

# Starting Early:

Preparing our system, employers, families, and youth with disabilities to participate in the workforce

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Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

A world of possibility



## Acknowledgement of the land

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# Acknowledgements



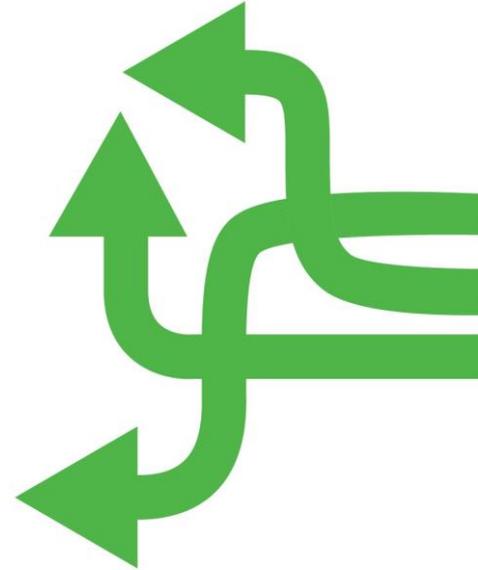
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# Agenda

- Introductions
- Current state
- “Start early”
- Cases:
  1. Individual & Program: Employment Pathways
  2. Community & Business: Project SEARCH
  3. Public & Policy: Theoretical Modelling
- Review and reflection: what is your role?



# Introduction



## **Carolyn McDougall**

Manager, Employment Pathways  
Ontario/Canada Coordinator,  
Project SEARCH  
Adjunct Lecturer, OS&OT, UofT  
Occupational Therapist



## **Laura Bowman**

Project Manager, Research &  
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Adjunct Lecturer, OS&OT, UofT  
Occupational Therapist



## **Holland Bloorview**

Canada's largest paediatric  
rehabilitation hospital with the  
vision of creating the most  
meaningful and healthy futures  
for all children, youth and  
families.

# Definitions: Who?



## Youth

*Age 14-29*

*Focus on high school age*



## Employer

*Organization, manager,  
or leader in a work or  
volunteer role*



## Family/Supports

*Informal or formal  
caregiver and supporter*



## Society

*The public interest or  
group  
Local, provincial,  
national, or global*



# Definitions: What?



## Disability

*Broad definition*



## Employment

*Organized paid or unpaid role*

*A social determinant of health*



## Programs

*Also 'interventions'  
Intended to build skills or knowledge for YwD*



## Services

*Public or private mechanisms to serve a certain group (E.g. employment services)*

