



An Open Letter to the Employers of Youth in Our Community

February 1, 2021

Dear Employers,

Wellkin's Youth Engagement Advisory (YEA) and the Community Action Network, Youth Engagement Subcommittee (CAN YES) exist to address barriers that youth in our community are experiencing. Our goals are to better the wellbeing of our community as a whole and amplify the voices of youth without censoring or interfering with the integrity of real youth feedback.

We know that, as employers, you care about healthy and productive workplaces with high employee engagement, great customer service, and low employee turnover. Employing local youth is an integral part of that picture. What you might not know is that our youth are experiencing barriers to successful employment in our community. In particular, youth are struggling with:

- 1) a lack of support in finding and maintaining healthy work/life/school balance (specifically when employers ask youth to work late hours without considering school schedules starting early in the mornings);
- 2) Stigma in workplaces that leads to youth feeling unable to voice concerns regarding mental wellness/safety in the workplace;
- 3) Confidentiality about concerns not being maintained by management/peers.

A key difference between youth workers and adult workers is that often youth are not in control of their own lives. In particular:

- 1) Youth may be facing social pressure from their personal support networks to take on more work or responsibilities than their school schedule really allows;
- 2) Youth may be reliant on parents/caregivers for transportation to and from work, or may not have access to a car, leaving them with unpredictable public transportation;
- 3) Youth may be using work life as a way to avoid home or school life as they may feel safer in the workplace than at home or may not have a stable housing situation to return to.

The good news is that there are ways that you can help support youth employment in our community! Youth are a valuable sector of the workforce and when properly supported can add much value to your business. We recognize that you may already be implementing many of these suggestions and we encourage you to continue creating an even better work environment for youth.

Calls to Action

- 1) Get to know your employees and make space for equal and open discussions in your workplace. These discussions can help to offer solutions to the barriers employees may be facing.
- 2) You have the duty to uphold the confidentiality of your employees. This respect will build trust and encourage mental wellness within your workplace.
- 3) Create an inclusive workplace where all employees feel safe and accepted.

4) Be an advocate and help to reduce the stigma of mental health. Let your employees know who they can reach out to for help.

www.cmhaelgin.ca-support services for individuals in St. Thomas or Elgin County 16 years or older.

www.mentalhealthcommission.ca – ensuring good psychological health and safety within the workplace.

www.reachout247.ca - confidential 24/7 information, support and crisis service for people living with mental health or addictions concerns in Elgin, Oxford, Middlesex and London.

www.wellkin.ca - confidential counselling services for young people (0-17 years of age) and their families.

From personal experience and hearing the experiences of my peers I can confirm that when an employer fulfills their duty to accommodate or even offers accommodations before they are completely necessary, the workplace environment is a much safer and enjoyable place to be and stay. Youth are less likely to leave employment opportunities if they are supported in these small ways that make large differences.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, if you are interested in finding out more ways you can support youth please contact Jessica Ross, Youth Engagement Facilitator, at jross@wellkin.ca.

Sincerely,

Murphy-Issac (They/Them),

Youth Engagement Advisor, Wellkin Child and Youth Mental Wellness

