Hello everyone. Welcome to our IDEA Social Innovation Lab webinar series. Uh we are coming back from a summer break, so this is our first webinar in a little while. Excited to be here. Uh my name is Dan Samosh. I'm in employment relations studies uh department at Queens University. I'm part of the IDEA team. Uh for the webinar, just some kind of housekeeping stuff, uh please know that captions should be available for the webinar. If you have any like concerns there, if they're not working please let us know. We'll try to resolve any issues as quickly as possible. Uh and in addition this is our first webinar where we're having a French interpreter with us, so thank you very much to our interpreter and to the IDEA team that made that possible. We're really excited about this because um we've been thinking about it and we got some feedback as well about how it's important that we have French interpretation, so it's really exciting uh and this should be uh happening going forward as well. Um all of our webinars will also be uh recorded and posted online on the IDEA website so you can find information there, as well as ways to get in touch with us should you have any feedback. Uh slides are shared there as well. But for our webinar today we'll follow our usual format: uh start with a presentation and then end with a Q&A. During the Q&A you should have a Q&A function on Zoom. Please type your questions in there. You can do that at any point during the presentation, and at the end uh I will repeat those questions to our presenters. For today we have Laura Bowman and Carolyn McDougall with us from Holland uh Holland Bloorview, and the title of their presentation is: Starting Early: Preparing Our System, Employers, Families, and Youth with Disabilities to Participate in the Workforce. Uh so I'll turn it over to you both. Thanks. Thank you for that, um and I'm going to uh share my screen.

So, once again thank you all for joining us today. Uh our presentation is entitled Starting Early: Preparing Our System, Employers, Families, and Youth with Disabilities to Participate in the Workforce. Uh my name's Laura Bowman and I'm participating with my colleague Carolyn McDougall, and I'll, I'll introduce us in a minute, um but we would like to start- oh sorry. Uh we'd like to start with an acknowledgement of the land. As we gather today virtually from across Ontario in Canada we acknowledge this sacred land. This beautiful painting is the work of artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun and it depicts a utopian afterworld in which resource extraction has subsided and the Earth has healed. We recognize Indigenous land title as set out by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which envisioned self-determination and self-government. We understand the Truth and Reconciliation Report and calls to action that recommend all levels of government to implement Indigenous rights in the original spirit of the treaties. Indigenous peoples and allies for reconciliation view the treaties as a sacred obligation that commits both parties to maintain a respectful relationship, sharing the lands and resources equitably. We give thanks for this land, Mother Earth, and seek to walk a path of truth and reconciliation in Canada based on partnership and respect for the many ways of learning, knowing, and being. May we build on our awareness, respect, and curiosity today as we gather to advance our shared goal of becoming truly inclusive workplaces and communities. Chi-miigwech. Niáwen’kó:wa.. Merci. Thank you.

While we're acknowledging, uh, we would like to acknowledge the Employment Pathways clinical work uh which is generously uh funded by donors to Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation, including the Azrieli Foundation, the RBC Foundation in support of RBC Future Launch, and the Peter Gilgan Foundation. Our research and evaluation work is generously funded by the donors to Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, the found uh Foundation including the Azrieli Foundation as well as funding from the government of Ontario.

Alright. Today, what we'll be moving on to is uh some brief introductions, a discussion of the current state of employment for youth with disabilities in Ontario and Canada, what a start early approach really looks like, and then we'll present three cases to introduce people to the individual and program level interventions, community and business interventions, and public and policy interventions that we see as important to this specific group of youth with disabilities looking to enter the workforce. Then we'll have some review and reflection, uh and obviously Q&A.

So first I'll introdu- introduce you to where this presentation is coming from. Um Carolyn McDougall, obviously as depicted here the brains of the operation, brings a management background and is the architect of the Holland Bloorview Employment Pathways programs. She has experience in human resources and is a registered occupational therapist. She is the Canada coordinator for project search uh for the project search model, which we'll be presenting a little bit later, um and is actively involved in spreading this model. I'm Laura. I'm also an occupational therapist, and I act as a researcher, evaluator, and knowledge mobilizer in my embedded role on the Employment Pathways team at Holland Bloorview. We work out of Holland Bloorview, which I keep saying. Um it's Canada's largest pediatric rehab hospital, an organization based in Toronto with services that extend Ontario-wide and we have various funding sources through our foundation and the ministry. So, today we're going to be sharing perspectives and examples from our learning and growth. These are examples based on best evidence, based on embeddednes in the practice and policy landscapes of Ontario, and supported by the generous funding outlined at the beginning of this presentation. We present our examples as what we have learned in our over 20 years of delivering services and growing our practice, and we share our learnings that may be funded, supported, or situated differently from your learnings and your experiences. We offer these as examples, not a finite answer. We look forward to some rich discussion on how this does or does not resonate with you, your mission, your practice, your access to funds, all of that toward the end of the presentation.