# The business case



**1 in 5**

**Ontarians have a disability**

70% of disabilities are invisible

More than 2% of Ontarians use wheelchairs or scooters



**90%**

**Scored average/ above average for job performance**

86% scored above average for attendance

97% scored average/ above average for job safety



**Companies that invested in accessible employment practices report:**

↑ customer satisfaction

↑ job retention

↑ attendance

↑ job performance & quality of work

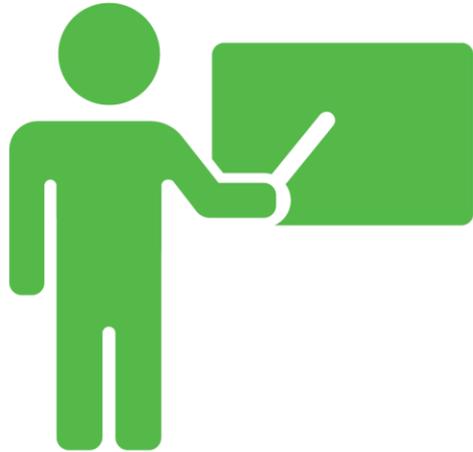
↑ safety records

↓ employee turnover

# Current state of youth disability employment

	This population	General population
<p><b>Employment Rate:</b></p> <p>Canadians with disabilities <sup>[1]</sup></p> <p>Canadians with severe disabilities <sup>[1,2]</sup></p> <p>Canadians with very severe disabilities <sup>[1,2]</sup></p>	<p>68.8%</p> <p>54.5%</p> <p>29.9%</p>	<p>77.8%</p>
<p><b>Employment Rate:</b></p> <p>Canadians with disabilities who have attained a high school diploma/certificate or less <sup>[1]</sup></p>	<p>45%</p>	<p>68.1%</p>
<p><b>Youth Age 14-24 who are NEET</b></p> <p>Canadians with disabilities <sup>[3]</sup></p> <p>Canadians with severe disabilities: employment rate <sup>[3]</sup></p>	<p>17%</p> <p>28%</p>	<p>11%</p>

# Current state of youth disability employment



Employment is a recognized social determinant of health (Raphael et al., 2020)

Early intervention (i.e., during high school) to support employment participation for people with disabilities relates to:

- ✓ greater amount of time individuals access and participate in the workforce (Wehman et al. 2020; Krahn & Chow, 2016)
- ✓ improved workforce attachment (Caliendo & Schmidl, 2016)
- ✓ economic benefit to society (Bowman et al., 2024)

# Best Practice



‘Start Early’



