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Leading Canadian Companies Take Action To Provide Meaningful Employment To 40,000 Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Youth

- *Companies join forces, to help solve vulnerable youth unemployment crisis in Canada, with support from community employment agencies and governments*
- *5-year goal to connect 40,000 NEET (Not Employed, in Education or Training) youth facing systemic employment barriers, to meaningful employment.*

An unprecedented coalition of Canada's leading companies - Starbucks, Walmart, Chipotle, HMSHost, Tridel, The Source, Coast Capital Savings and TELUS - supported by MaRS Discovery District is coming together with government and community employment agencies to take action to provide jobs and training opportunities to youth who need it most.

Organized under the banner **Opportunity For All Youth (O4AY)**, the coalition has set an ambitious five-year goal to significantly impact the national NEET unemployment rate by providing meaningful employment to 40,000 NEET Youth (aged 16 to 29) with a focus on those who have been disconnected from the employment market for four months or longer.

Nearly **one million young Canadians are not in school or holding down a job** according to Statistics Canada. Of those nearly 400,000 are actively seeking jobs. Low-skilled youth are particularly challenged in the labour market. **Those who face one or more barriers to employment and educational development opportunities can be unemployed at three times the national average or more.**

"Ensuring that youth have pathways to stable employment is critical to the long-term economic prosperity of communities across our nation. Our government is investing heavily in training programs, and this coalition is stepping up with opportunities for youth to succeed in the workforce," says Patricia Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour.

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY DIVIDE

Despite significant government funding and service agency focus, high rates of unemployment and disconnection from education continue for NEET youth. At the same time, Canadian businesses continue to experience labour shortages and job vacancies.

"The Opportunity For All Youth coalition recognizes that corporations play a unique role in helping tackle this societal challenge, and that they must work together with community organizations and governments to achieve maximum social impact" says Richard Derham, Lead Director, Opportunity For All Youth. "We want to ensure that every young adult has the chance to join the workforce, pursue their ambitions, and improve our shared future."

What has been missing to date is a coordinated effort by employers interested in connecting youth to meaningful employment opportunities that is national in scope. The Opportunity For All Youth coalition addresses this and will make it easier for employers to learn from one another, share best practices, and accelerate what is working.

“We’re appealing to the business community to join forces and take action to transform lives,” says Michael Conway, president, Starbucks Canada. “Our experience tells us vulnerable youth are a remarkable source of untapped talent and possibility. They consistently demonstrate high engagement and long tenure.”

INVESTING IN OUR NATION’S FUTURE WORKFORCE

Hiring events specifically focussing on connecting NEET youth with jobs will be hosted across Canada.

The first hiring event will be held in Toronto in June with others to follow in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa and Montreal later this year. Hiring events in other cities will follow.

"Tackling youth unemployment has been a major focus for City Council over the last few years," says Toronto Mayor John Tory. "Through Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE), the City has connected thousands of young people to great employment opportunities with hundreds of employers across Toronto. I am pleased that a national campaign based on our successful PAYE model is being launched to create more opportunities for young people that need them the most in Toronto and across the country."

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