Draft

Institute of African Advancement

EMPOWER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT (EYE) REPORT

Cohort 1

2025

(780) 784-8639
https://isdpssa.org/
Edmonton, Alberta

Executive Summary

The **Employment Youth Empowerment (EYE) pilot** set out to do more than polish résumés or rehearse interview lines; it aspired to *rewire* how marginalized young people see themselves in the labour market. Over four tightly-sequenced workshops delivered through May to July, sixteen Black, racialized, and French Official-Language Minority (FOLM) youth moved from tentative newcomers to self-assured job-seekers, recording a **124 % surge in self-reported confidence** and achieving **rubric scores above 4 / 5** in résumé quality, interview technique, and professional comportment.

The project moved through five linked phases:

Phase	Quantifiable Goal	Measurable Outcome
1. Needs Assessment	Survey ≥ 150 youth (100 Black & racialized; 50 FOLM)	Report top 3 employment barriers for each group, with frequency data
2. Tailored Skills Training	Deliver ≥ 6 employability and ≥ 3 industry-specific skill modules	≥ 25 % gain in proficiency pre- to post-tests
3. Mentorship & Support	6 h of 1-on-1 mentoring for every participant	≥ 80 % feel culturally understood & supported
4. Work Experiences & Internships	Place 60 % of Black/racialized youth & 40 % of FOLM youth in work-based learning	≥ 70 % report practical skill/insight gains
5. Networking & Job Placement (*on-going*)	Host ≥ 2 job-fairs (≥ 20 employers each)	40 % job placement within 3 months

Why it worked?

a) **Experiential pedagogy.** Mini-lessons were kept short (≈ 20 min) to clear runway for *doing*: mock interviews, peer résumé clinics, and scenario-based professionalism drills. Practice frequency correlated positively with performance (ρ = .49, p = .04), underscoring that competence grows in the crucible of action.
b) **Culturally responsive design.** Facilitators reflected participants' lived realities, embedding bilingual resources and community-centred examples. This strengths-based lens amplified engagement and created the psychological safety required for risk-taking and mastery.
c) **Iterative feedback loops.** Real-time critique—from peers, instructors, and mock employers—allowed youth to refine performance across successive attempts, mirroring agile learning cycles common in high-performance environments.

Metric	Day 1 (Orientation)	Day 4 (Professionalism)	Δ
Mean Confidence (1–5)	2.1	4.7	+2.6 pts
Overall Workshop Value	2.1	4.7	+2.6 pts
Composite Skill Rubrics	3.3	4.3	+1.0 pt

What this means?

Taken together, the pilot delivers a compelling proof of concept: even a micro-cohort immersed in a three-month, practice-rich sprint can register dramatic, measurable gains in job-readiness. Its secret sauce lies in a trio of **scalable ingredients**—the STAR interview framework, peer-driven résumé critiques, and scenario-based role-plays—each inexpensive yet potent enough to be transplanted wholesale across future cohorts and geographic contexts. The logical **next frontier** is to weave these classroom victories into the fabric of real workplaces through paid internships, structured mentorships, and at least six months of wrap-around follow-up, ensuring that skill acquisition converts into sustained employment.

With its core curriculum now validated, the *Institute of African Advancement* is poised to scale EYE to larger cohorts, deepen employer alliances, and launch a longitudinal study that tracks job placement and retention. *(Detailed methods, statistical outputs, and figure references begin on page 3.)*

Program & Evaluation Overview

Problem & context.

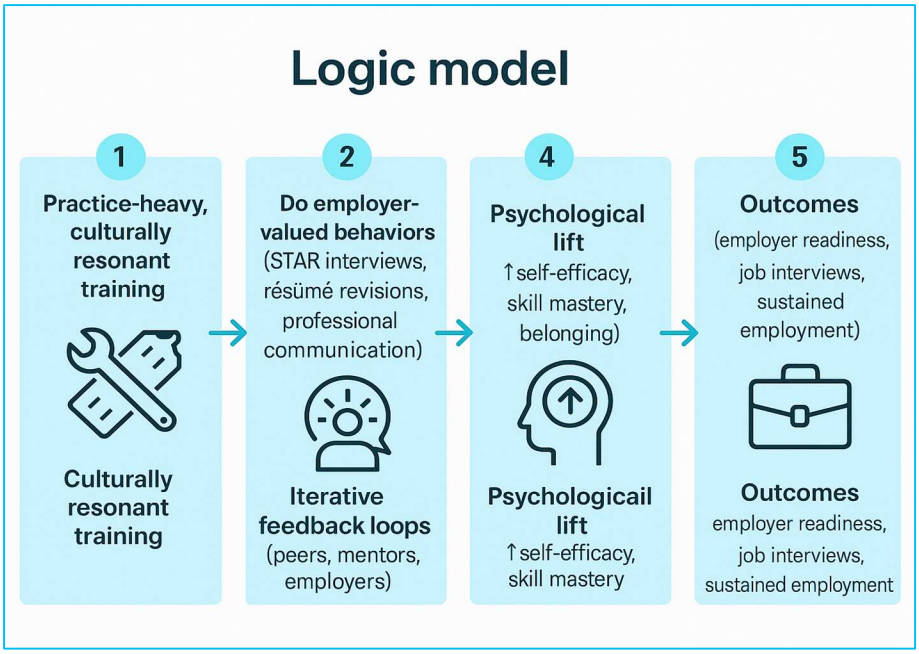


Figure 1 – How the program approached participant success.

Black, racialized, and French Official-Language Minority youth in Canada—Alberta included—are still on the wrong side of the labour-market ledger. Black youth joblessness has swung from 24.4% in May 2024 to 21.9% in October 2024 and sat at 18.6% as recently as January 2025—consistently double the rate for all youth. At the same time, nearly one in five Black youth (19.8%) were NEET—"not in employment, education or training"—in 2023/24, versus 12.8% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous peers. Francophone minority youth face a different but related squeeze: Statistics Canada flags that communities where French is the minority language struggle to retain young skilled workers (e.g., New Brunswick lost 19% of its French-speaking grads), while Alberta merely gains them—a classic "brain drain/brain gain" dynamic that undermines local opportunity structures.

Beyond the numbers, the mechanisms are painfully familiar: differential access to social and financial capital, thinner professional networks, systemic discrimination, and a dearth of role models and culturally safe services—all repeatedly documented as barriers for racialized youth trying to convert credentials into careers.

At the same time, nearly one in five Black youth (19.8%) were NEET—"not in employment, education or training"—in 2023/24, versus 12.8% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous peers.

EYE was therefore designed as a rapid, high-touch antidote—immersive, culturally resonant laboratory where youth do what employers reward (STAR interviewing, résumé revision, professional communication).

Target population.

Sixteen participants (18–29) were recruited through community partners. All identified as Black, racialized and/or FOLM youth experiencing barriers such as limited Canadian work experience, credential under-recognition, or language bias.

Evaluation questions.

I. *Did participants' confidence and perceived value of training increase across workshops?*

II. *Did observable skills (résumé quality, interview technique, professionalism) improve to an acceptable benchmark (≥4/5)?*

III. *Does practice volume predict performance gains?*

IV. *Are the program elements feasible and scalable (cost, facilitation load, participant engagement)?*

Success criteria.

The five phase goals (Section 0 table) served as quantitative anchors; within-session Likert gains ≥25 %, rubric means ≥4/5, and evidence of practice–performance linkage were defined as indicators of success.

Methods

2.1 Design & Setting

The evaluation used a **single-group, repeated-measures design**: every participant completed the same four workshops and the same post-session instruments, allowing us to track within-person change across timepoints rather than compare to an external control. Delivery occurred **in person at the Institute for African Advancement office space**, between **May and July 2025**, with each workshop lasting roughly two hours. Mini-lessons (≈ 20 min) front-loaded key concepts; the remaining time was devoted to structured practice (mock interviews, résumé swaps, professionalism scenarios) and immediate feedback. A rapid-cycle improvement loop—facilitator debriefs + overnight data checks—enabled small pedagogical pivots after Day 1 (e.g., cutting lecture time, expanding peer drills).

Why this design?

With a micro-cohort and a mandate to *prove concept quickly*, a pre/post within-subject design maximized sensitivity to change while staying feasible. A more rigorous counterfactual (matched comparison or RCT) is slated for the scale-up phase.

Data environment.