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Employment  
Pathways

# Best practice: What is 'start-early'?

**When**

High School

**What**

Self discovery  
Experience  
Risk taking  
Supported reflection

**Where**

Real-world  
contexts

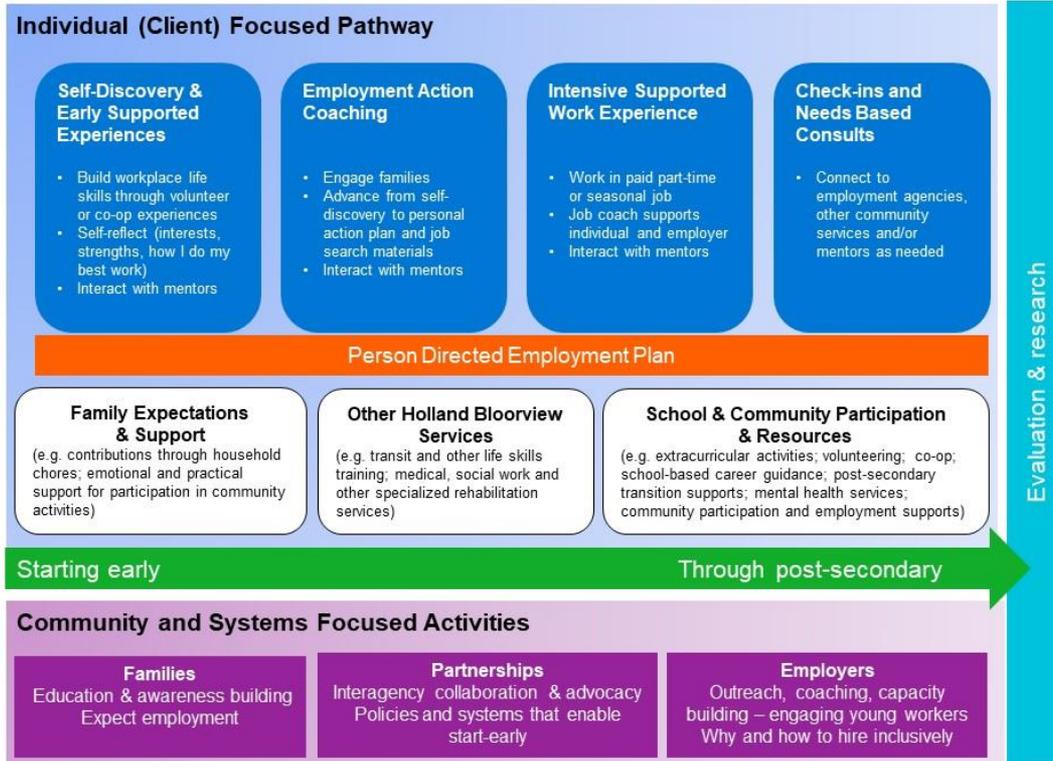
**How**

Targeted, evidence-  
informed services

**Who**

Equitable:  
Youth, employers,  
society

# Best practice: How to ‘start-early’?

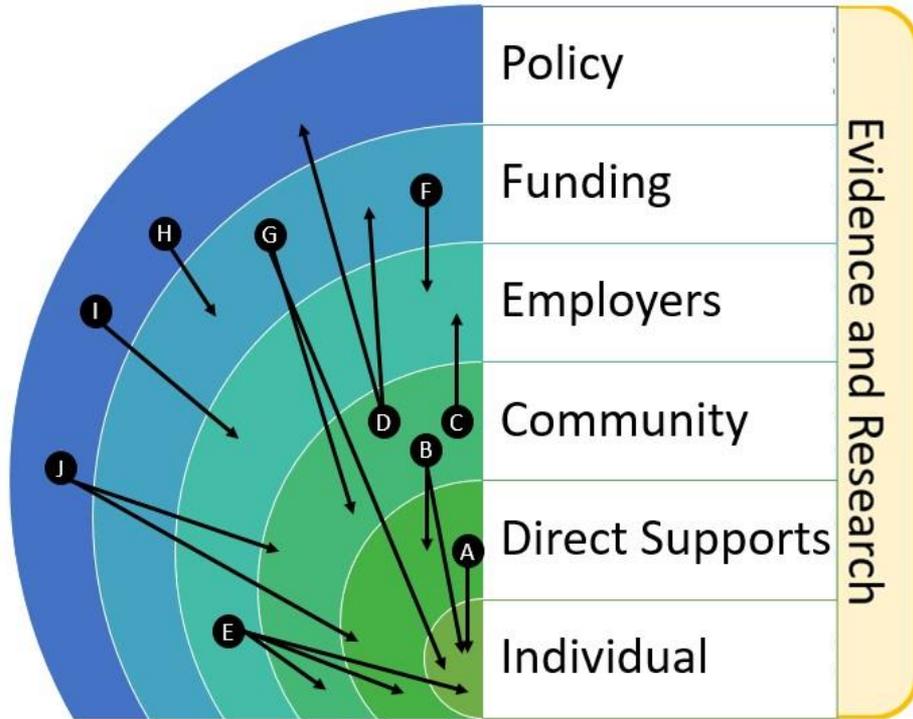


## Holland Bloorview Employment Pathways Model

Bowman, L. R., McDougall, C., D’Alessandro, D., Campbell, J., & Curran, C. J. (2023). The creation and implementation of an employment participation pathway model for youth with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 45(24), 4156-4164.

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# Best practice: Who must 'start-early'?



## Model of Embedded Employment Supports (MEES)

Bowman, L. R., McDougall, C., & Menna-Dack, D. (2024). A Justice Perspective on Ecologically-Based Employment Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities. In *Intellectual Disabilities and Autism: Ethics and Practice* (pp. 221-235). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

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Cases:

