



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NL YOUTH A FIRST LOOK

COVID-19 has impacted the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are experiencing lay-offs, financial stress, and a complete shake-up of daily routines.

For youth who are graduating, entering the workforce, saving for school, or navigating life as a young parent, COVID-19 is making what is an uncertain stage of life even more turbulent.

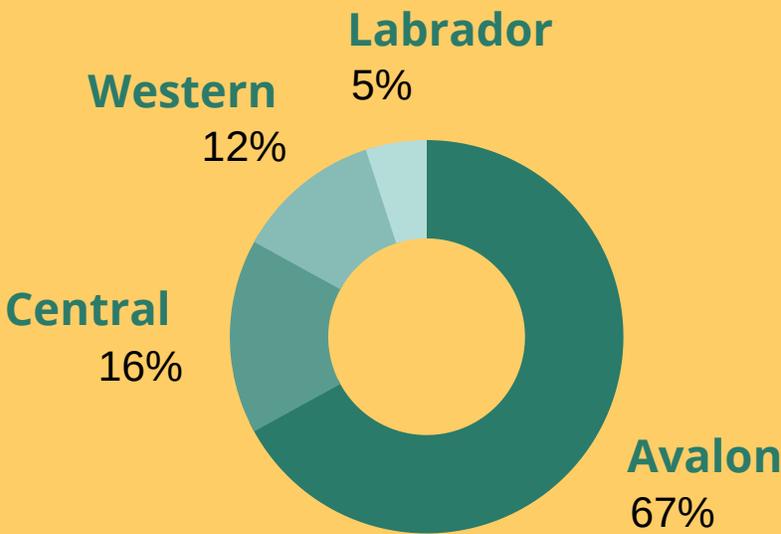
In an attempt to understand what youth are going through, **Choices for Youth conducted a survey and consultation process with 486 young people across Newfoundland and Labrador.** The hope is that the results will shine a light on the unique emerging needs of youth in our province, so that we (as community agencies, governments, and post-secondary institutions) can center young people in how we collectively build stronger organizations, institutions, and systems that empower youth to succeed during COVID-19 and beyond.

CHOICES FOR YOUTH HEARD FROM HUNDREDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Between April 27 - June 7 2020, we heard from **486 participants**

- 451 online survey respondents
- 35 virtual consultation attendees



9.6% Identified as Indigenous

6.3% Identified as a minority other than Indigenous

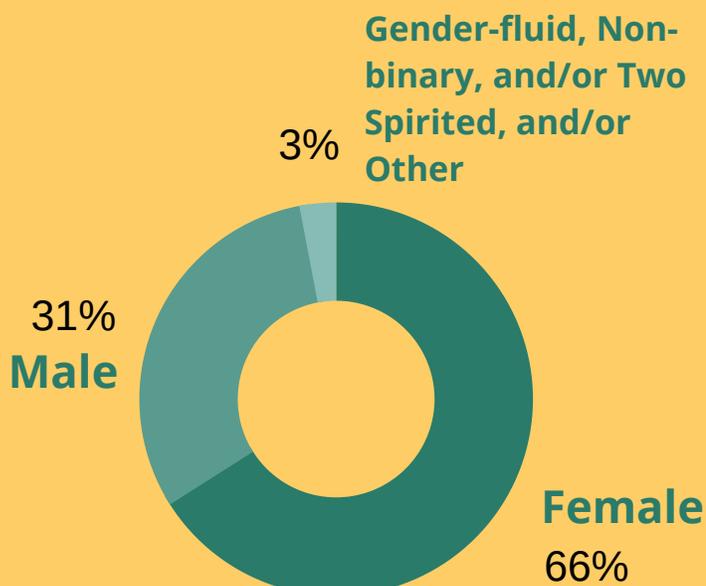
61%

of youth surveyed were unemployed at time of survey completion.

Of this 61% who were unemployed:

72%

were unemployed due to COVID-19.