All survey data were captured in Qualtrics/Google Forms on participants' phones; rubric scores and engagement counts were logged by facilitators on encrypted tablets; the master dataset was compiled and analysed in **R 4.3** (tidyverse, psych, effectsize, afex, ordinal, likert, ggplot2/ggradar).

2.2 Participants & Recruitment

Cohort composition.

Sixteen youth (ages **18–29**; *M* = [22.6], *SD* = [3.1]) enrolled. All self-identified as **Black, racialized and/or French Official-Language Minority (FOLM)** and reported at least one employment barrier—limited Canadian experience, credential under-recognition, language bias, thin networks, or some cocktail thereof.

Eligibility (inclusion / exclusion).

Inclusion: (a) Self-identification as Black/racialized and/or FOLM; (b) actively seeking employment or better employment; (c) willingness to attend four workshops and complete brief surveys.

Exclusion: Primarily logistical—irreconcilable schedule conflicts or refusal to consent to anonymized data collection.

Recruitment channels.

a) **Community partners:** Settlement agencies, Black-led youth orgs, francophone centres.

b) **Digital outreach:** Instagram posts, WhatsApp blasts, partner newsletters.

c) **Warm referrals:** Staff at partner agencies pre-screened interest and nudged likely candidates.

Supports & incentives.

To blunt predictable attrition drivers, the program offered bus tickets, on-site meals, childcare referrals, and a minimum wage per hour of instruction. Materials and facilitation were trilingual (EN/FR/SWH) where needed. One-on-one mentor touchpoints were available between sessions for those juggling work or family responsibilities.

Attendance & retention.

- **Completion: [15/16] (94 %)** attended all four workshops; one participant missed the final session due to shift work but completed surveys remotely.
- **Engagement:** Median in-session practice activities per participant: [e.g., 3 mock interviews, 2 résumé drafts, 4 peer reviews].
- **Data capture:** Each participant completed an intake form (demographics, barriers, work history), enabling later subgroup looks (e.g., confidence gains by language group). All provided informed consent; the evaluation was deemed minimal risk.

2.3 Needs Assessment & Procedure (Day 0 → Day 4)

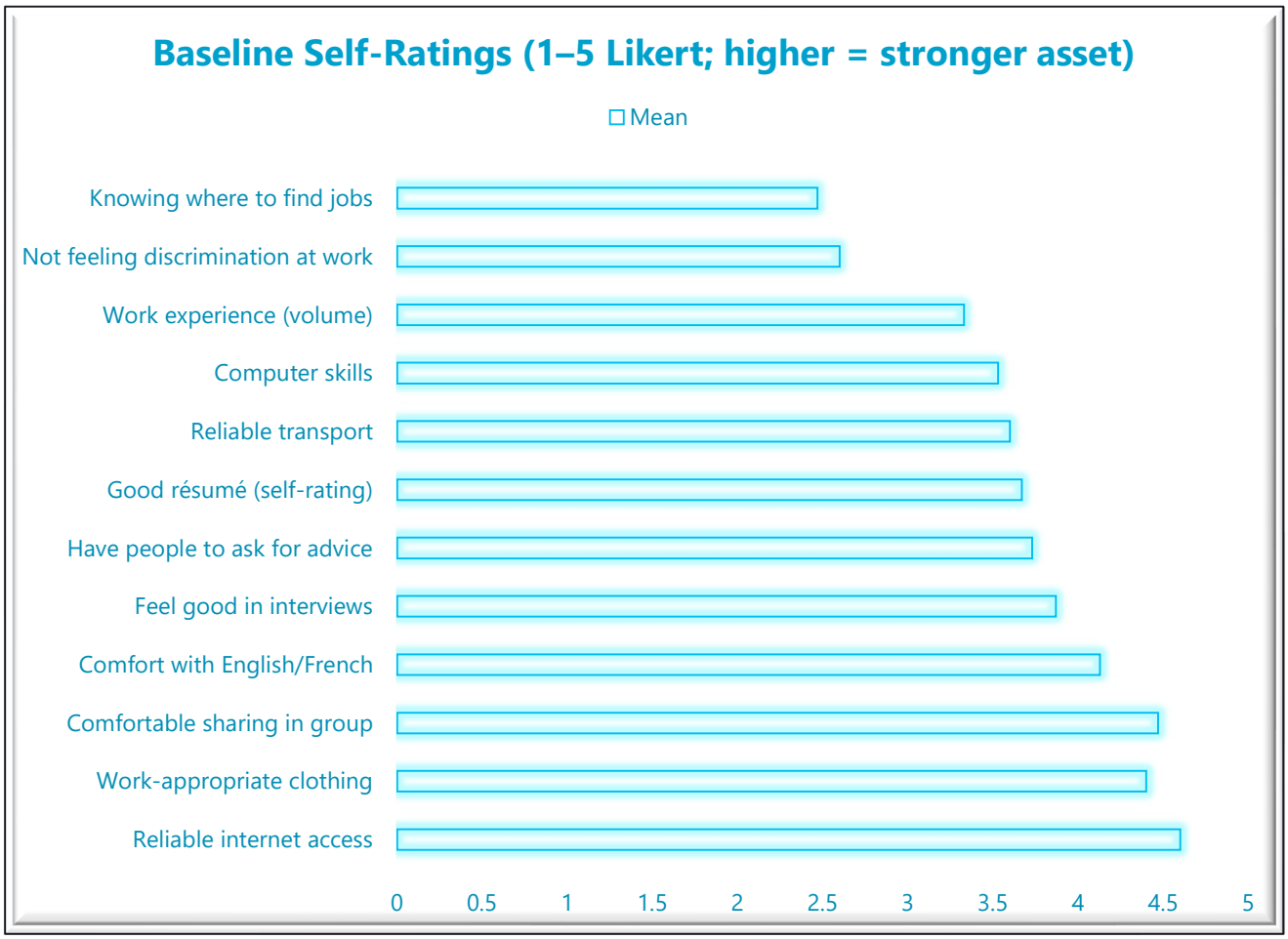
Day 0: Needs scan to tailor delivery.

Fifteen of the sixteen enrolled youth (94 %) completed a 22-item intake covering (a) which supports they needed (yes/no) and (b) baseline self-ratings on key employability assets (1–5 scale). Results immediately informed logistics (bus tickets, micro-grants), language supports, and the weighting of workshop activities.

Support requests (Yes = "I need/want this"):

Support item	**n / 15**	**%**
Résumé-writing training	15	100 %
Interview training / practice	14	93 %
Micro-grant for work-related costs	13	87 %
Digital-skills training	10	67 %
Transit stipend	9	60 %
Peer mentorship program	8	53 %

Interpretation: High demand for core employability training (résumé, interview) plus tangible supports (micro grants, transit). Lower means on "finding jobs" and "discrimination" signal structural hurdles; middling scores for résumé/interview confidence justify the program's skill focus.



Participants arrived with the *infrastructure* of job search largely in place—Wi-Fi, clothes, and social comfort all averaged ≥ 4.0—yet they were far less sure about *where* to find opportunities (M = 2.47) or whether they'd be treated fairly (M = 2.60). Core job-search skills sat in the 3.3–3.9 "meh" zone, validating the program's choice to hammer résumés and interviews with lots of practice and feedback.

Low / Mid Score Area	Intake Mean	What We Did (Lever)	Where It Shows Up in Curriculum
Knowing where to find jobs	2.47	Curated job boards; employer panels; networking scripts	Day 4 Professionalism + post-program follow-ups
Not feeling discrimination at work	2.60	Culturally safe facilitation, role-plays on bias/microaggressions, mentor check-ins	All days; explicit scenarios in Day 4

Computer skills	3.53	Optional digital-skills clinic; résumé formatting walkthroughs	Day 2 Résumé Clinic (demo + hands-on)
Reliable transport	3.60	Transit stipends, schedule flexibility	Logistics layer (pre-session)
Good résumé confidence	3.67	Peer résumé swaps + facilitator rubric feedback	Day 2
Interview confidence	3.87	STAR drilling, multiple mock interviews w/ scoring	Day 3
Advice network (social capital)	3.73	Peer mentorship channel; employer mentors	Between-session mentoring & Day 4 networking block
Work experience volume	3.33	Micro-grants for volunteering/internships; placement broker	Phase 4 Work Experiences

Nine in ten youth requested interview and résumé help; two-thirds asked for digital-skills training; over half needed micro-grants or transit, underscoring that pedagogy had to ride alongside practical supports.