Individual & Program  
Community & Business  
Public & Policy



# Individual & program level

## Holland Bloorview's Employment Pathways Programs



# Marya's story



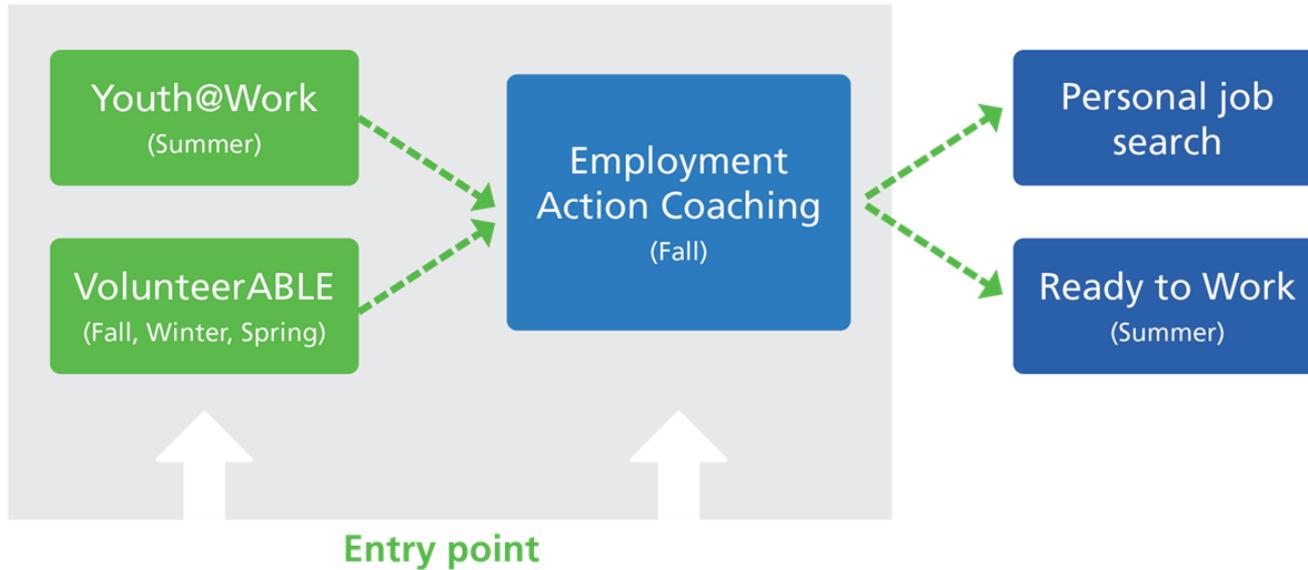
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# Holland Bloorview employment pathway



# Holland Bloorview employment pathway



# Holland Bloorview employment pathway



**100%**

Change in  
preparedness for  
workforce after  
participation  
(Sep 2023-Aug  
2024)



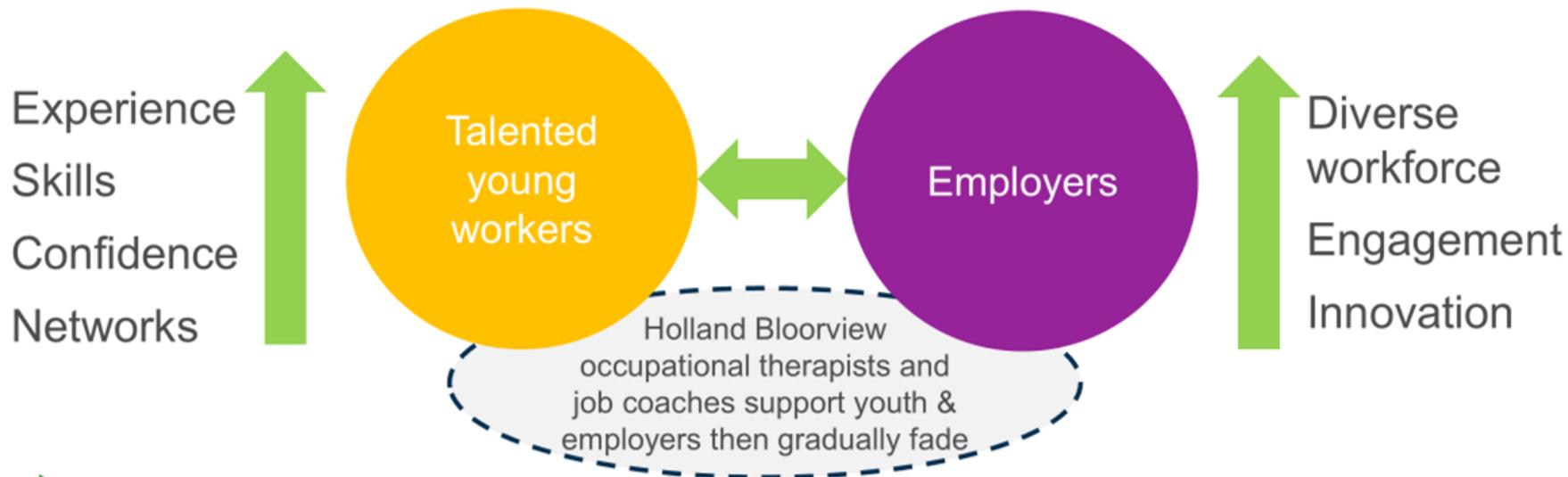
**100%**

‘Ready to Work’  
participants got  
**paid summer job  
experience -  
average of 150  
hours**  
(Summer 2024)

