

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) on the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy program

Submitted October 25, 2023,
by **YWCA Cambridge**

The Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program has been an invaluable tool for nonprofits for decades. In the wake of the pandemic and the rising cost of living, CSJ has become even more critical for nonprofits facing increased demands for services at the same time as they are seeing lower and fewer donations, fewer corporate partnerships and fewer and smaller granting opportunities.

CSJ has also been an effective way to attract young people to nonprofit jobs, giving them hands-on experience in enriching, decent jobs, helping many of them build up their skills inventory while earning money to pay for their postsecondary education.

YWCA Cambridge has relied on CSJ for a number of years to support its low-barrier, affordable and high quality summer camps and its free summer youth programming, as well as some of its core communications work. As an organization that has no core funding and relies on grants, donations and sponsorship dollars, CSJ has been critical in sustaining its work. That said, there are also some ways the CSJ program could be improved to better serve both young people hoping to find CSJ placements and the organizations hoping to host those placements.

We are grateful for this opportunity to provide our recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities as it undertakes a study of this vital program.

Our recommendations mirror those made by the Pillar Network:

- 1. Reverse planned funding cuts to the Canada Summer Jobs program and instead commit to an increase in Budget 2024, while also:**
 - a. Prioritizing nonprofit organizations who are providing essential services and are in the greatest need of public investment, rather than for-profit employers; and
 - b. Increasing CSJ terms from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks.

Nonprofits are the backbone of our communities. They provide vital services and programming in areas such as recreation, mental health, care work and more, and they contribute to building safer, more caring communities. Also, because nonprofits prioritize service delivery over profits, investing in them and helping them provide valuable jobs that help young people gain skills and incomes makes good economic sense.

Often, nonprofits apply for longer CSJ terms but are awarded terms that are around 8 weeks. Increasing CSJ terms takes into account the length of time many students are looking to work between school years. It also makes CSJ jobs more viable for lower income or self-supporting students who do not have the same access to other financial supports as more privileged students would. Increasing the length of terms also helps offset the burdens on nonprofits who either have to find the funds to support those positions for the rest of the summer or modify programming to align with the CSJ funding.

CSJ is the only funding available to support wages for hiring summer students. Not only do young people need the work experience and the income, and organizations need the resources to provide those jobs to support their programming, but programs like YWCA's summer camps and youth programs are often the only child care option available to families. Child care remains inaccessible and unaffordable to many families and summer programming such as YWCA's that is either free, subsidized or lower cost is often the only option parents have. CSJ helps YWCA keep summer camp costs down and provide youth programs free of cost to participants who would not otherwise have the opportunity to take part in summer programming.

Furthermore, according to Statistics Canada, youth unemployment rates in Waterloo Region have been steadily climbing - reaching 16.7% in July 2023. Increasing the supply of enriching jobs can help reverse this trend.

2. **Improve program administration and communication**, by:
 - a. Clearly communicating funding projections to employers;
 - b. Making decisions on CSJ funding allotments earlier and informing employers earlier; and

CSJ has been incredibly successful to date and has helped countless employers such as YWCA Cambridge. However, greater transparency and earlier communication of decisions - and also anticipated funding available - will help both employers and young people better plan for the summer season. At YWCA Cambridge, learning we will not receive funding for all of the camp counsellor positions for which we applied, after we've advertised camps and after we've hired the staff to support the number of campers registered causes a significant financial burden. Because YWCA Cambridge keeps its fees as low as possible, there is very little room for increased expenses. In order to help employers better plan summer programming and staffing - and to provide sufficient time for employers to recruit and hire staff - we recommend the review and decision-making timelines be moved earlier in the year.

Canada's nonprofit sector is struggling. In Ontario, according to the Ontario Nonprofit Network, which represents 58,000 nonprofits across the province, the sector is at a "tipping point." Demand for services is at an all-time high while nonprofits deal at the same time with financial challenges brought on by the pandemic and rising costs leading to significant

reductions in donations which fuel most nonprofits.¹ This domino effect will put the future of the entire nonprofit sector at risk if governments do not intervene. Now is the time for deeper investments in a program proven to boost nonprofit organizations' capacity, not defund it.

We appreciate this opportunity to inform HUMA's study of the CSJ program and would welcome any opportunity to consult further.

Sincerely,
YWCA Cambridge

About YWCA Cambridge

For over 75 years, YWCA Cambridge has been a respected leader on issues that impact women and girls in our community. As a member agency of YWCA Canada, YWCA Cambridge is part of a national movement known as the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization, the largest national provider of shelter, literacy, life skills, employment and counseling programs, and is the second largest provider of child care services in Canada. Through leadership, advocacy and program and service delivery, YWCA Cambridge influences communities to ensure all women, girls and gender diverse individuals are respected, valued and equal.

¹ Source: Ontario Nonprofit Network (2023) *2023 State of The Sector: At A Tipping Point*. <https://theonnc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023-State-of-the-Sector-Policy-report.pdf>