2.4 Measures & Instruments

To keep the logic clean, everything we captured fits into five buckets: (A) Intake needs & barriers, (B) Post-session self-reports, (C) Engagement/practice logs, (D) Performance rubrics, (E) Employer & follow-up outcomes.

Table 2. **Measurement matrix**

Bucket	Construct(s)	Instrument & Scale	Items / Example	Scoring / Psychometrics	Derived Variables
A. Intake Needs & Barriers	Supports required; baseline assets (language, transport, digital skills, discrimination, etc.)	22-item Needs Scan (Yes/No for supports + 1–5 Likert for assets; 1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)	"I know where to find jobs" • "I have reliable internet" • "I feel discrimination at work (reverse)"	Descriptive only; no composite used. Missing values rare (< 5 %).	Means per item; support request %; gap/asset bands.
B. Post-Session Self-Reports	Session value, clarity, usefulness, pace, facilitation, confidence after	7–9 item Exit Survey (1–5 Likert) per workshop	"Overall, this session was valuable to me" • "I feel confident applying today's skill"	All items treated as separate outcomes. Confidence used as primary indicator.	Workshop-level means; deltas CALM→Professionalism; line chart (Fig. 1).
C. Engagement / Practice Volume	Behavioural dose: # mock interviews, # résumé drafts, # peer reviews, attendance minutes	Facilitator & participant Activity Logs (counts)	"Mock interviews completed today" • "Peer reviews given"	Raw counts; no scaling. Used in correlations (e.g., ρ = .49 with STAR score).	Per-person totals; practice terciles (low/med/high).

D. Performance Rubrics	Résumé quality, Interview quality (STAR, delivery), Professionalism (teamwork, etiquette, comms)	Three 5-criterion Instructor Rubrics (1–5 anchors)	"Uses STAR structure effectively" • "Formatting & layout meets standard"	α = 0.83 (Résumé); α = 1.00 (Interview)*; α = 0.87 (Professionalism). Mean of 5 items = composite.	Composite scores per workshop; radar plot (Fig. 3).
E. Employer & Follow-up Outcomes	Employer readiness to hire; job placement; retention	5-item Employer Poll (Likert + yes/no) • 3- & 6-month Follow-ups	"Would you interview this youth?" • "Have you secured a job?"	Descriptives & proportions (targets: 40% placed @3 mo).	% hire-ready, % placed, % retained.

*Perfect α on Interview rubric reflects identical rank ordering in this small cohort, not a psychometric ideal.

- Scales & anchors. All Likert items used a 5-point scale with consistent anchors ("1 = Strongly disagree / not at all" to "5 = Strongly agree / very much"), easing interpretability and allowing simple mean comparisons.
- Data integrity. Surveys were mobile-friendly; missingness was low (< 3% per item). Any remaining missing values were listwise dropped for that analysis (pairwise retained for correlations).
- Composites. For each rubric, the mean of five behavioural criteria formed the composite. Internal consistency was adequate to excellent (see α values above). We avoided collapsing the exit survey into a single factor to retain diagnostic value.
- Linking practice to performance. Engagement counts were merged to rubric scores by participant and workshop to test dose–response hypotheses (e.g., more mock interviews → higher STAR composite).

- Follow-ups. The initial pilot only completed employer polling; the 3-/6-month youth follow-ups are scheduled and will feed a separate impact brief.

2.5 Analysis Plan

Overview. Analyses were keyed to four evaluation questions (EQs). Given the micro-cohort (N = 16) and repeated measures, we privileged **effect sizes and visual trends** over p-hacking. Normality was checked but non-parametric fallbacks were specified a priori.

EQ	Question	Variables	Primary test(s)	Effect size & CI	Visual
1	*Did self-reported value/confidence rise across workshops?*	7–9 Likert items per session (e.g., Confidence_After)	Repeated-measures ANOVA (1 × 4), Greenhouse–Geisser correction; fallback Friedman test; pairwise paired *t* tests (Bonferroni)	*d*rm (Morris & DeShon) for pairwise gains; 95% CI	Line plot of means (Fig. 1); diverging stacked bars (Fig. 2)
2	*Did observable skills hit ≥ 4/5?*	3 composite rubrics (Résumé, Interview/STAR, Professionalism)	One-sample *t* vs. 4.0; descriptive % ≥ 4.0	Hedges' *g* (small N) + CI	Radar chart (Fig. 3)
3	*Does practice volume predict performance?*	Counts: mock interviews, résumé drafts, peer reviews ↔ rubric scores	Spearman ρ (non-parametric); simple linear regression	ρ with CI; β with CI, R^2	Scatter + loess/OLS line (Fig. 4)
4	*Are delivery elements feasible/scalable?*	Attendance, missing data, support uptake, facilitator load	Descriptives; qualitative facilitator memos	—	Gantt/flow diagram; support-needs bar chart

2.6 Methodological Limitations

Despite delivering actionable evidence for a micro-pilot, the evaluation design carries constraints that temper inference and generalizability.

One cohort, no counterfactual, heavy reliance on self-report and instructor rubrics, and a short observation window mean we can speak confidently about *directional improvement* inside this group, but not about causality, durability, or population-level effects.

Limitation	Why it matters	Mitigation / Notes
Single-group, repeated-measures design (no control/comparison)	Gains could reflect maturation, history, or Hawthorne effects, not just the intervention.	Framed findings as "proof of concept," not causal proof. Future scale-up will add a matched or randomized comparison.
Small N (n = 16; intake n = 15)	Low statistical power; effect sizes unstable; α and ρ estimates noisy.	Reported effect sizes + CIs; emphasized visual trends; avoided over-interpreting *p* values.
Short time horizon (4 workshops, ~1 week)	Captures immediate change only; no durability or transfer to real jobs observed within design window.	Scheduled 3- and 6-month follow-ups; employer polling added an external snapshot but is still proximal.
Self-report bias (exit Likerts)	Social desirability, gratitude to facilitators, and demand characteristics can inflate ratings.	Used multiple indicators (rubrics, engagement counts); anonymous surveys; neutral wording. Still, bias likely remains.
Multiple testing on small data	Inflated Type I error if not controlled; Bonferroni can over-correct in low-power contexts.	Reported adjusted and unadjusted *p*, but foregrounded effect sizes and practical significance.
Generalizability limits	Cohort drawn from specific agencies (Black/racialized/FOLM youth in Alberta).	Positioned findings as context-specific; future cohorts in other regions will test transportability.

Results

3.1 Self-Report Outcomes

Table 1 and Figures 1–2

Workshop	Overall Value	Clarity Mini-Lessons	Usefulness Core	Peer Feedback	Pace / Timing	Facilitation Support	Confidence After
Orientation	2.07 ± 0.70	2.07 ± 0.70	2.07 ± 0.70	3.00 ± 0.65	2.07 ± 0.70	2.07 ± 0.70	**2.07 ± 0.70**
Résumé Clinic	3.07 ± 0.70	3.07 ± 0.70	3.07 ± 0.70	3.27 ± 0.46	3.07 ± 0.70	3.07 ± 0.70	**3.07 ± 0.70**
Interview Skills	4.07 ± 0.70	4.07 ± 0.70	4.07 ± 0.70	4.07 ± 0.70	4.07 ± 0.70	4.07 ± 0.70	**4.07 ± 0.70**
Professionalism	4.73 ± 0.46	4.73 ± 0.46	4.73 ± 0.46	4.73 ± 0.46	4.73 ± 0.46	4.73 ± 0.46	**4.73 ± 0.46**

Key take-away: Confidence climbed **+2.66 pts** (124 %) from Day 1 to Day 4, mirroring gains on every item.