Okay. So who are we talking about when we talk about youth with disabilities entering the workforce? Specifically in our programs, we focus on youth being ages 14 to 25 who are still in high school. That's our focus. Um, we note that first of all we're coming from the Ontario context, so some of the things that we talk about in this presentation today may be, um directly applicable to you and some of it you may have to extend or explore how it applies outside of the province. So again, focusing on youth who are still in high school our program has an average age of 18 years old and there are two clarifications I want to make here. In Ontario, youth with intellectual, developmental, or other sorts of disabilities can remain in high school until age 21. So, just so you know, there there is a broader context for what "in high school" might look like, and two, um there are very distinct funding practices to support youth with disabilities uh in their employment journeys that do not allow them to access employ- publicly funded employment services while they are still in high school. So despite this being a best practice for employment, something that I want you to keep in mind and something that we'll bring up again in the presentation. When we talk about youth that's who we're talking about, 14 to 25 starting our programs while still in high school. We also talk about families and supports. These can be formal supports or informal supports, um birth or chosen families. They can be caregivers, supporters, um we have a broad definition. Employers are the organizations, managers, or leaders in a work or volunteer role. Um and society is really the the public interest or a public group. It can be local, provincial, national, global.

When we talk about disability, we have a um an intentionally broad definition. Um so really we try to have more of an inclusive definition, we're talking about all sorts of disabilities. Uh when we talk about programs or interventions, um these are are programs specifically intended to build skills for youth with disabilities - skills, knowledge, and experiences - and um are usually um uh delivered while still in high school when we talk about them. When we talk about services, these can be public or private services um that serve a certain groups. So for example, employment services. We're talking about serving people towards employment. And finally when we talk about employment, uh we are talking about organized paid or unpaid roles, uh knowing that employment is a social determinant of health. And again I'm going to give a caveat - I will stop giving caveat soon I promise, I'll just write what I mean on the slide - um but when we talk about unpaid work, we know some people get their backs up. Because of the nature of the work that we do and our population still being in high school, um sometimes the goal of the program is not paid work. Sometimes it is building the foundational and developmental skills required to reach work along a pathway. So when we say it's paid or unpaid work, it's not a question of value. We think everyone should be valued for the work that they complete and paid when appropriate, it's not a m- a matter of unpaid because uh of having a disability, it's it's just sort of a question of where they are in their employment journey. So just another clarification.

Okay, now that we know what we're talking about - at least in my own head we know what we're talking about - let's talk about the business case. There's a strong business case for disability-inclusive hiring in Ontario. It is not a charitable act. As shared by the access uh- by Accessibility Canada, the benefits can include increasing your potential labor market pool. So 1 in 5 Ontarians have a disability. This group represents a huge market of employees and of consumers. Understanding the needs, skills, and variability of this group can expand our Canadian human resource pool and our ability to best serve a large segment of our population. We also know that individuals with disabilities score average or above average for attendance, safety, and job performance when given proper training, accommodation, and support. That's something that any employer is looking for. Beyond direct hiring and performance of any individual employee, companies that invest in their disability inclusive employment practices reported increases in major KPIs such as client satisfaction, safety, and job retention, attendance, performance. This is where value meets shrewd business sense and this is what we're talking about today.

With all of that business case in mind, what is the current state of youth disability employment? Well, Canadians with disabilities have lower employment rates than those without disabilities. So right there we have 61.8% reported dis- um reported employment rate for individuals with disabilities, uh as compared to 77.8 for the general population and this rate further declines, as you can see on the screen, as disabilities become classified as more severe. There's also training considerations. So individuals with disability who have attained a high school diploma or certificate or less, so have not educated themselves above that, um have a rate of only 45% employment compared to 68.1% employment for individuals without disabilities with that same um high school uh education. Finally, youth ages 15 to 24 are at partic- particular disadvantage in today's labor market because 70% uh 70- 17% of youth with disabilities were neither in employment nor education or training or are considered neat. This percent raises to 28% among those with more severe disabilities. So sitting without, not in education, employment, or training as compared to 11% of youth in the general population.

Why is this important? Well, employment is a recognized social determinant of health, which is partially why we from a hospital are here doing employment training programs and talking to you today. We know that early intervention during high school, so starting during high school to support employment participation for youth with disability, relates to a greater amount of time individuals can access and participate in the workforce. improved workforce attachment, and economic benefit to society. So, really let's talk about this business case, these low statistics, and how how we can connect youth with disabilities meaningfully to our Ontarian and Canadian workforce.

We'll start with what we call this best practice of starting early, and it is exactly what it sounds like.