**↑ 2.8**  
points change

“I know what helps  
me do my  
**best work**”  
(10 point scale,  
2=clinical  
significance)  
(April 2023-March  
2024)

# What is 'Ready to Work'?



# Individual & program level: Takeaways

- ✓ Personalized
- ✓ Progressive
- ✓ Supported



Community &  
business level

Project SEARCH



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WHERE  
INCREDIBLE  
HAPPENS

# Mackenzie's story

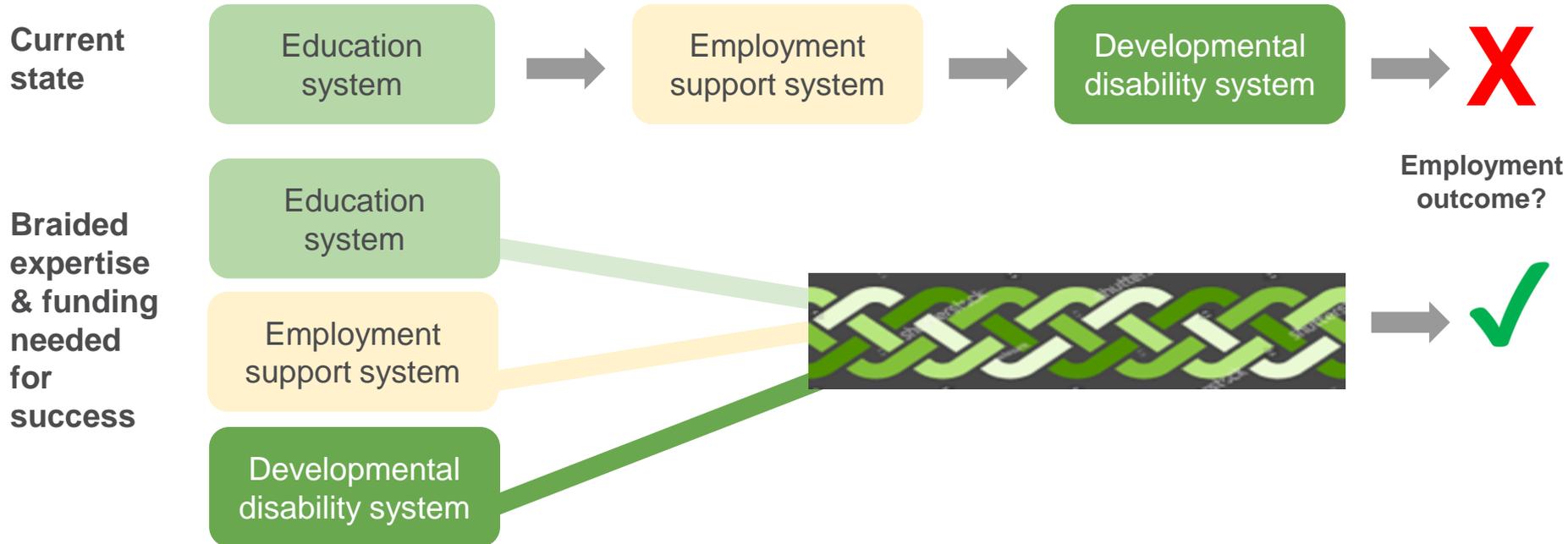


# Those farthest from employment



# Braided, sustainable expertise & funding needed

Youth with significant disabilities left behind in current system  
- inter-sectorial/agency expertise key to success