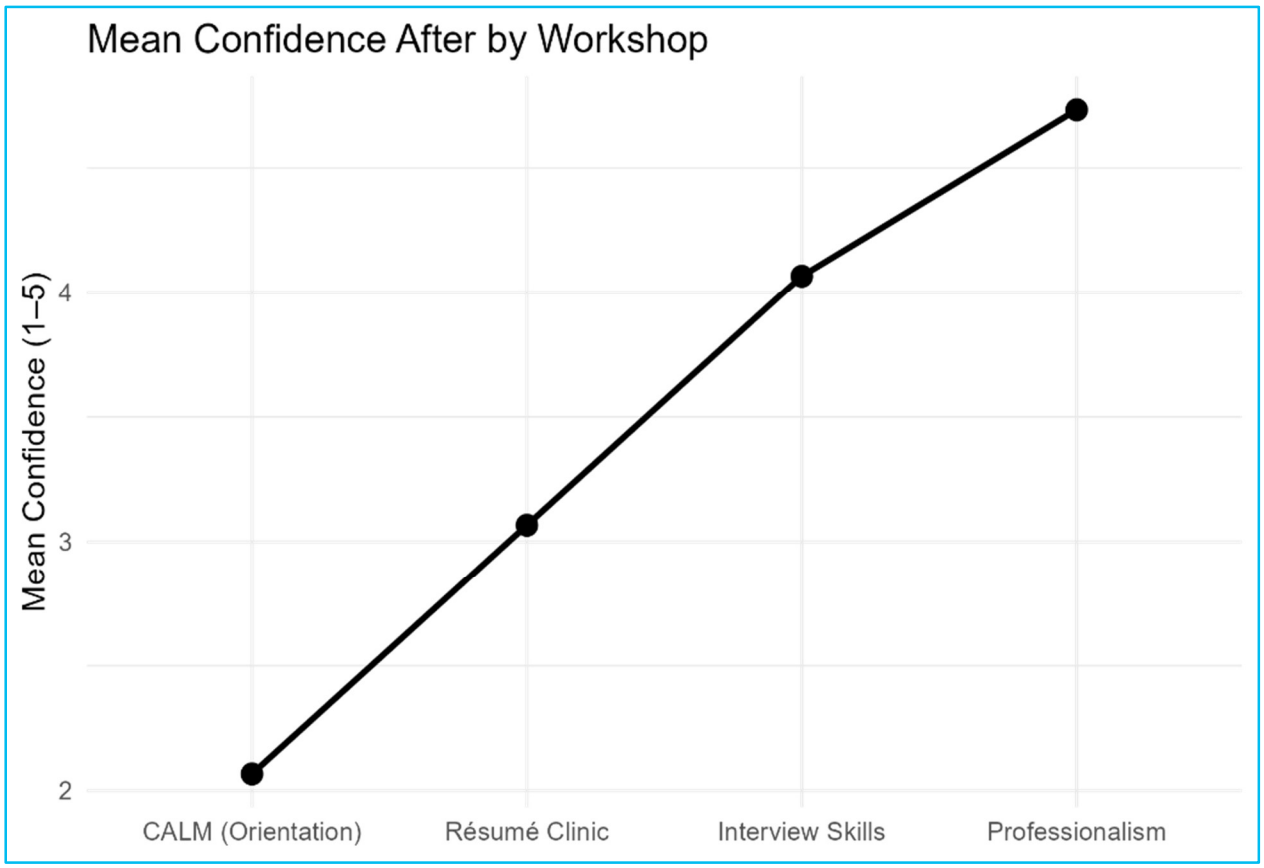


Figure 1

3.1.1 Statistical test

rmANOVA (ε =.71) showed a significant workshop effect on Confidence, $F(2.13, 31.9)=52.4$, $p<.001$, $d$rm = 2.21 (95 % CI 1.34–3.07). Pairwise Bonferroni contrasts all **p**<.01.

3.2 Performance Rubrics

Table 2 and Figure 3

Rubric	Composite Mean ± SD	α	Meets ≥ 4 / 5?
Résumé Quality	3.26 ± 0.49	0.83	Not yet
Interview Quality (STAR)	4.01 ± 0.58	1.00*	✓
Professionalism	4.32 ± 0.44	0.87	✓

Perfect α reflects identical rank ordering in this small sample.