COMMON THEMES FROM DIVERSE YOUTH VOICES



1

MENTAL HEALTH IS A TOP CONCERN & ACCESSING SUPPORTS IS A CHALLENGE

67% of youth surveyed indicated that their mental health has been impacted as a consequence of COVID-19.

2

POVERTY IS A GROWING CONCERN

77% of youth surveyed feel COVID-19 will impact their earning potential in the next 6 months or more.

3

YOUTH ARE EXPERIENCING MAJOR SETBACKS

53% of youth surveyed shared that their employment goals or career aspirations have changed because of COVID-19.

4

YOUTH ARE STRUGGLING TO ACCESS EDUCATION THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

77% percent of youth surveyed shared that they are uncertain or worried about their education goals.

5

YOUTH SEE OPPORTUNITIES TO CHANGE SYSTEMS

We heard over and over again that there's a need for a more equal path forward, and youth have suggestions for what that could look like.

1

MENTAL HEALTH IS A TOP CONCERN & ACCESSING SUPPORTS IS A CHALLENGE

67% of youth surveyed indicated that their mental health has been impacted as a consequence of COVID-19.

With a significant disruption to normal life, youth have been laid off, forced to move, and are missing the routines and systems that foster mental and physical health. Youth are experiencing elevated levels of stress while navigating a new reality and grappling with an uncertain future, and are feeling isolated as they follow public health regulations or are forced to move away from their support system.

Some youth shared that they are able to avail of online counselling and other mental health resources, while others are struggling to get the help that they need during a time of heightened stress and anxiety.

"Before the outbreak, I was doing well treating my mental health but my inability to see friends, go to town (I live in a remote area) and do activities I used to do to help with mental health, self-esteem issues, etc, has caused my depression and anxiety to worsen to the point I fear my safety may be at risk."

- Youth Respondent

2

POVERTY IS A GROWING CONCERN FOR MANY YOUTH

While some youth are trying to survive after losing their income and not being eligible for CERB, others are desperately trying to save while missing income that they would be making over the spring/summer, which many planned to use to go to school or pay for their next semester of education. For many young parents this has also resulted in increased challenges to making ends meet and provide for their families. Students are forced to move into more precarious housing situations and choose between bills and pursuing their future.

77%

of youth surveyed feel COVID-19 will impact their earning potential in the next 6 months or more

79%

of youth surveyed feel worse about the NL economy than they did before COVID-19

"I moved in with my friend once bubbles were allowed because I could no longer afford to live on my own due to COVID. I have placed my educational goals on standby due to financial reasons & my mental health has been all over the place due to stress and fear."