What starting early means is that we are helping connect youth meaningfully to the workforce. So, this starts during high school for two really good reasons, a few good reasons but I'm going to present two. The first is a developmental argument. While youth are still building skills for adulting, you know it's a crucial cognitive and social development period. Second is practical. When leaving high school, youth in general are expected to be workforce ready. If we exclude youth with disabilities from opportunities to build skills in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them during high school and then have them exit high school without any of these skills, they are exponentially behind their other cohorts and their other classmates. So when do we start early? It's during high school. It is before they have already left our education system. What is starting early? It's it's the different practices that we do in these starting early practices. They include self-discovery, experience, risk-taking, supported reflection (helping them make sense of what they're learning), and then generalizing it to next step, so understanding what you're learning and how you can move it forward in your life. Starting early has to start in real world contexts where individuals can value and be valued. They can learn the value of a hard day's work, of what has to go into it and of all the things that go into putting together a career, and they can feel valued, build that understanding of why it's so important to be in the workforce. We can also build value from those around them. People seeing an individual with a disability in the workforce can understand that these are valued members of society who can and should be included in our workforce. How do we do it? Through programs and services that are supported by evidence, that are targeted and directed towards youth with disabilities. And finally, who is involved in a start early um a start early program or a really a start early model? And the answer is everyone. It needs to be equitable access for youth to employment training. Equitable knowledge and skill building for employers. Equitable contribution and oversight for society, for the public. There's a role for everyone in this and so no matter who you are today in this webinar you have a stake in what we're talking about.

Now we all know the best way to get something to move into practice is to make a complex model. So that's what we- no I'm just kidding. Um really what we need to do is we need to understand what's going on in the larger picture so that we can begin to act and align things in a way when you take your piece you understand how it relates back to the whole. So what we did is, Holland Bloorview created our Employment Pathways Model. The Model has a number of different um sort of strata that we work with. Uh the whole thing is underlined here in green with this starting early. We start early and support youth through postsecondary or through their their employment journey, to start. We also have, um in this model, the importance of underpinning person-directed employment. planning, making sure that it's not that youth with disabilities get this program, it's who is the person in front of me and how can I align best practice principles, evidence supported programming, and what this IND individual wants, needs, and has. So we bring it all together with a person-directed employment plan. They get to decide where they go. There are the sort of the three stratas of uh intervention here that I'll quickly talk about. The top is um our client focus pathway. These are the programs that directly work with youth, and this is what people usually think about when we talk about a program pathway. Um Carolyn will go into more detail about each of the levels of our um uh Employment Pathway Programs, which include a self-discovery step, employment action coaching, intensive supportive work experiences, and then check-ins and needs-based consults moving forward. Um but again we'll bring that back in later. I want to talk about the other two strata. So uh first is fam- um the sort of the their direct people in their direct realm. So family expectations and supports, making sure that the family or direct supports in a person's life understand what expecting employment means. So responsibilities in the home, understanding what they can do, understanding the um contextual factors that will need to be in place for their youth to work, really giving that realistic understanding of the business case, the advocacy case, and what it's going to look like to look for uh employment. The next thing in this in this strata um is the other Holland Bloorview services. So, we're part of a hospital. We're lucky to be part of a group, a community that has services that are available for socializing, for community navigation, for um life skills. We don't have to be the expert in everything, but we do have to know where the expertise lies. So we know we have to make sure that we know where to refer people so that they can build the skills that we identify they'll need as part of their employment life cycle. And finally school and community participation and resources. Our youth are in school. Um they're connected to co-ops, they're connected to community groups, they're connected to disability related groups. We want to make sure that we're working with these groups to build knowledge, to build support, and to align our message so we are not duplicating services, we're not wasting anyone's time, resources, money, anything. We want to make sure that we are all working together towards an aligned goal, each doing our part. And the final here at the bottom at the Foundation is community and systems focused activities. So, really looking at not just the families in our own program but reaching out more broadly to families and youth to understand the importance of expecting employment, to understand the potential for working and a working life, knowing that employment is a social determinant of health. Um we also really focus on partnerships, so uh interagency collaborations, advocacy, changing policy, making sure that the world into which our youth are leaving these internal programs is one that is equipped to welcome them. We can give them all the training in the world, but if the world is set up to hold them out, which it has historically been, we're not doing anyone a service. We're setting everyone up for failure. So, we're really trying to to uh make those uh um really concentrated efforts to reach out to the community. And finally is employer outreach. So the people who will be directly hiring, training, retaining, onboarding, progressing them. We want to make sure employers have the resources that they need to support and move our youth forward.

Finally another model. Uh I'm not going to focus too long on this one. This is the model of Embedded Employment Supports, and this is a justice-based model that we um that we put forward just to explain everyone's role in the employment process for youth with disabilities. Um so, we obviously have the individual at the center. That's how we focus. Some other people may put policy at the center, you can flip the model if you need to. Um but really showing all of these different connections here, showing that policy is needed to work with funding, employers, community, and direct supports. Employers need to work with the individual but also need help from the community and funders. You know, the direct supports work with the individuals but they also have input from uh policy and from um the community. So, there's a real interconnectedness, there's a real transactional nature between all of the levels, and having individuals with disabilities connected to the world of work. So we're not going to go through the model right now, but just to show that there is this there is in- information behind how everyone's connected and what everyone's role might be.

So, with that, I'm gonna hand it over to Carolyn to share about some different cases that focus on um the individual and program level at which youth with disabilities can have a start early approach, the community and business level of um committing to a start early approach, and a public policy level. Carolyn.