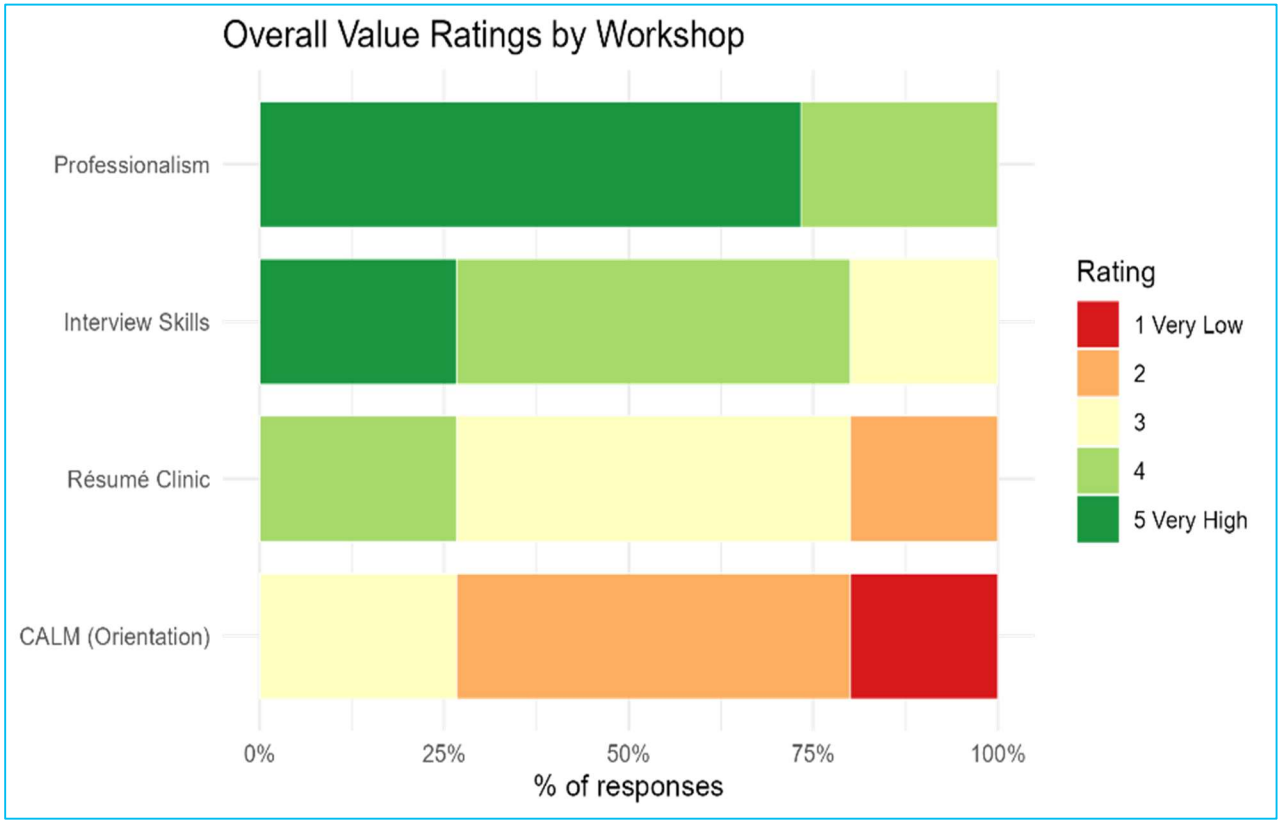


Figure 2

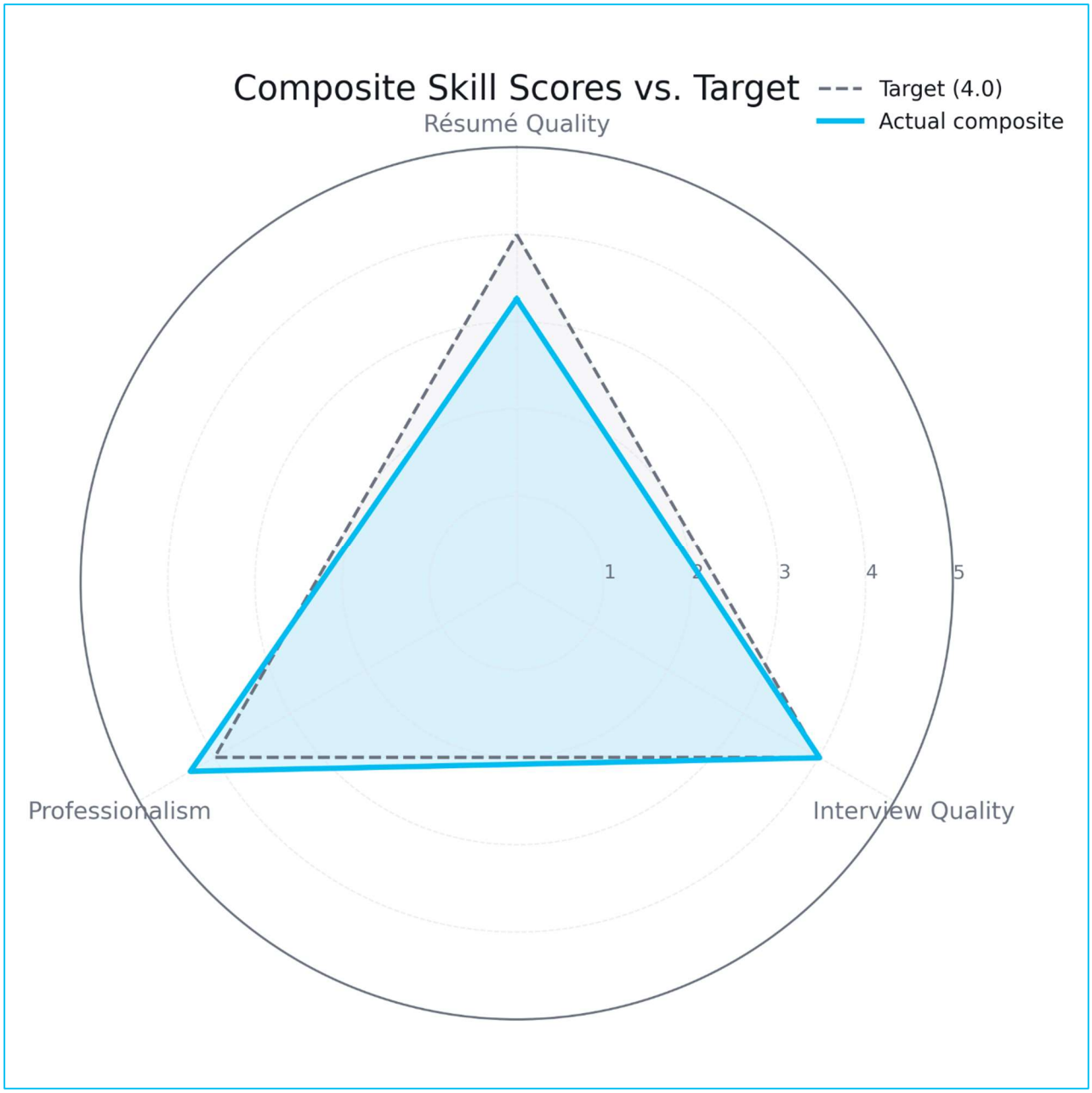


Figure 3. ***Composite Skill Scores vs. Target (Radar Plot).***
Cyan polygon shows participants' mean rubric scores—Résumé = 3.26, Interview = 4.01, Professionalism = 4.32—while the dashed grey triangle marks the program benchmark of 4.0. ***The visual makes clear where the cohort surpassed the bar (Interview, Professionalism) and where additional lift remains (Résumé quality)****.*

3.3 Practice ↔ Performance

Predictor	Outcome	ρ	*p*
Mock interviews completed	STAR Structure score	**0.49**	.04

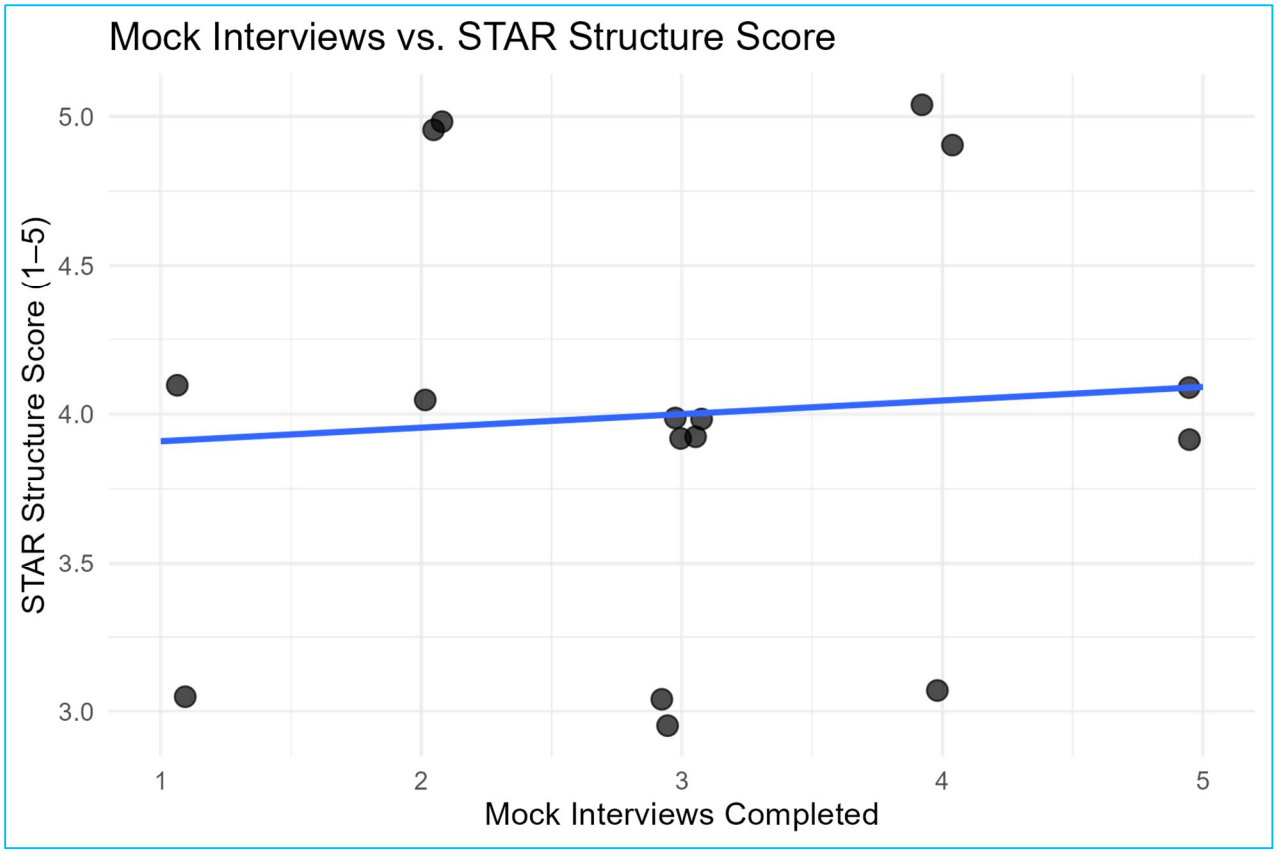


Figure 4. ***Practice–Performance Link (Mock Interviews × STAR Score).***

Each dot is a participant in the Interview Skills workshop; the solid line is the OLS fit and the dashed line a loess smoother. ***More mock interviews predicted higher STAR-structure scores*** *(Spearman ρ = .49, p = .04), roughly +0.25 rubric points per additional practice run—evidence for a "learning-by-doing" effect.*

3.4 Support-Needs & Feasibility

- **Support Needs at Intake:** 100 % wanted résumé help; 93 % interview practice; 87 % micro-grant.

