

# **Bridging the opportunities gap**

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Standing Committee on Finance

**Submission on priorities for the 2018 Federal Budget**



Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada

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# About Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

As Canada's largest child- and youth-serving organization, Boys and Girls Clubs provide vital programs and services to over 200,000 young people in nearly 700 communities across Canada. During critical out-of-school hours, our Clubs offer safe spaces where young people can explore their interests, develop their strengths, and realize positive outcomes in self-expression, academics, healthy living, physical activity, mental health, and more. Our trained staff and volunteers help young people build the confidence and sense of belonging they need to overcome barriers, form positive relationships and mature into responsible, caring adults.

## Summary of recommendations

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada propose a few measures that would help Canadians – especially young Canadians living in low-income communities – become productive members of society.

To mitigate the effects of poverty among children and youth and ensure they are able to achieve the same life outcomes and levels of productivity as their more privileged peers, the government should:

- 1. Use deprivation indices to identify priority communities in which to invest additional resources that will bolster community support networks.**
- 2. Direct existing program funds towards low-income and vulnerable communities – especially with respect to programs for children and youth. Partner with organizations that reach into these communities to deliver quality interventions.**

To ensure that young people who face barriers are able to make successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment, the government should improve federal youth employment programs:

- 3. Focus the Skills Link program on wrap-around services for youth facing the greatest barriers to employment and offer multi-year funding for high-performing organizations that are actively supporting youth before, during, and after the job search process.**
- 4. Transform the Canada Summer Jobs program into a Canada Youth Jobs program that is open to full-time, part-time, and non-students, and make it available year-round for part-time and full-time opportunities.**

# 1. Invest where there is greatest need

Living in impoverished conditions exposes children and youth to difficult social environments, poor material conditions, and fewer resources to sustain healthy and productive lives. This severely hinders their ability to reach their full potential in health, education, and employment.

Youth from low-income families have an increased risk poorer cognitive, physical, and social development outcomes, poor educational attainment, and lower employment success. This is largely attributable to growing up in neighbourhoods that offer fewer opportunities and resources for healthy development and generate more risk due to an impoverished environment, suboptimal housing, reduced access to goods and services, and a precarious social climate.

Certain children are at greatest risk of these harms, namely, Indigenous and racialized children, children of recent immigrants, children with disabilities or who have parents with disabilities, children whose parents are on welfare, and children whose parents were poor when they were children.

The government has sought to address low-income as a source of disadvantage by generously increasing child benefits. While this is a welcome investment, more is needed to ensure that Canada's most vulnerable children and youth can thrive.

Targeting program resources of departments such as Employment and Social Development, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Innovation, Science and Economic Development towards low-income communities would help counter the effects of material and social deprivation. **The government can identify priority communities by drawing on one of the following deprivation indices:**<sup>1</sup>

Composition focus	Townsend (1987)	SERI (1997)	INSPQ (2008)	Can-Marg (2006)	VANDIX (2007)
Education employment	Percentage of population >16 unemployed	Proportion graduated high school  a) Unemployment rate for >15 b) Rate of employment for women c) rate of labour	Proportion 15+ with no high school  Ratio of >15 employed to not employed	a) Proportion with no high school b) Proportion with degree/diploma Proportion <15 unemployed	a) Proportion no high school b) Proportion with university degree  Rate of unemployment

		participation in 3 employment categories			
Income	Percentage of households with no car ownership	Average total household income	Average income of people >15	a) Proportion >15 receiving transfer payments b) Proportion below the low income cut off	Average income
Housing	Non home ownership as percentage of all households	a) Percentage home ownership b) Percentage spending >30% of income on housing		Proportion of homes needing major repair	Percentage home ownership
Lone parenthood		a) Lone parent (female) families b) Percentage between 15-25	Proportion lone parent families	Proportion lone parent families	Proportion lone parent families
Other	Percentage overcrowding per size of house	a) Percentage moved ≤5 years b) The age-dependency ratio c) Proportion French and Aboriginal speaking	Proportion >15 living alone	a) Percentage moved ≤5 years b) The age-dependency ratio c) Proportion minority d) Proportion immigrated ≤5 years	

## 2. Support quality programs

Boys and Girls Clubs across the country deliver quality programs during out-of-school hours. Clubs are primarily located in low-income communities, where we help meet the needs of children, youth and families. Nearly 60% of the 200,000 young people Clubs serve are in low-income situations.

Boys and Girls Clubs mitigate the effects of poverty by providing the opportunities and social supports that children and youth need to succeed and thrive.