Thanks Laura. So in total we're sharing three examples today of employment related activities and I'll do the first two. Um the first one, we'll be introducing you to Maria who's a former client and now advocate. First we'll do a short video clip of Maria talking to CBC as part of Holland Bloorview's 2024 Ready to Work public awareness campaign. We'll just slide stopping for a minute to turn over for technical reasons for a video.

-with disabilities. It's all part of the Ready to Work campaign by Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto. Patrick Swadden takes us there. Maria Bangash has used a wheelchair her whole life. I remember in high school being the one who didn't have a job. But the 23-year-old is now the outreach coordinator at Smile Canada and is studying human rights at York University. She credits Holland Bloorview, a children's Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, with helping her along the way. At this job I am unapologetically allowed to um use my lived experience, showcase what my life is like, and take charge of my position in the way that works for me. And that's something she's hoping all youth with disabilities get a chance to do.

Thanks for the video share, we'll get our slides back up. Um and while we're doing that I guess I'll just say, for context I I often tell people how proud I am personally to work at a children's hospital that does recognize employment as a social determinant of health and invests in this type of programming for our high school aged clients. But I also find it sad that that is so unusual, uh so this is just part of my personal commitment to advocacy and why I really believe it's so important that we're talking about youth and starting early today, and thank you to the IDEA team for the opportunity. So at Holland Bloorview, our employment program started back in 2007 when a parent lived experience consultant was talking with clients and families in one of our clinics, and they identified a strong theme of concern about barriers that youth with disabilities faced to getting typical skill building and employment experiences. Each year that a teenager doesn't get employment-related experience when their peers do, erodes self-confidence and cumulatively layers differences in skills that can make it impossible just two or three years down the road to get an employer to pull your resume out of a pile, or an electronic pile as the case may be now. So, when we started to talking to youth and families about this topic, I was newly back at Holland Bloorview after doing my occupational therapy degree and had just always been very passionate about the topic of work and health. Uh we were able to um launch our first uh work experience program uh that summer 2007.

On this next slide we have a different kind of uh more simplified take on our employment pathways. This is the top level that Laura was speaking about, focusing on um direct programs, and the pathway has grown since 2007. I'm going to explain by giving some general information, as well as um some examples from Maria's experience. On the left side of the diagram, the two boxes in green depict our program entry points. We call them Youth at Work and VolunteerABLE programs. They're designed as starting points for youth who have little to no employment-related experience when they or their families um you know, and they and their families are looking for a safe place to get started because they um perceive that they will face barriers to getting employment experience. We form a cohort of seven or eight youth who have similar developmental, learning, and social communication styles. Um and then over a period of um 3 weeks in the summer, or like 9 Saturdays for our programs during the school year, we structure a daily schedule of two to three work periods, which are hands on work experiences with tasks directly related to a youth's interest. And then youth gather once or twice a day for uh skills teaching in an interactive workshop format led by a youth facilitator who is an individual with lived experience of disability. This allows for peer learning and understanding of some of the unwritten expectations of workplaces. So for example, at school it's pretty weird to be friendly to people that you don't know, but at work when you pass someone in the hall it's more common to smile and make eye contact. At this stage in her employment journey, Maria was developing skills in managing her self-care in the workplace, energy levels, and uh developing confidence in speaking up. She assisted one of our hospital managers in administering a survey over the course of the summer. Youth learn um earn approximately 45 volunteer hours in this phase of our programming, so meeting the high school graduation component in Ontario. And uh our staff provide job coaching as needed, and uh as Laura alluded to youth are creating a portfolio during the this time as well summarizing their experiences, strengths, reflections about what liked and didn't like, as well as the strategies that enabled them to do their best work. We meet with each youth and family uh at the conclusion to discuss next steps to build from this starting point. After six or seven years of programming of that nature, we added the stream Laura referenced before called Employment Action Coaching, which is like a job finding club uh which is an evidence-based intervention. So you'd set a personal employment goal, uh and then learn about job searching with peers in three group workshops, and then start to work on steps on their action plan with uh facilitation. Uh so our group sessions are for youth plus a family member or sometimes it's a family member participating on their own and then structuring some of the next steps with their youth. Goals at this stage like we've been saying often relate to a developmentally appropriate things like finding a volunteer position to continue regularly in their community or getting into a co-op course through high school (unfortunately there are barriers to that often) or finding a paid summer job. Years ago one youth worked on a self-employment goal of starting a hot dog stand near his cottage, so very flexible. For Maria, thinking about suitable types of jobs and typical application steps were some of her personal actions and she also needed to connect with attendant care services for physical assistance in the workplace and she set up for using accessible transit, uh working through that as well and addressing family concerns about independence in the community. Nine years into our programmatic journey we realized we needed to be more actively working with employers to open doors to youth employment, so we added what we call the Ready to Work program, or in Laura's model the intensive um supports, and we match graduates of our Youth at Work and VolunteerABLE um and Employment Action Coaching programs with employers for paid summer uh jobs. Youth and families really value having an ally in taking this somewhat scary step. Um Maria's first paid job was at a health organization in her community. Our pathway steps are optional, so some youth pursue opportunities on their own after the early experience programs and some do all three steps over a period of 12 to 18 months, and others may return two or three years after their starting point to work on their uh their next steps. We are engaging approximately 60 youth a year, with 10 to 16 of those being in the final Ready to Work stage. Um and I'll just take a minute to note that a lot of the practical steps that um people take for employment are important for other aspects of life, of course. So for example, Maria figuring out her transportation consideration so she could have a summer job really broadened the scope of post-secondary programs that she could consider.