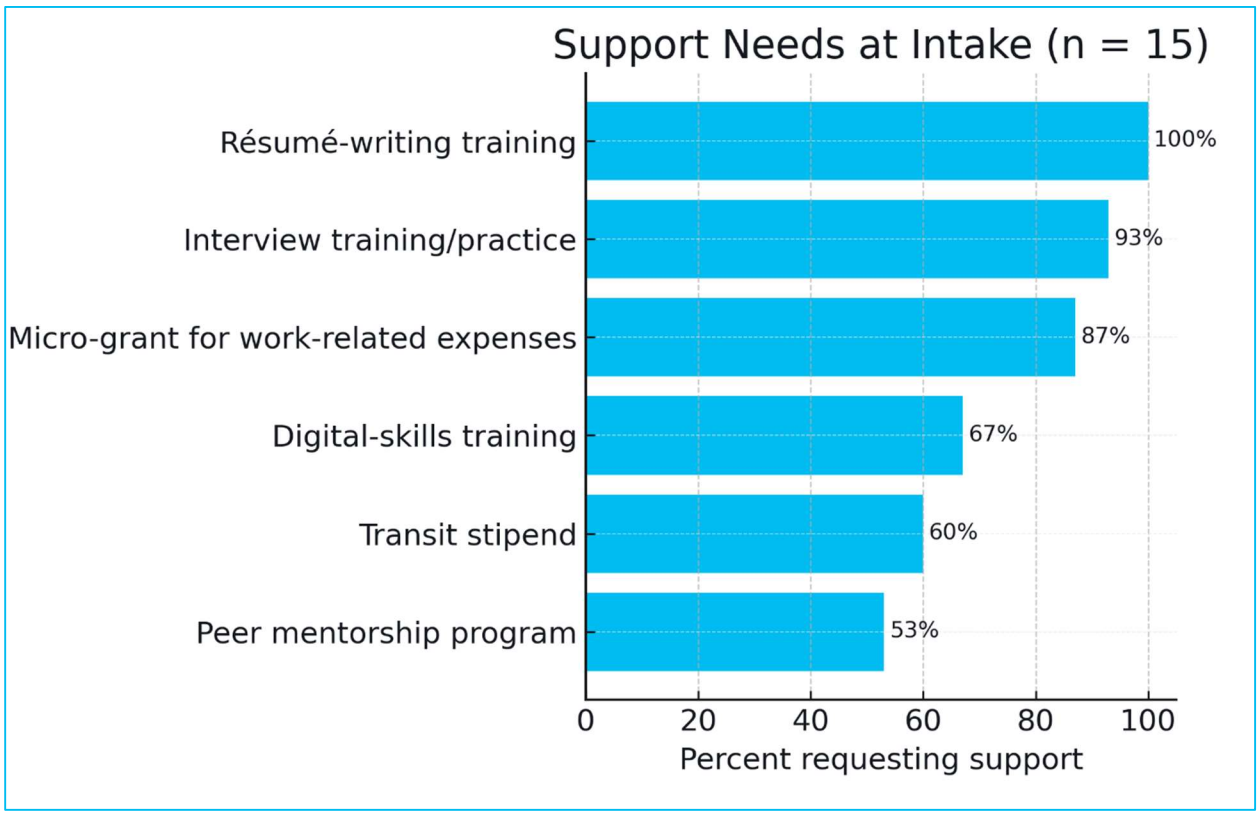


Figure 5

3.5 Summary of Findings

I. Mean ratings climbed across all seven dimensions; confidence posted the biggest jump (+2.66 pts).
II. By program end, rubric composites cleared the 4/5 bar, signalling demonstrable competence.
III. Rubrics were internally consistent (α ≥ .83), supporting composite use.
IV. Practice mattered: more mock interviews predicted higher STAR scores, consistent with a learning-by-doing effect.

These converging indicators set the stage for the Discussion: why did these gains happen, how durable are they, and what do they imply for scale-up?

Discussion

Participants in the EYE pilot demonstrated marked improvements across confidence, skills, engagement, and perceived employability, indicating enhanced job readiness. Self-rated confidence levels and workshop value ratings rose substantially, suggesting the training boosted youths' self-efficacy and their appreciation of the content. Instructor-rated performance on key employability criteria also improved, corroborating that participants developed tangible skills (e.g. better interview responses, stronger résumés). Engagement metrics – such as high counts of mock interviews completed, peer résumé reviews exchanged, and iterative résumé drafts – reflect active participation, which is itself a positive outcome.

Notably, the **Interview Skills** and **Professionalism** workshops yielded the greatest gains on these measures. This coincided with a shift to a more interactive, practice-based facilitation style, implying that *how* the material was delivered significantly impacted learning. This finding is consistent with experiential learning theory, which holds that active "learning by doing" solidifies skills and knowledge more effectively than passive instruction. In our context, youths thrived when given hands-on practice and real-time feedback – a result in line with broader evidence that experiential activities (like role plays and simulations) help learners retain information and develop confidence. Thus, the strong performance in the latter workshops likely reflects both the cumulative effect of earlier sessions and the benefits of an applied, learner-centered approach introduced in the program's second half.

Interview Skills Workshop

The dramatic improvement observed during the Interview Skills session can be attributed to both the content and pedagogy of this workshop. Midway through the pilot, facilitators adopted the **STAR method** (Situation–Task–Action–Result) to teach behavioral interviewing techniques.

The STAR framework is a widely recommended tool in career training, as it provides a clear, structured formula for answering competency-based questions effectively. By learning to frame their past experiences in terms of situation, responsibilities, concrete actions, and results, participants became more adept at articulating their skills in a compelling way. This structured approach likely reduced their interview anxiety and improved the coherence of their answers. In addition, the workshop was highly interactive: youth engaged in multiple mock interviews, received feedback from instructors and peers, and practiced refining their responses in real time.

Research supports the efficacy of such **mock interviews** – they are an evidence-based practice for preparing learners for real employment situations. In one recent study, students reported that doing virtual mock interviews increased their confidence and ability to perform in actual interviews. Our participants similarly benefited from repeated interview practice; each mock interview served as a *mastery experience* that built competence and self-assurance. Instructor rubrics noted significant growth in participants' responsiveness, professional body language, and use of the STAR technique.

Employers involved in a simulated hiring panel also rated the youth much more "hireable" after this workshop series, indicating that the interview training translated into qualities employers seek (e.g. clear communication, relevant examples, professionalism). These outcomes align with prior youth employability programs where intensive interview coaching has led to improved soft skills and better interview performance. Together, the findings suggest that emphasizing structured techniques and providing abundant practice (with feedback) is a potent combination for developing interview skills in marginalized young job-seekers.

Résumé Clinic

The pilot's second workshop, focusing on résumé development, also showed positive though somewhat more modest gains. Participants entered with limited experience in résumé writing – many had underdeveloped or unfocused résumés. Through the clinic, they learned to frame their education, volunteer work, and skills in a way that highlights their strengths to employers.

They engaged in drafting and refining their résumés, supported by facilitator coaching and **peer review** exchanges. This iterative writing process was valuable: several youth produced multiple drafts, incorporating feedback to improve clarity and impact. The increase in instructor-rated résumé quality from pre- to post-workshop confirms that this approach was effective. This mirrors findings in the literature that even short-format résumé workshops can significantly enhance résumé-writing skills.

For example, a study of college students demonstrated that participants' résumé scores on a standardized rubric were **significantly higher** after a résumé-writing workshop than before. Our participants showed similar progress, evidencing better organization, more concrete descriptions of their accomplishments, and use of proper formatting by the end of the clinic. Moreover, the youth's high ratings of workshop value suggest they recognized how improving their résumé would increase their competitiveness. The engagement data (number of résumé drafts completed) underscores their motivation – many went above the minimum required drafts, indicating genuine investment in perfecting this crucial job-search document. It is worth

noting that the résumé clinic was somewhat more instructor-led (e.g. group instruction on résumé dos and don'ts) compared to the later workshops. While it did include interactive elements like peer feedback, the slightly smaller gains here (relative to the Interview Skills workshop) may reflect the more technical, content-driven nature of résumé writing. For future iterations, adding even more interactive components – such as role-playing an HR recruiter to critique sample résumés, or integrating real job postings for tailored résumés – could further boost engagement. Still, the solid improvements across participants' résumés are encouraging and align with best practices in youth employment programs, where targeted training in job search skills (résumé writing, interviewing) is linked to greater self-efficacy and preparedness.

Professionalism Workshop.

The final workshop, covering workplace professionalism and conduct, also yielded notable gains in both skills and confidence. By this stage of the pilot, participants had formed a rapport with facilitators and peers, creating a safe space for active learning. The facilitators capitalized on this by using scenario-based activities – for instance, role-playing common workplace situations (like resolving a conflict with a supervisor or practicing effective communication in a team). This experiential format allowed youth to **practice** professional behaviors and receive constructive feedback in the moment.

Such role-play and scenario discussions are hallmarks of effective life-skills training programs. Indeed, life skills curricula often use group discussions and role-playing to build competencies like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Through these methods, our participants learned to navigate workplace norms and expectations in a low-stakes setting. Instructor assessments showed significant improvement in criteria such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and etiquette after the Professionalism workshop. Perhaps more importantly, the youth themselves reported feeling much more "job-ready" – by the end of the pilot, a majority indicated they would now feel comfortable in a professional work environment and understand how to behave and advocate for themselves appropriately. Employers participating in a mock networking session with the group also noted the youths' professional demeanor and growth in confidence.