# Project SEARCH: international model

FINAL YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL  $\Rightarrow$  WORK



Host business



Education partner



Employment agency partner

## 10-month training program

### Experiences

700+ hours, 3 training “internships” immersed at host business

### Job coaching

On the job progressive skills training

### Employability & life skills training

Evidence-informed curriculum

+

## Transition to employment support

Community employment agency provides coaching & consultation employment support for graduate & employer

=

**70% +**  
employment  
rate of  
graduates in  
community

## Student-focused employment & future planning. Community connections

Student | Engaged family | Partners

# Mackenzie's training for employment

As she started the Project SEARCH program, Mackenzie knew she liked helping people.

She learns well through repetition as her intellectual disability affects her reading and writing skills.

She progressively built marketable skills across 3 internships.



Mackenzie was hired at UHN's Princess Margaret site as a patient porter

She works an average of 25 hours a week

She:

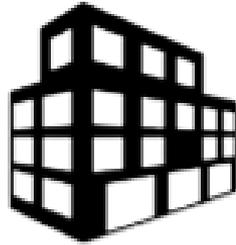
- Is part of the union
- Earns a living wage (well above minimum wage)
- Contributes to a hospital pension

# Resolve sustainability issues to expand access & impact



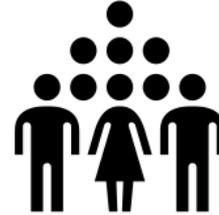
## Transforming lives

Income  
Social inclusion  
Health & wellbeing



## Building disability confidence & inclusive workplaces

Diverse workplace  
Unique skills  
Reduced labour market shortages



## Societal cost benefit

Decrease individual lifetime social assistance costs and increase income tax

Diverse and inclusive labour force

# Community & business level: Takeaways

- ✓ Collaborative
- ✓ Shared responsibility
- ✓ Pipelines



# Public & policy level

## Theoretical cost-benefit modelling



**Paper:**

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1281088/full>

**Report:**

Forthcoming  
(October 1, 2024)

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# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling



 fund  
programs  
without data



 get  
program data  
without funds

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

Theoretical  
Data

 fund  
programs  
without data



 get  
program data  
without funds



To promote public funding of stable, equitable "start early" programs, we created a cost-benefit model to show lifetime government return on investment.

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling



**Baseline**

**Intervention/Program**

**Intervention/Program +**

Global inputs  
Local context inputs  
Persona inputs

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

## High School to Work

**Age:** 20

**Disability:** Intellectual disability + Autism

**Challenges:** limited work experience, social communication skills, literacy, time management

**Start-Early Program:** Project SEARCH

**Public investment:** \$16,000

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

## High School to Work

**Age:** 20

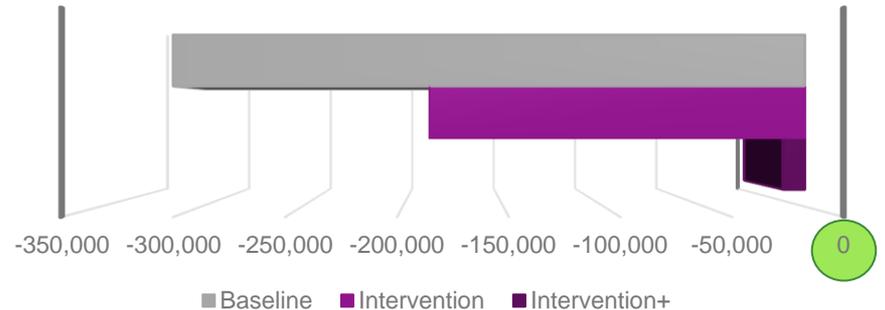
**Disability:** Intellectual disability + Autism