- Youth Respondent

A First Look

3

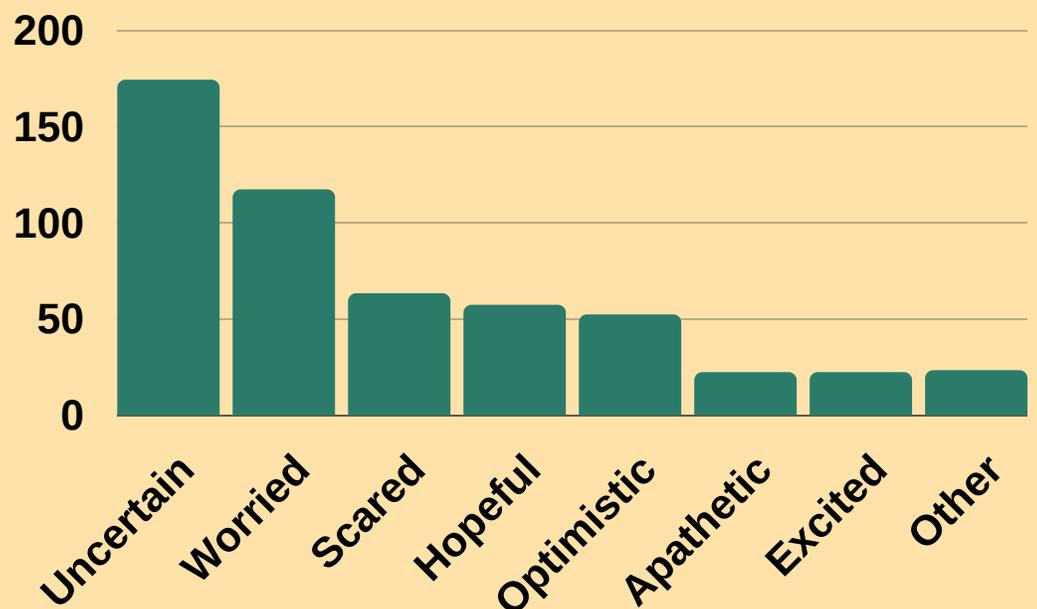
YOUTH ARE EXPERIENCING MAJOR SETBACKS

For youth who were just getting back on their feet prior to COVID-19 - having experienced battles with mental health or addictions, working multiple jobs to save for school, or balancing work and childcare responsibilities - the pandemic presented a significant setback.

53% of youth surveyed shared that their employment goals or career aspirations have changed because of COVID-19, while 50% have experienced a change in their education goals.

Youth have goals of advancing in their career, caring for their family, purchasing a home, and getting an education. Many cited the effect that COVID-19 has had on all of this. Youth are finding themselves reliant on parents and those who don't have supports are struggling to get by.

When asked:
"Which of the following words best describes how you currently feel about your employment goals or career aspirations?"



4

YOUTH ARE STRUGGLING TO ACCESS EDUCATION THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

We heard a lot through this process about online education at the high school and post-secondary levels. While some students are happy to have the option to pursue their education online while saving money by moving back home, others are lacking the tools to succeed - including reliable wifi, devices, and quiet space to work. Youth shared that their grades are slipping and they're questioning whether they should continue or pause their education.

77% of youth shared that they are uncertain or worried about their educational goals

"If [Covid-19] is still going on and come September we can not be in the classroom then I will be taking a year off until I can attend a classroom again which puts me back at least a year."

- Youth Respondent

"I was in my last year of studies with projects to complete and they were switched online, which I believe resulted in lower overall marks."

- Youth Respondent

5

YOUTH SEE OPPORTUNITIES TO CHANGE SYSTEMS

We heard over and over again that there's a need for a more equal path forward, and youth have suggestions for what that could look like. Young people who are on income support are stuck in a cycle of poverty, while young parents are struggling to achieve their career and academic goals in the absence of affordable childcare.

Despite this, youth spoke to the opportunity to change systems, noting that governments have stepped in to support people who are struggling while individuals have stepping up to support local small businesses.

Respondents would like to see this support continue and grow to include those not currently eligible for CERB, or who are in a wider range of work arrangements.

Suggestions for sustained support including a basic income and living wage program were heard loud and clear - seen as a way to allow youth to build a future without having to take on massive debt and delay the ability to reach their goals.

"CERB versus income support is showing a degree of privilege and priority.

People on income support are stereotyped and devalued and that's why we get a lot less money. When I was on income support I got \$160-\$280, every two weeks depending on whether I was on Youth Services or AESL.

That wasn't enough for me, so I did sex work. Other people sell drugs and did art, and when we do that... I didn't pay taxes on sex work, people who sell drugs don't pay taxes... "

- Youth Respondent

NEXT STEPS

This is just the start. Based on the results of this survey and consultation process, Choices for Youth will be releasing a comprehensive report with more details on what we heard and recommendations looking forward.

Supportive Resources for Youth

- **[Bridge the gApp](#)**: Online resources for NL youth struggling with mental health or substance use.
- **[NL Food Program](#)**: A database of food banks, food delivery programs, and other free meal services across the province.
- **[Choices for Youth](#)**: Access to mental health and medical support, drop-in and food services, an emergency shelter, and employment and family services for youth, ages 16-29 in St. John's region.
- **[Community Youth Networks](#)**: There are 34 Community Youth Networks across NL that can help young people overcome challenges, gain work experience, advance entrepreneurial skills, and gain leadership skills.

For more information on this project, connect with:

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