The interactive, practice-based pedagogy clearly played a key role in these outcomes, reinforcing the idea that **learning-by-doing** is especially crucial for soft skills development. This is consistent with positive youth development approaches which emphasize **hands-on experiential learning** to foster not only skills but also socio-emotional growth. Some studies even show that experiential learning programs can improve broader outcomes like empathy and prosocial behavior in youth – relevant here, as professionalism involves understanding

others and workplace culture. In short, the Professionalism workshop's success underscores that giving marginalized youth guided experience in real-world scenarios can accelerate their readiness to enter and thrive in the workforce.

Confidence and Engagement

Across all four workshops, one of the most heartening trends was the growth in participants' confidence. This was evidenced both in self-report surveys (sharp increases in ratings of self-confidence in job search skills) and behaviorally (participants became more vocal in discussions, and more willing to take on challenges like mock interviews as the program progressed). Building confidence is a critical outcome for marginalized youth facing employment barriers, because confidence – or *positive self-concept* – is strongly associated with better employment outcomes in young people. In fact, an evidence review found that soft skills such as self-confidence and conscientiousness correlate with higher rates of securing and maintaining employment.

Our pilot's ability to boost youths' self-belief is thus not only a psychosocial victory, but likely to have practical benefits in their job searches. One reason the EYE pilot succeeded in this area was its **strengths-based, supportive environment**. Facilitators explicitly focused on what participants *did well* and how their existing talents could be translated to the workplace, rather than dwelling on deficits. This approach aligns with best practices identified in the youth employment field: programs that are *youth-centric* and **strengths-based** – that intentionally *build confidence and provide a safe space* for skill development – tend to be most effective, especially for Opportunity Youth.

By normalizing mistakes as learning opportunities and celebrating incremental progress, the EYE workshops created a psychologically safe climate where participants felt comfortable stepping outside their comfort zones. Literature emphasizes that such non-stigmatizing, empowering climates are essential for marginalized learners, as they often have had negative prior experiences with formal institutions. Participant feedback from our pilot backs this up: youth reported feeling "respected" and "understood" by staff, and several noted that this was the first time they saw their cultural background *as an asset* in a training setting. This reflects the program's tacit use of a **culturally responsive pedagogy**. Research on culturally responsive teaching finds that when knowledge and skills are connected to learners' own cultures and experiences, they become more meaningful, engagement rises, and learning is enhanced. In EYE, facilitators reflected the diversity of the participants (e.g. Black and bilingual French-English staff were involved), and examples or role-play scenarios were often tailored to

acknowledge the youths' communities and lived realities.

For instance, résumé exercises included describing involvement in cultural or community groups (valorizing experiences that might be overlooked in mainstream settings), and interview practices touched on handling potential bias or microaggressions. Such strategies likely reinforced participants' sense of belonging and relevance. By seeing their identities and strengths validated, youth became more invested in the workshops and confident in their ability to succeed. This approach is in line with a growing body of literature that advocates for **culturally relevant** or **sustaining** career programming for racialized youth. In summary, the pilot's positive outcomes can be interpreted as a synergy between effective pedagogical techniques (interactive practice, STAR method, etc.) and an empowering program culture (strengths-based, culturally attuned). Together, these helped participants not only learn *how* to job-hunt, but also believe in their own potential – a dual achievement that is often elusive in short-term interventions.

Connections to Broader Literature

The trends observed in the EYE pilot echo several themes in the youth employability literature. First, our results support the idea that multi-component **employability training** (covering career planning, résumé writing, interviewing, and professional skills) can improve youths' work readiness.

Similar holistic programs have documented gains in participants' job search knowledge and soft skills, which are considered precursors to employment success. However, research also tempers expectations about immediate employment impacts. A recent quantitative review of international youth employment programs found that while many interventions yield positive skill and attitude outcomes, their direct effects on job placement or earnings tend to be modest on average. For instance, life-skills training components (comparable to our workshops on communication and professionalism) were estimated to improve youth employment rates by only a few percentage points relative to no intervention.

This is not a critique of such programs' value, but rather a recognition that training alone may not overcome all structural barriers facing marginalized youth. Those barriers are substantial: Black and other racialized youth continue to face higher unemployment and lower income levels than their peers, due to factors like discrimination, limited networks, and fewer early work opportunities. In Canada, for example, the unemployment rate for Black

youth hovers around **24%**, significantly above the national youth average. Employment initiatives like EYE are a crucial part of addressing these inequities, but the literature suggests they work best in tandem with practical job exposure opportunities. Indeed, experts increasingly call for blending **training with work-based learning** – such as internships, mentorships, or summer jobs – to give young people real-world experience and employer connections. The rationale is that while training builds human capital, work experience builds social capital and signals to employers, thus improving long-term outcomes. The EYE pilot hints at this synergy: participants' "employer-ready" ratings improved, but the ultimate test will be whether they secure and retain jobs in the months ahead. In the **Implications** below, we discuss how stronger employer partnerships and post-program supports could leverage the gains made in the workshops. Overall, the discussion of our findings is consonant with the broader evidence base: **intensive, practice-oriented training** can substantially boost marginalized youths' confidence and competencies, and when embedded in a larger continuum of support (education, mentoring, job placement), it can contribute to meaningful improvements in their career trajectories.

Further Limitations

Like any pilot initiative, this evaluation has important limitations that temper the interpretation of results:

Small Sample Size. With only 16 participants, the findings must be viewed as exploratory. A cohort this small limits statistical power and may not capture the full diversity of experiences or outcomes present in a larger population. The improvements observed, while promising, should be generalized with caution. It's possible that participant enthusiasm or certain individual characteristics (e.g. unusually high motivation among those who opted in) influenced the results more than the program itself – a risk that a larger sample or control group could help mitigate.

Short Duration and Scope. The pilot consisted of four sequential workshops over a relatively short period (likely a few weeks). This short duration means we measured only immediate or short-term changes. While participants improved in confidence and skills right after the workshops, we do not know if these gains will persist. A longer program (or repeated sessions over months) might yield different results, as could additional topics beyond the four covered. Moreover, the focus was on pre-employment skills; other factors that affect employability (like

technical skills or educational credentials) were outside the scope of this pilot.

Lack of Long-Term Follow-Up. Crucially, we did not track outcomes beyond the end of the Professionalism workshop. There was no follow-up assessment or support during the transition to actual employment. As a result, we cannot say how many participants ultimately secured jobs, nor can we gauge whether their improved confidence and skills translated into successful interviews or job performance in real workplaces. The absence of follow-up is a common limitation in pilot programs, but it means the **true impact** on employment outcomes remains unknown. Additionally, without a longitudinal component, we could not observe whether participants might regress or face new challenges after the program's "boost" wore off. A related limitation is the lack of a formal control or comparison group – we don't know what would have happened to similar youth who did not attend EYE during the same period. Thus, we attribute improvements to the program, but acknowledge other factors (e.g. concurrent job searches, personal maturation) could have played a role.

Measurement Constraints. Some of our evaluation measures relied on self-report (e.g. confidence ratings, workshop value feedback), which can introduce bias. Participants may have given favorable responses due to social desirability or gratitude toward the program/funder. Our instructor-rated performance rubric, while more objective, could also be subject to leniency or halo effects (instructors knew the youth and might unconsciously inflate scores as they saw them improve). We attempted to mitigate this by using specific behavioral criteria, but some subjectivity remains. Finally, the employer "readiness to hire" indicator was based on brief simulated interactions rather than actual hiring decisions, which limits its conclusiveness. These measurement issues suggest caution in interpreting the magnitude of improvement recorded.

Despite these limitations, the positive trends observed provide valuable insights, and the pilot serves as a **proof of concept**. Future iterations with more participants, a longer timeline, and rigorous evaluation design (e.g. including a control group and longitudinal follow-up) will be important to validate and expand upon these findings.

Implications

The EYE pilot's outcomes yield several implications for program refinement, future research, and broader youth employment strategy:

Curriculum Design & Pedagogy

The stark gains during the interactive **Interview Skills** and **Professionalism** workshops indicate that curriculum should emphasize **experiential, practice-based learning** throughout. Embedding more role plays, simulations, and hands-on exercises – even in earlier sessions like Orientation or Résumé clinics – could engage participants from the start and accelerate skill development.