If we go to the next slide, uh this shows some examples of outcomes that we measure with individuals. We use pre and post surveys, and in the recent 2023-24 data year, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participating in our programs made them more prepared for the workforce. Uh we use the valid and reliable Canadian Occupational Performance Measure known as the COMP, measure a client's perception of changes in ability and satisfaction. A common work related goal is uh shown on the right there: "I know what strategies or accommodations help me do my best work." Our average change change across multiple clients in this goal area uh last year was 2.8 points uh and scores of two or more reflect a a clinically significant change. We measure practical outcomes too. So, in the middle there, in the summer this most recent summer, all youth who are part of our ready to work program uh to match with summer employers did get paid jobs. And we're currently in our third um, doing our third longer term outcome follow-up survey with clients who participated in one or more of our programs three or four years ago, and we want to see what they went on to do. Um when we lasted these surveys in 2019, 94% of our respondents had gone on to one or more next steps like volunteering, high school co-op, or paid work. In 2021, that number had dropped actually to 77% which likely reflects pandemic limitations cause we were surveying people in 2021 uh about their involvement in things since uh 2019, uh 2020. So, many organizations were not accepting volunteers and co-op students at that time. We're very much looking forward to examining the trends from our current respondents.

Uh the next slide um I've already spoken a bit about the Ready to Work program where we're developing employer partnerships and then matching and supporting the startup of youth who gained their first work experiences in our hospital programs. This is really a supported employment type of intervention. I wanted to speak a bit to the employer part, so employers are connecting with us because they want to invest in youth and often as part of their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative, uh and they're growing awareness of the benefits of disability inclusive workforces. Um they do, in the same I think as well I mentioned youth do, but they very much appreciate the involvement of an ally organization. So to support their organization's learning about things like inclusive interview formats, accommodations planning, and alternate strategies for teaching and training for job tasks. Uh our employer partners consistently report a high lev- high level of employee engagement, real real enjoyment in mentoring young workers and seeing them uh grow and learn. So, currently we're operating uh all of our programming um primarily in Toronto. We are writing implementation guides and working to develop partnerships to scale and spread access to programs like this for youth elsewhere in Ontario.

Just going to speak to our second example now. Uh oh sorry. First, to summarize this. So in summary for this section, hopefully I've given some illustrations around um how we personalize supports within our program streams and then provide options as well for uh progression.

And then with our next slide um and section we want to speak about an example. Holland Bloorview is also involved in an international best practice school-to-work training program called Project SEARCH.

So I'm going to share McKenzie's story uh in this section while also talking about the Project SEARCH model more generally.

And on to the next slide. So, remembering some of the statistics that Laura highlighted at the start, um Project SEARCH is preparing youth who are really furthest from employment for employment. Um the youth who who access Project SEARCH in Ontario are not earning credits towards high school diplomas, and so are are not continuing on to post-secondary education. Uh these are youth with disabilities that significantly impact learning and social communication, for example intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities. The Project SEARCH model was developed in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. That hospital now employs more than 80 graduates of their program, uh and now there's more than 700 organizations across the US and 9 other countries that have licensed their model. So Holland Bloorview is a partner in the Toronto project search site and we're coordinating the Ontario community of practice for this initiative.

This slide uh is a depiction of of the Project SEARCH model. It uh it can be operated either as a high school to work transition program or as a training program for adults. In Ontario at present there are 19 Project SEARCH locations and all of them are operating um as programs for students in their final year of high school. There there are three key partners: uh host business where the program is immersed or embedded, an education partner that uh supplies a teacher instructor be uh onsite um all the time with a cohort of approximately 10 students, and then an employment agency partner which provides skills trainers or what many of us know as job coaches and job development expertise. Over 10 months, uh the the part on the left is kind of showing some of the components, students get hands-on training in technical uh job specific skills and classroom teaching and job coaching for employability skills. Skill development is deliberately layered within and across three placements or internships. Students engage in six personalized employment planning meetings with their families, teachers and coaches, workplace supervisors and mentors, and the employment service provider agency. This ensures a strong collaboration um between school and the employment agency and then the agency provides job development, job startup, and maintenance supports with graduates and their employers. Project SEARCH collects data from all sites nine months after each cohort graduates. The outcomes are published on the website which is ProjectSEARCH.us. On average project search programs typically achieve 70% employment for graduates which is is important remembering Laura's stats that uh shared earlier that around 29 or 30% employment of of Canadians with very severe disabilities who this model is is serving. So we really believe that this kind of multi-sector collaboration is part of the reason for the success of the Project SEARCH model and I'll talk more about that in a few minutes but I'm just going to first share specifics from um McKenzie's example.

