with HireUp, you can begin posting employment opportunities onto the HireUp job board. Your posting should be clear and articulate the types of candidates and skills needed to be successful in the position. Clearly articulate the details about the position, provide some details about your company, and outline the responsibilities and requirements of successful candidates.

Participating youth-serving organizations in your community will receive a notification that you have posted a position and they will connect with qualified youth to apply.

Get to know your local youth-serving organization

Once you have posted a position onto HireUp, it is very beneficial to build a relationship with the youth-serving organization(s) who are submitting candidates. You can contact the organization and set up a meeting or phone conversation with their employment program manager. This meeting will give you the opportunity to ask questions to the YSO, and set out your expectations.

Questions you could ask your local youth-serving organization:

- What is the age range of the youth you serve?
- Do you have relationships with other employers? How does the process generally work?
- How do you assess the job-readiness of youth?
- How do you support youth and their employers at the outset of the placement? How are youth supported during employment?
- Are there procedures in place to anticipate or respond to difficulties a youth may have during employment?
- What other services do you offer?
- What advice do you have for us as we begin hiring youth who have experienced homelessness?

Define your expectations

You should be prepared to clearly communicate your expectations and other important details that are needed for the youth-serving organization to put forth the best candidates. The more they understand your needs, the better they can accommodate you and the youth they serve. You can do this with clear job postings, but also through having a detailed conversation with the organization.

Be prepared to communicate the following:

- Types of entry-level positions you have available
- The skills and knowledge required to fill those positions
- Your hiring process
- Your training expectations
- The capacity of management/associate capacity to mentor and coach new hires
- What the diversity and culture of the team is

You might also consider inviting representatives from the organization to your location and conduct a tour with them. Go through the different departments and explain the different skills that are required for each. Invite them to talk to current employees and leaders so that they get a feel for your company's culture. You get in what you give out at this stage – investing time in helping the youth-serving organization understand your business ensures they identify the right candidates for you in the future.

Tips & Advice

Provide as much information about your organization and the job positions you have available. Make sure you include all the details needed for community organization to provide you with great candidates. Include information such as, criminal record check requirements; organizational culture; traits needed in successful candidates; location where the employee will be working; and any other relevant information.



Begin the hiring process

Once you build a relationship with a specific youth-serving organization through HireUp, you are ready to start the hiring process. Keep an open line of communication with the youth-serving organization throughout this process.

Provide the youth-serving organization with information

Remember, it is vital that the relationship with the youth-serving organization is open and transparent, and that you are able to make your hiring needs clear and explicit.

You will want to provide the youth-serving organization and the youth with the following information:

- List of required skills and competencies
- Details of training that will be provided
- Expectations around availability and scheduling
- What the new hire should do if he/she has questions or concerns during their first few weeks on the job
- Details about company policies and procedures

Armed with this information, the youth-serving organization can assist the youth through the hiring process. This should be an ongoing feedback process that allows youth-serving organization to serve your needs best.

The HireUp process in brief

- 1 An employer registers on the HireUp website and pays the annual or monthly membership.
- 2 The employer posts jobs to the HireUp website based on hiring needs.
- 3 The employer begins to receive job applications. Employers work collaboratively with YSOs to find candidates who are most suitable for a particular job's requirements, skills and experience.
- 4 Once the employer has found a great candidate, the YSO supports the candidate through the hiring and onboarding process.
- 5 With the case manager's ongoing support and guidance, the youth's chances of success in meeting an employer's expectations greatly increase.

Providing accommodations

Youth who have experienced homelessness may not always be able to follow all steps in your hiring processes. For instance, they may not have access to computers and the Internet on a regular basis to communicate online. They may not have a dedicated phone number that they can be reached on. For this reason, it is beneficial to work out accommodations.

Some common accommodations to consider could include:

- Using an employment counsellor or youth worker as the primary contact throughout the hiring process
- Being flexible with employment experience and previous work experience requirements
- Being flexible with the reference requirements
- Providing the youth with a mentor, who can help them through the onboarding and employment process

The Importance of Mentorship

Having a workplace mentor is a critical component of youth succeeding in their employment. There are a number of studies that show that having a workplace mentor increases the potential success of a new hire (both with retention rates but also promotion rates for mentees and mentors).

The mentor acts as a role model and supports the mentee by sharing knowledge, resources and advice to help them improve their skills. Mentoring can happen in different ways. For example, it can be as simple as an employee showing another how to complete a particular task. Or, it can be more involved where employees commit to long-term mentoring relationships.

Mentoring is an effective way to help employees improve their essential skills, and it doesn't require a lot of resources to be successful. It can also reinforce strong relationships among employees, support a learning culture in the workplace, and increase productivity.

(As defined by Employment and Social Development Canada)



Onboarding support from the youth-serving organization

Once you have found a great candidate working collaboratively with HireUp and the youth-serving organization, you will want to inform your contact at the organization, as this will allow them the opportunity to support the candidate through the onboarding process.

It is possible that youth with lived experience of homelessness may encounter challenges to successful onboarding. These could include uniform costs prior to their first pay cheque and/or transportation costs prior to their first pay cheque.

The youth-serving organization may be able to help the candidate with:

- Start-up transportation costs
- Required clothing/footwear allowances
- Complementary training
- Other helpful supports, which will make their transition into employment seamless (e.g. housing and rental support)

The youth-serving organization may also be able to help with other aspects of the onboarding and training process as needed. Consistent communication will help you understand the support that can be offered by the organization, which will complement your onboarding process.