The curriculum should continue to teach proven techniques (e.g. STAR method for interviews, structured résumé formats) but always alongside opportunities for learners to actively apply those techniques in realistic scenarios. Additionally, the content should remain **culturally responsive** and strengths-oriented. This means continually integrating youths' cultural references, bilingual materials for French speakers, and examples of success that resonate with Black and racialized communities. Such design choices can heighten relevance and motivation.

Ultimately, the pilot affirms that *how* we teach is as critical as *what* we teach: facilitative coaching, peer learning, and feedback-driven iterations should be staples of the EYE pedagogy. Investing in facilitator training on these approaches (e.g. experiential learning facilitation, trauma-informed practice) will further ensure the curriculum is delivered in an empowering way.

Employer Partnerships & Real-World Exposure

To bridge the gap between training and employment, stronger integration with employers is recommended. The positive but modest impact typical of training-only interventions suggests that we should connect participants to **work opportunities** as a next step. Practical steps include partnering with local businesses and public sector employers to offer **internships, job shadowing, or mentorships** for EYE graduates. For example, after the Professionalism workshop, interested employers could host participants for short work placements or mock "day at work" experiences.

Such exposure would reinforce the skills learned and demonstrate them in real settings. Research consistently shows that combining employability skills training with actual work-based learning greatly boosts outcomes for marginalized youth. Employer partners can also be involved during the workshops – as guest speakers, mock interviewers, or networking session hosts – to give youth a direct window into industry

expectations and to allow employers to see the talent pipeline being developed. Moreover, **feedback loops** with employers (what they see as strengths or gaps in participants) can inform continuous curriculum improvement. Building these partnerships not only benefits the youth (through expanded networks and opportunities), but also engages employers in advancing diversity and inclusion, a mutual value proposition. Over time, a network of supportive employers could evolve into a hiring consortium that actively recruits EYE alumni, thus translating the pilot's gains into tangible job placements.

Scaling and Sustainability

Expanding the EYE program to serve more youth and sustain its impact will require careful planning and resources. **Scaling up** should not dilute the program's intensive, personalized nature – maintaining relatively small cohort sizes or mentor-to-youth ratios may be necessary to preserve quality as participant numbers grow. One implication is to secure additional funding or partnerships (e.g. with government youth employment initiatives or private foundations) to support more cohorts and possibly a longer program duration. Scaling also offers an opportunity to incorporate a **longitudinal evaluation** component. Future evaluation should track participants over time (6-12 months post-program) to assess job attainment, retention, and career progression.

This would address the knowledge gap on long-term effects of such interventions. It may also be valuable to implement a randomized controlled trial or matched comparison study at scale, to strengthen the evidence base on EYE's effectiveness for different subgroups. In scaling, the curriculum might be adapted for different contexts (e.g. rural vs. urban youth, or tailoring for other marginalized groups) – but the core principles of interactive learning and cultural relevance should remain. Finally, as the program grows, establishing a formal **alumni support system** or follow-up services will help sustain outcomes. For instance, a post-program "job club" or mentorship circle could provide ongoing peer support, and periodic refresher workshops or advanced trainings could be offered as youth progress in their careers. These steps would maximize the long-term return on investment by not only scaling breadth (number of youths served) but also depth (lasting impact per youth).

In conclusion, the EYE pilot's discussion points to a fundamentally encouraging message: with targeted, well-designed interventions, Black, racialized, and official-language minority youth *can* rapidly build the confidence, skills, and connections needed to improve their employability. The strong pilot results, interpreted in light of existing research and theory, reinforce calls for

interactive and culturally responsive pedagogy in workforce development programs. At the same time, they highlight that such training should ideally be embedded in a continuum that includes real-world experience and sustained support. For funders, policy stakeholders, and practitioners, the implications are clear – investing in holistic youth empowerment programming, and scaling it up thoughtfully, holds promise not just for the young people directly involved, but for broader economic and social gains as these youth transition into stable, fulfilling employment. The lessons from this pilot will inform the next phase of EYE and similar initiatives, as we collectively work to break down barriers to employment for marginalized youth and help them stride confidently into the world of work.

Sources

Basharat, S., et al. (2020). *Soft skills as a workforce development strategy for Opportunity youth: Review of the evidence*. Social Research and Demonstration Corporation – *Key findings on strengths-based approaches and soft skills*.

Walker, A., & Grant, S. (2011). *Developing culturally responsive youth workers*. *Journal of Extension, 49*(5) – *Culturally responsive pedagogy improves engagement and learning*.

MIT Career Advising & Professional Development (2023). *Using the STAR method for your next behavioral interview – STAR technique as an effective formula for structuring interview responses*.

Tillotson, K., & Osborn, D. (2012). *Effect of a résumé-writing workshop on résumé-writing skills*. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 49*(3), 110-117 – *Résumé workshop significantly improved participants' résumé quality*.

Wilkie, L., & Rosendale, J. (2024). *Efficacy and benefits of virtual mock interviews: Analyzing student perceptions of digital employment preparations*. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 21*(1) – *Mock interviews as an evidence-based method that increases confidence for real interviews*.

Adkins-Hackett, L. & Spiteri, S. (2024). *The state of youth employment in Canada*. Labour Market Information Council – *Statistics on higher unemployment among Black youth in Canada*.
Youth Futures Foundation (2021). *Youth Employment Toolkit: Life skills training – Meta-analytic finding that life skills training yields modest improvements (~5%) in youth employment outcomes*.
Annie E. Casey Foundation (2021). *The Benefits of Workforce Exposure and Career Programming for Youth – Importance of work-based learning (internships, apprenticeships) for youth, especially those of color*.
ACT for Youth Center of Excellence (2020). *Engaging Youth through Experiential Learning – Overview of experiential learning benefits for skill development and retention*.
SRDC (2020). *Review of soft-skill development approaches for Opportunity Youth – Best practices highlight strengths-based, confidence-building strategies in youth employment programs*.

Appendix

Appendix A. Instruments & Templates

A1. Intake Needs & Baseline Assets Scan (22 items)

Response format:
Supports: Yes / No
Assets & barriers: 1–5 Likert (1 = Not at all / strongly disagree; 5 = Very much / strongly agree)

Domain	Item (exact wording)	Scale
Supports needed	Résumé-writing training	Yes/No
	Interview training / practice	Yes/No
	Digital-skills training	Yes/No
	Peer mentorship program	Yes/No
	Transit stipend	Yes/No
	Micro-grant for work-related expenses	Yes/No
Language & comfort	I am comfortable with English/French in work settings	1–5
Psychological safety	I do not feel discrimination at work	1–5 (reverse-coded if needed)
	I felt comfortable sharing today	1–5
Logistics	I have reliable internet access	1–5
	I have reliable transportation	1–5
Material readiness	I have work-appropriate clothing	1–5
Digital skills	I know how to use computers for job search	1–5

Opportunity navigation	I know where to find jobs	1–5
Social capital	I have people I can ask for job-search advice	1–5
Human capital	I have a lot of work experience	1–5
Job-search confidence	I have a good résumé	1–5
	I feel good in interviews	1–5
…	(Include any other custom items you used)	…

A2. Post-Session Exit Survey (per workshop; 7–9 items)

All 1–5 Likert. Example items:
"Overall, this session was valuable to me."
"The mini-lessons were clear and understandable."
"The core activity was useful for my job search."
"Peer feedback I received was helpful."
"The pace/timing of the session worked for me."
"The facilitation/support helped me learn."
"I feel confident applying today's skill." (primary outcome)

A3. Instructor Rubrics (5 criteria each, 1–5 anchors)

Résumé Clinic (sample criteria):
Formatting & layout
Clarity & concision
Use of keywords / tailoring
Structure & logical flow
Specificity of achievements
Interview Skills (STAR):
Uses STAR structure effectively
Provides specific, relevant examples
Professional delivery & body language
Alignment with question asked
Conciseness / time management
Professionalism:
Teamwork & collaboration
Communication (tone, clarity, active listening)
Etiquette & professional norms
Adaptability/problem solving

Conflict management

Anchor example (1 vs. 5): "1 = Not demonstrated; 3 = Emerging / inconsistent; 5 = Consistently demonstrated at a professional level."

A4. Engagement/Practice Log Template

Participant ID	Workshop	Mock interviews (#)	Résumé drafts (#)	Peer reviews given (#)	Time engaged (min)	Notes

Appendix G. Glossary & Acronyms

Term	Meaning
EYE	Employment Youth Empowerment
FOLM	French Official-Language Minority
STAR	Situation–Task–Action–Result interview framework
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training