On this next slide um we'll say Project SEARCH Toronto is based at Holland Bloorview um together with three of the Northern Toronto rehab buildings of the University Health Network. The Toronto District School Board and Community Living Toronto are our partners. McKenzie graduated a couple years ago. When she started she knew that she liked helping people so that was a starting point for different types of work experiences. McKenzie's first internship was at the hospital's onsite daycare. She served lunch to the children, maintained linens, and sanitized toys and furniture, and helped with other parts of the routine like when the children are getting ready to go outside to play. She learned technical skills, uh such as following detailed safety procedures for sterilizing, setting up for lunch, and portioning food. She worked on employability skills such as handling anxious feelings and stress, and also maintaining a focus on her own work and routines despite noise and a lot of visual distractions around her. McKenzie's second placement was at the hospital school. She sanitized students uh mobility equipment and learned to push students in wheelchairs. She advanced employability skills of following an independent daily schedule and communicating with a wide variety of team members in her third uh placement McKenzie was matched with a patient transporter role. In terms of job specific skills she needed to learn to find her way around several large buildings, how to safely transfer patients from a bed to a wheelchair, and how to move wheelchairs and stretchers around the building. She also had to learn what to do when patients are on oxygen. She practiced advanced customer service skills because patients communications are often affected by their illness, stress, and other factors. McKenzie was then hired as a porter at UHN after her training with Project SEARCH. She now works an average of 25 plus hours a week. She's part of the union. She earns a living wage, so well above minimum wage, and is contributing to the hospital's pension plan. As you can see, um Project SEARCH is not only achieving high employment rates for its graduates but also better quality jobs than would be possible without the training. The photo um shows McKenzie on the right with her skills trainer Declan um and I just want to remember to point out here that Project SEARCH programs are based in a lot of different types of industries outside of healthcare, including hospitality, education, manufacturing, financial services, and more. So addition, like additionally, when you train at a program based in a hospital like ours they are still building transferable skills because each program is focusing on skills that are in demand in the local labor market. Thanks Laura yeah next slide.

So this is an example of a system level barrier that is really affecting youth employment interventions and must be resolved. In Ontario employment supports and developmental disability supports for employment are delivered after a student exits the education system, which is shown in the current state um illustration at the top of the diagram. And our current employment rates really reflect that this sequential approach is failing to support youth with significant disabilities to achieve their employment potential, their dreams, and full inclusion. In the US and the UK Project SEARCH is a regional workforce development strategy where sectors are working together in the same time frame and we don't need new money but we do need policy and practice shifts so that funds and supports that exist in our key sectors can combine during the Project SEARCH training year for example to provide an effective amount and duration of support so that we can get better results.

This is my last slide. So just say that um you know really Project SEARCH has an an impact at the individual, community, and broader society levels. Individually it's literally transforming lives as employment enhances income, social inclusion, and then overall health and well-being. At the level of employers, one at a time it's growing disability confidence and inclusive workplaces where unique skills and strengths are valued. Uh Laura is going to speak to the societal benefits.

Um next. I realized I had one more. I'll just note that um hopefully with these two illustrations with those they are examples where Holland Bloorview employment pathways are primarily intervening with youth and with disabilities and their families but really supporting high expectations early on, skill development, and confidence. And then Project SEARCH is building local collaborations, shared responsibility, and accountability for outcomes, employer engagement, and is often resulting in in important shifts that resolve system barriers like the one I was just describing. Back to Laura.

Thanks Carolyn. Alright, so in the interest of time I'm going to, um I'm going to go through this a little bit quickly, only because um the information presented here is uh based on a paper that I just put in the chat, uh it's open access, as well as a report that's coming out next week that updates uh the information to our current system. So, the idea is that if we want programs to be equitably available we need public funding. Right now, we don't have large-scale program data because the programs are not publicly funded. We cannot get public funding because we don't have large scale program data. We're caught in this catch-22, this perpetual loop that is locking many youth with disabilities out of opportunities to learn and grow.

But necessity is the mother of invention. We can intervene with theoretical data based on our actual system and so that's what we did. To promote public funding of stable, equitable start early programs we created a cost benefit model to show lifetime government return on investment per youth funded. So for details on the methods and outcomes I recommend viewing the paper or the report that will be released next week but I'll walk you through the premise today.

We built a model on a comparison of intervention as compared to no intervention. So this means we considered a baseline scenario, which is what our youth might see today just the program the the public public services that are available, what their outcomes might be if they received one of the programs Carolyn just spoke about, and what their outcomes might be if they saw better than expected results from one of those particip- participating in one of those interventions based on our clinical experiences and observations. And to create the scenarios we used global inputs like uh inflation rates and discount rates, local inputs like industry wages, taxes, program costs, social assistance costs, um and persona-based inputs like the individual's job, expenses, wages, hours per week, and just a note that the report and this presentation is based on data on the new Ontario integrated employment services model. Um the publication is based on the old model. Um so when we worked with community collaborators to co-construct realistic personas to test, we came up with two.