**Challenges:** limited work experience, social communication skills, literacy, time management

**Start-Early Program:** Project SEARCH

**Public investment:** \$16,000

Reduced lifetime government spending of **696% (\$127,338)** per individual



# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

## University to Work

**Age:** 16

**Disability:** Cerebral Palsy; mild learning disability

**Challenges:** difficulty standing/walking for long periods, carrying heavy items, confidence

**Start-Early Program:** Holland Bloorview's Employment Pathways

**Public investment:** \$16,752

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

## University to Work

**Age:** 16

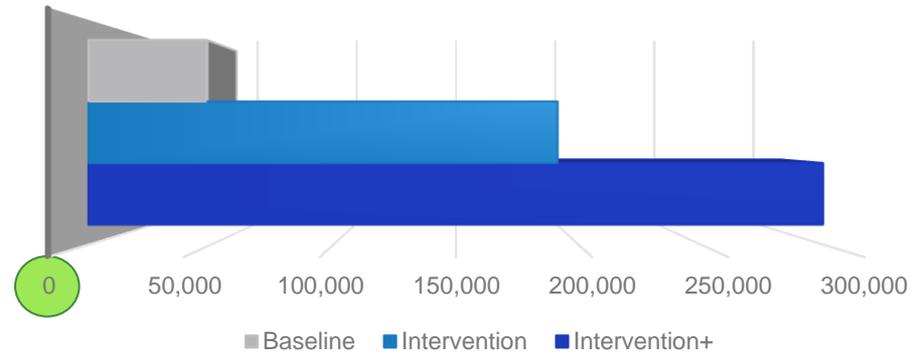
**Disability:** Cerebral Palsy; mild learning disability

**Challenges:** difficulty standing/walking for long periods, carrying heavy items, confidence

**Start-Early Program:** Holland Bloorview's Employment Pathways

**Public investment:** \$16,752

Increased lifetime government realized cost savings of **755%** (**\$143,215**) per individual



# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling

## Total lifetime cash flow to government by annual cohort of 100 students\*

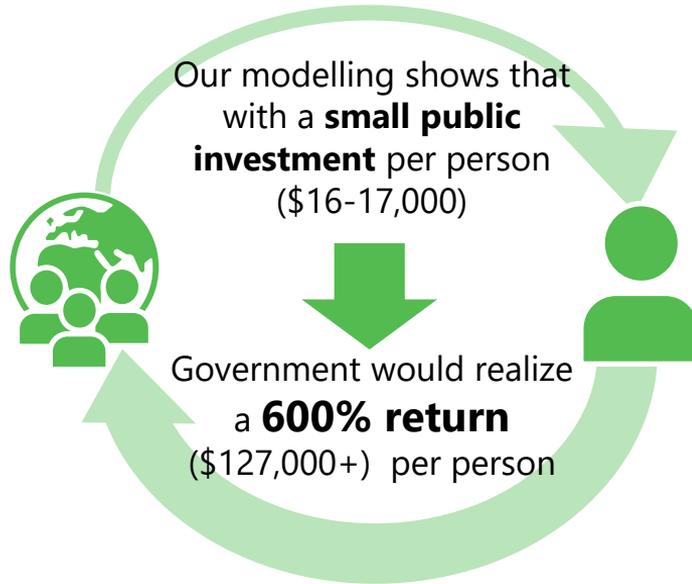


An annual public investment of \$1,600,000 would yield lifetime return of **\$8,913,694** per cohort of high school persona students.



An annual public investment of \$1,675,200 would yield lifetime return of **\$10,025,047** per cohort of university persona students.

# Theoretical cost-benefit modelling



With this information, we can:

Advocate for **public funding** for start-early employment programming.