Accommodations to consider

As with the hiring process, some accommodations may be required during the onboarding and training phase. Some common accommodations to consider could include:

- Pairing the youth up with a buddy or mentor who works with them during their first few shifts to help build confidence
- Providing regular updates to the youth-serving organization (with the youth's consent) on their progress so they can support the transition
- Being flexible about the youth's schedule to allow time for them to adjust to transportation and the lifestyle change
- Giving frequent feedback on the youth's performance during the first few months to ensure expectations are met and to celebrate their success

Respecting privacy

Consider your new hire's privacy during the onboarding phase and do not share his or her situation with anyone who does not need to know (i.e. anyone who will not be interacting directly with the youth-serving organization). Each youth is different. While some may be comfortable sharing their story with colleagues, others will prefer not to. Let them make that choice!

Remember, the youth-serving organization is there to support you, and they are motivated to do so. They have a strong interest in ensuring the success of your new hire, as it benefits everyone when the youth is successful. Your company gets a great new employee, the youth gets a job and development opportunities, and the organization gets your trust that they can provide you with good quality candidates who will succeed in the future!

Tips & Advice

Loni Attrell, Home Depot Canada Recruiter: "Above all else, don't treat them any differently. Give them the respect that they need, as you would with any other candidate, but understand the barriers that they face."

A strong relationship flourishes when there is total transparency between the managers and the youth-serving organization. The focus always has to be on the youth, but support must also be available to the supervisors/managers.



Supporting the youth

In general, the youth should be treated no differently than other young associates throughout their employment. All youth who are new to the workforce may require a little more guidance than a workforce-experienced hire. Therefore, it would be advantageous to follow-up with the youth on a regular basis and/or to assign a mentor employee that can help guide the youth through their employment. Ideally, this person should be approachable and patient, and comfortable acting as a resource for the youth in their employment.

Tips & Advice

Keeping Work: Supporting homeless people to start, stay in, and thrive at work; a guide for employers by Broadway Homelessness and Support

- “Have regular 1-1s with [your] employees and make [yourself] as available as possible to [your] teams”
- “Support youth to set professional goals and work towards them”
- “Where it is known that an employee has a background of homelessness, managers [can] discuss with them whether they will disclose their background to colleagues and/or clients, and support them with this decision”

Raising the Roof: YouthWorks Employment Toolkit for Employers

- “Alert the agency right away if a problem arises. They can often help address the matter/provide extra support to you and the youth before it is too late”
- “Stay in touch with the agency on a regular basis to ensure that the partnership is progressing smoothly”

Maintaining an open line of communication

It is important to be considerate of the possibility that youth who have experienced homelessness could have more challenges outside the workplace than other young employees. Youth who have experienced homelessness may not have a strong family support; they may also be juggling school and employment while taking on other responsibilities that are typically beyond what most youth their age deal with. For this reason, there could be instances where extra sensitivity is required from management and coworkers. It is important to be clear in your expectations and keep an open line of communication with the youth. If you feel that you need more support at any time you can in the youth-serving organization. If you feel that the youth needs help with circumstances outside the workplace, or even with certain skills in the workplace, do not hesitate to let the youth-serving organization know.

Commonly Asked Questions

- Q: Readiness: how do I ensure that this youth is adequately prepared to enter the workforce?
A: Be as clear as you can about what a successful candidate looks like when communicating with the youth-serving organization. It is in everyone's best interest to place a youth with the greatest chance of being successful. These youth applying through HireUp will have completed pre-employment training from their YSO. As well, most of these youth will have completed the Workplace Essentials and Canadian Workplace Essentials training programs.
- Q: Ability to learn quickly: will this youth need extra/closer supervision and training to pick up new skills?
A: If your jobsite doesn't have the capacity to provide extra support to this employee, make that clear to the youth-serving organization. Each youth is different and has different needs. Be as transparent with the youth-serving organization as possible so they can help identify the most suitable candidate.
- Q: Social and life skills: will the transition into working life pose any difficulties?
A: Joining a new workforce, or joining the workforce for the first time always poses a set of challenges. This is the case for people of all walks of life. Let the new associate lead the way and if they reach out for support, be attentive and sensitive.
- Q: Mental stability: is there the possibility of this youth acting out in any way? If so, how do I react?
A: The youth-serving organization representing this young person should be upfront about any specific difficulties they may have. Even so, if an issue should arise, loop in the organization as early as possible.
- Q: Behaviour and professionalism: when interacting with management, colleagues and customers: will this youth maintain expectations of professionalism?
A: Always make your expectations as clear as possible to the youth. If a problem should arise, be sure to reach out to the youth-serving organization, but to also explain to the young person why certain behaviour is inappropriate.
- Q: Attendance: if the new associate isn't showing up on time, or at all, how should I address this?
A: This issue can arise with any new associate, so try not to treat this youth differently. Be as sensitive as you can while still expressing your expectations—and the possible consequences of this—as clearly as possible. If the problem persists, connect with the youth-serving organization.
- Q: Performance: what if the new associate isn't meeting expectations of performance after a given period?
A: Have regular check-ins with the new employee to let them know how they're doing, and if they aren't meeting expectations, how they can improve. You may wish to loop the youth-serving organization in on these touch-ins if appropriate and if that's something that would make the youth feel more comfortable. If after multiple check-ins, the youth is still not meeting expectations, follow regular policies and procedures for employees not meeting expectations.
- Q: Privacy: how can I best make sure that the privacy of this youth is respected?
A: As with any employee, take their lead. If there are difficulties or issues they wish to share with you, make sure that you always respect their confidentiality.

Other Resources

Broadway: Street to Home. "Keeping Work. Supporting homeless people to start, stay in, and thrive at work. A guide for employers" 2013: <http://www.bitc.org.uk/our-resources/report/keeping-work-supporting-homeless-people-start-stay-and-thrive-work-guide>

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"Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions"
"It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness"
"Activation of Youthworks Employment Toolkit"
<http://www.raisingtheroof.org/Get-Informed.aspx>

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