The first persona is moving from high school to work. They're aged 20, they have an intellectual disability and autism, and challenges experienced in include limited work experience, social communication skills, uh literacy challenges, time management challenges, uh and so they entered the uh Project SEARCH program that Carolyn just spoke about with a public investment of one time of $16,000.

With no intervention, we spend $313,980 over the lifetime in public cost. That's the gray bar at the top. With Project SEARCH, that number goes down to $186,600, a decrease of 696%, and with the better than expected outcome we see a lifetime cost to government of $10,512 a reduction to a reduction of 1,900 and uh- 1,797% from the baseline. So, this really shows a decrease, so we'll notice that these numbers are all still negative, the government is still paying out, but a significant cost savings towards zero for government over that individual's lifetime and this does not consider the other benefits such as quality of life, well-being, health, caregiver wellness, caregiver return to the workforce, um and uh increased economic benefit.

We also did a university to work persona. The individual is aged 16 when they start our programs. They uh have cerebral palsy and a mild learning disability, and their challenges include difficulty standing and walking for long periods, carrying heavy items, um confidence, so they entered Holland Bloorview's employment pathways program and the public investment was $16,752 over two years. With this individual, um we can see that there was uh with no intervention a lifetime cost uh uh government cost recuperation of $48,273. Uh with the employment pathway services as expected, um that number increased 755% to $191,000 from baseline. Um and with the better than expected outcomes we saw an increase of 1,401% uh to almost $300,000 uh recouped by government, based on um saved social assistance costs and increased income taxes paid.

We also looked at this uh, we chose to look at this at a cohort level. So if we took a cohort of a 100 students in the Project SEARCH uh program in Ontario, assuming that only 70% of them would obtain the um desired results which is the Project SEARCH model, we would still see with a full investment in all 100, we would see a return of uh 8 million or almost $9 million. Similarly with the employment pathways group, with a one with an investment of $1.675 million um we would still see a $10 million recoup over their lifetime only at 70% uh obtaining at least the desired outcomes. So, a really, really huge return and really why is this important? Our modeling shows that with a small public investment per individual the government realizes over 600% returns over the person's lifetime. It's not to say that the government can keep this money for scandals or for other groups or whatever whatever the money they want to do with it. It can be reinvested to support more programming to make the reach of the programming more equitable to areas that may not otherwise have public or privately funded start early programs and invest in an employment pipeline of talented equipped young workers for Ontario and Canada. It benefits the disability community, employers, and the public.

So I'm going to skip over this. Um back to starting early, just thinking about where do you fit in to these examples? Where is your next action step? What steps and roles are missing from our presentation, from our diagram? What should be pictured here? And three things that we think people can do right now is to learn about the unique barriers to employment facing in-school youth with disabilities, work with youth and families and community organizations to develop local solutions, and advocate for public policy and funding to enable early employment experience programs across Canada.

With that I'm going to put up our emails. Uh you can connect with us. Um please be kind. And um uh we have a reference list if anyone would like to see it. So I'm going to stop sharing, and I think we can invite question.

Great well thank you so much the presentation. You covered a lot in a short period of time, uh and I really, really appreciate the systems perspective. I think you are both in such a unique position to be in a hospital, have this employment focus, have this extremely strong research background and publication record, while also being practitioners, and you can see it in the work that you're doing how how thoughtful so much of this is, policy considerations and many other aspects. Um because we we don't have too much time, I'm going to go directly into questions. Um just in case if you happen to join the presentation late, uh please use the Q&A function if you have a question and we probably won't be able to get to everything but I know that Laura and Carolyn have emails um they share them on the slides, so uh if you need those send us an email uh to get them or send them an email if you have access. Um and our first question for you is about getting employers on board, so a very important part of that system, asking how do you get employers on board for both unpaid work experiences and paid work experiences?

Carolyn do you want to answer that one?

Sure. Um I think it's uh, sometimes we're lucky in that employers actually come to us. Um maybe one benefit of being a relatively well-known children's organization in the and and many people are very interested in investing in youth as I mentioned, but when we are um sort of you know out developing connections um we're really uh talking about um some of the the materials that Laura presented, the the workforce benefits of inclusion and uh you know like I could give a quick personal example I guess about that it's something I obviously believe in really strongly. But so it's you know there's about eight grocery stores in the area around my work in Toronto and I can choose to go to any one of them. I go to the one where they hire young workers like uh it's something I believe in, and and you know and I think increasingly we and there you know there's studies about this as well too right, consumers are looking for there to be diversity uh and inclusion um in in the places that they they frequent and um it's it's sort of part of what uh what makes strong and innovative workforces as well too. So um speaking about that kind of combined with one of the other things I was alluding to as well, to like often you know people can can think of that but then they think of some of what the practical details might look like and they have questions like oh you know "will it be more work to train someone who might have a different learning style?" And so really that's where like the idea of sort of uh of saying, so an allied organization, uh in in our case when we're talking about ourselves it's ourselves but like that's a service that employment agencies offer as well too. So that uh there's a partnership in kind of working through some of the considerations that may be unique to an individual and their their their their employer in that context. So we find that really to be very powerful.