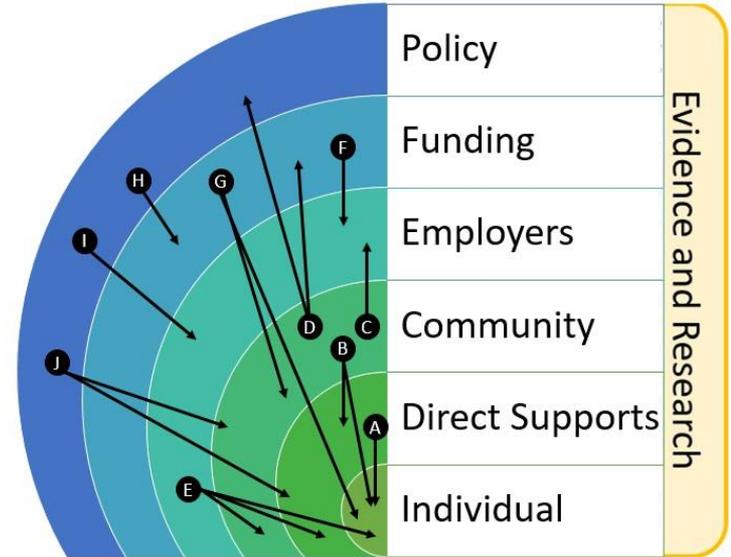
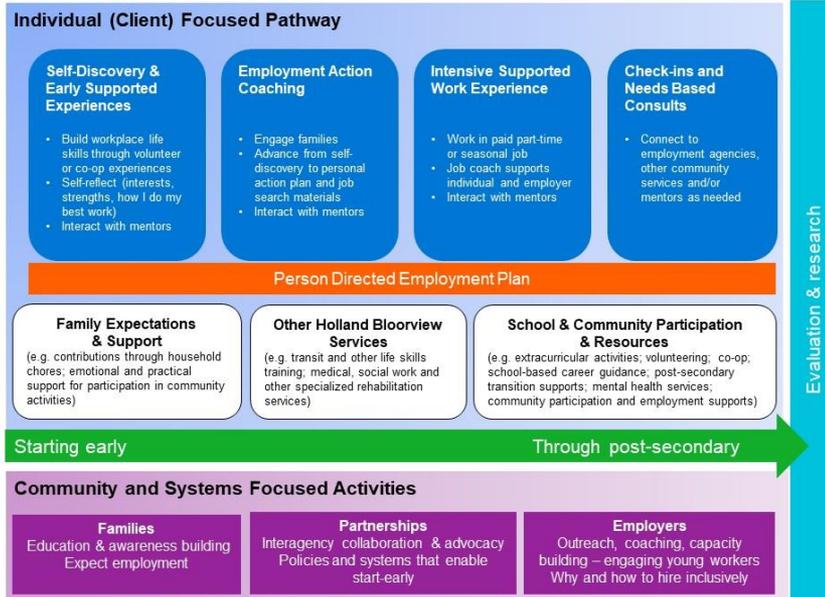
Increase availability of **evidence-based start-early programming** for people who have a disability in Ontario.

# Public & policy level: Takeaways

- ✓ Equitable
- ✓ Sustainable
- ✓ Responsible
- ✓ Pipeline

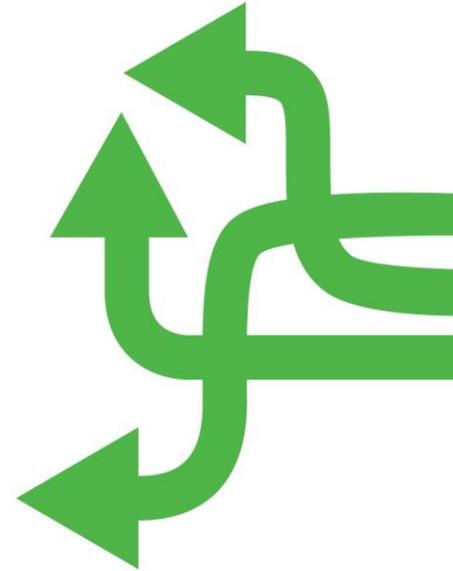


# Back to the models



# 3 things we can do right now

1. **Learn** about unique barriers to employment facing in-school youth with disabilities
1. **Work with** youth, families and community organizations to develop **local solutions**
1. **Advocate** for public policy & funding for enable to early employment experience programming across Canada



# Thank you!

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