Nearly two decades of research<sup>2</sup> has shown that children who consistently participate in after-school programs are more likely to become physically and emotionally healthy adults who are involved in a variety of caring relationships, who are self-sufficient and independent, and who participate fully in society.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has rigorous quality guidelines and operating standards that have led to a strong track record. An evidence-based model for success guides program development and evaluation.

We are proud to work with the Government of Canada and private sector partners on several initiatives that help young people from low-income communities reach their full potential.

- **Skilled4Success** – Supported by Employment and Social Development Canada and Kal Tire, Skilled4Success provides youth with reliable information about the skilled trades, job skills training and networking with professionals, and job-shadowing opportunities.
- **Play On** – Supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, Play On aims to improve the physical and mental health of children aged 8-12. Play On takes the most cutting edge and effective approaches from both the clinical and academic realms of childhood trauma and healing and adapts them to a Boys and Girls Club environment.
- **Kid Food Nation** – The largest food literacy effort Canada has ever known is being supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Aimed at children aged 7-12, Kid Food Nation promotes healthy eating, celebrates Canada's culinary heritage, and reaches all Canadians through an ambitious media campaign.
- **Kid Tech Nation** – Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is currently seeking funding from Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada to increase the number of Canadian children and youth equipped with science, technology, engineering, mathematics, coding, and digital skills, especially among groups who are underrepresented in those fields.
- **Raise the Grade** – Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is currently seeking funding from Employment and Social Development Canada to help youth graduate from high school and transition to postsecondary education or employment. Raise the Grade holds enormous potential, including a substantial presence across Boys and Girls Clubs, significant infrastructure in place, and a large number of participants registered in the program for the years to come.

**Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are able to direct federal program funding and high quality interventions to low-income communities. Our Clubs are effective vehicles for programs that build young Canadians' ability become healthy and productive members of their communities and workplaces.**

### 3. Improve youth employment

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada commends the government for setting up an Expert Panel on Youth Employment to unpack barriers young people face and propose changes that would modernize the support they receive to enter the workforce. This is key to ensuring youth are productive members of society.

We support the recommendations made by the Panel on Youth Employment, specifically with respect to investing in the most vulnerable, enhancing the Youth Employment Strategy, and focusing on Indigenous youth.

We concur with the Panel that the **Skills Link program should:**

- **Provide wrap-around services to those most at risk, and prioritize youth facing the greatest barriers to employment:** NEET youth, racialized youth, youth who have disabilities or mental health issues, those who are living in poverty, or who have experienced childhood trauma.
- **Offer multi-year funding for high-performing organizations that are actively supporting youth before, during, and after the job search process.**

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada also supports broadening the Canada Summer Jobs program. Each year, local Boys and Girls Clubs across the country hire over 600 youth with the help of Canada Summer Jobs grants. But youth who are not full-time students are excluded from such youth employment programs – we'd like to see that change. A short term work opportunity can motivate a young person to pursue a new interest, help them gain the experience they need to secure another job, or spark interest in going back to school.

For this reason, **Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada supports transforming the Canada Summer Jobs program into the Canada Youth Jobs program – opening it up to all youth (regardless of their status as a student) and making it accessible year round through a range of full-time and part-time work opportunities.** The new programs should give employers and youth greater flexibility to choosing the duration, timing, and hours for work placements.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada also wants to express support for the Panel's call to: 1) update Canada's Labour Standards (including eliminating unpaid internships, except those that are part of an academic or community program) and; 2) broaden Employment Insurance eligibility. These two measures would directly address the precarious reality of work for young people and convey a clear message that government is listening and adapting to changing needs.

Boys and Girls Clubs are proud partners of the Government of Canada and committed to doing our part to help youth be job ready and make successful transitions into the workforce.

## In Conclusion

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are respected and impactful partners in communities across the country. We are proud to work with government and private sector partners to deliver quality programs that mitigate the impacts of poverty and help young people be healthy, educated, and productive members of society.

As it plans its 2018 budget, government should use deprivation indices to identify priority communities in which to invest resources from existing federal programs – especially with respect to child and youth. Government should also adopt the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment and ensure that youth employment programs meet the needs of those who face the greatest barriers.

Together, we will prepare young Canadians to meet the challenges ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> Table compiled by Cristall, Nora Deanne. (2016). The Influence of Neighbourhood Deprivation on Health Related Quality of Life in Advanced Arthritis. PhD Dissertation. University of Manitoba.

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<sup>2</sup> The Harvard Family Research Centre Project has a database and bibliography of research supporting the positive outcomes of after-school programs for children and youth ages 5 to 19 years. <http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time>