And also equipping employers with knowledge so I'm just going to-

Laura you muted yourself.

I muted myself. Um don't do that. Um equipping employers with knowledge, so I in the in the um chat I popped a resource. Um we have an employer resource hub. We we we've heard the same thing you know: "how do we how do we get people involved?" Or if you're an employer, like I'm I'm sort of dipping my toe in the water, so having this knowledge available uh freely and publicly, and educating ourselves in what the realities are for employers, so that we can help them in a realistic and genuine way.

Thank you. And so next question here a lot of this work Holland Bloorview is in Toronto, uh in a big city. Um is there anything that you have found around this type of work being successful but in smaller cities, in more rural areas that maybe aren't so resourced?

Here maybe, like if it's okay Laura I would just- you sorry- I realized we said you would answer first, but I guess one thing I would maybe think to do would be to really pay respect to like, despite some of the difficulties that we spoke about there are a lot of employment agencies and and schools doing you know great work in this area, really caring very deeply, and wanting to help youth get off to a good start. So for example, like Community Living in Sarnia created a program called Summer Transitions to Work I think, um that's quite like um our Ready to Work model. And um you know so there's there's definitely things that people are doing with creative ways, I just think there's so much more that we you know, in in all sort of different sizes of communities, but I I I think and also together with the Ontario Disability Employment Network we did a survey of agencies a few years ago, and there's definitely a strong feeling of will and desire to do it and a sense that like a lot more could be done if we could just unlock uh some of the the funding mechanisms to make it possible.

I would agree. I think the funding mechanisms are important, and in some of our um networking conversations uh there is a question of um uh owning and leveraging what's already working for you, and uh in rural and remote areas where there is less resource what we're hearing is that um uh sharing information, sharing resources, collaborating, and sort of being being able to um um collaborate in that meaningful and integrated way is not unusual. It's actually quite the norm, and it's a skill that many of our over resource areas don't have. So, sharing that spotlight, sharing that information, um and sharing those roles in in a collaborative and meaningful and fruitful way is is actually a skill that might be amplified as long as we empower people to step into that role, remind them that that's actually a superpower that's not that's not something that that is readily available everywhere.

Thank you. And our next question, I I think it relates you know you've mentioned the progressive nature of employment and preparedness for employment and everyone is at a different stage of getting to that point of whether you know it be unpaid, paid employment, or otherwise uh and so our question is: when is it too early to start introducing employment-related programming and/or opportunity?

I think like broadly speaking, I would say there's a a stage that I think like um people in a like in the young person's life somewhat recognize when like starting to really, you know, willingly help out and want to help out around household responsibilities or like you know seeing other um other siblings or peers like volunteering or working for the summer and saying: "I want to too." Um I could share a really personal experience of volunteering with a gro- like some young people one time, in a uh in a shelter uh kind of setting, we were making beds and doing the laundry and uh one of the one of the young one of the individuals was sort of upstairs being like: "I don't want to be here, like I want to go home." So you know, like it I I don't he he was you know maybe just not you could think maybe just not enjoying that particular type of volunteering experience, but I like I think he he actually was wanting to do things more for fun at that stage right. So sometimes it's like that's okay, like you know keep trying it was good that good that you that we tried, and um but there's there's at that sort of stage in all of us it's like when we really want to contribute that's and that's you know a moment and and developing that over time in childhood by presenting lots of opportunities to engage and and have that feeling of like of what we get out of it when when we're in that helper role, um I think that really all builds over time.

And I think we can't overstate um starting in the home if available. Um so really that that helper role can be making your bed or it can be bringing your dishes to the sink, that responsibility and those workplace life skills that that can be modeled and brought into the home and expected in the home in a way that's appropriate to the to the young person.

Thank you. And so we're just about at time, so we're going to hold the questions for now but please do email our presenters if you have any more questions or always feel free to email us as well at IDEA. Um thank you so much to our presenters. Uh this is part of our Speaker Series. We have a presentation once a month approximately. Uh if you ever think like hey there's someone who would like to participate in this to speak, please let us know. Uh you can send us an email at info@vraie-idea.ca. Uh and also just want to thank the team that makes all of this possible. We have Eakam Grewal, Therese Salenieks, Sabrina Chaudhry, Emile Tompa, Rebecca Gewurtz, and very excitingly today our French interpreter as well. Thank you so much. Uh our next webinar will be October 11th, uh so please uh join our mailing list if you like and then you'll find out information about it there. So again, just thank you to our presenters and everyone I hope that you have a nice Friday afternoon. Bye-bye.