

# PROJECT **INTEGRATE**

Exploring Future Employment Pathways



## How Digital Platforms Are Tailoring Youth Pathways To Employment

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Project Partners:



**FIRST WORK**  
ONTARIO'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Digitization in the Workforce Development Ecosystem

It's no understatement to say that the impact of digitization has been far-reaching; revolutionizing traditional practices in every sector here in Canada and around the world. Even workforce development has been dramatically transformed. Now, digitization in this field has accelerated to include self-paced micro-credentialing platforms, gamification of career exploration tools and the integration of technology into how employers attract, retain and upskill workers. Technology has become an integral part of workforce development with digital training and career navigation platforms incorporated into workplaces and educational systems. These tools are shaping the way youth and professionals interact with learning, employment and their ability to pursue career opportunities around the world.

The pace of change within career journeys has also accelerated. Over the last decade, technological changes have enabled the development of project-based, short-term employment opportunities. This rise in the gig economy has led to a surge in workers having shorter work experiences, spending more time job-searching and has illustrated the need for upskilling and continued learning. While these short-term roles are an opportunity to gain experience, they often do not translate to long-term job security or incorporate professional development opportunities.

Consistent professional development and upskilling have become essential for all job seekers to boost their profiles and adapt to the evolving skills needs of employers. Technical skills are only one area of focus; social and emotional skills are also prioritized by employers today, including communication skills, adaptability and resilience. While these skills are in high demand by employers, they are often overlooked by traditional educational channels. This has led youth to increasingly rely on targeted, digital training opportunities alongside formal degree and diploma programs. Today's youth are facing the challenge of consistently remaining competitive, upskilling, networking and navigating the labour market more methodically than ever before.

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## Project Integrate and the Youth Path to Employment

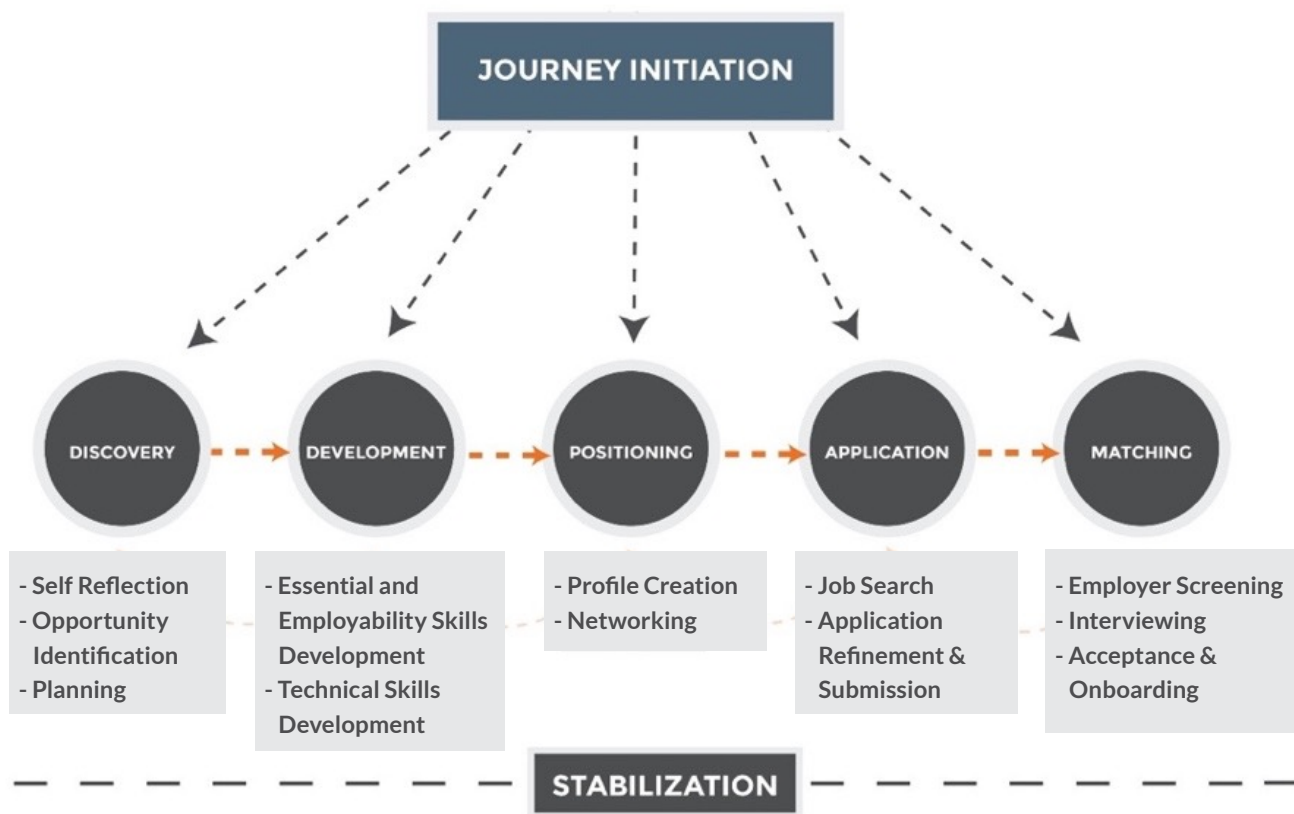
Project Integrate was launched in 2019 by a coalition of partners to test an innovative, evidence-based approach to skills development that can help youth understand and navigate the labour market in more targeted ways. The initiative explored how employment pathways can be enhanced by technology to support targeted employment skills training and be more easily transferred in the youth employment system.

Project Integrate engaged more than 160 employment service staff in roundtable consultations and surveyed 240 staff from the sector across Canada. Based on this discovery process, Project Integrate developed a Youth Path to Employment framework that has been synthesized into five key phases: Discovery Phase, Development Phase, Positioning Phase, Application Phase and Matching Phase.

- **Discovery Phase:** Youth actively and passively absorb information that can help direct subsequent phases of the employment journey.
- **Development Phase:** Youth seek to improve their eligibility for employment through the cultivation of a variety of skillsets. This includes technical skills as well as essential, social and emotional skills.
- **Positioning Phase:** Youth explore mechanisms to build their personal brand and communicate their value, aptitudes and skillsets. Youth generate their profile as well as engage in networking opportunities.
- **Application Phase:** Youth seek out and target specific job opportunities. Once opportunities are identified, job seekers engage in employer research and applying for jobs.
- **Matching Phase:** Youth engage in various styles of employer interviews and assessments. This phase ranges in intensity and increasingly includes both human and automated screening techniques.

In addition to the five key phases of the youth employment journey, research also indicated the importance of wrap-around stabilization support to ensure youth successfully continue along their path to employment. Stabilization may include a variety of services such as financial assistance, housing assistance, health and wellness services, mental health services, and other supports.

FIGURE 1: PROJECT INTEGRATE YOUTH PATH TO EMPLOYMENT (2020)

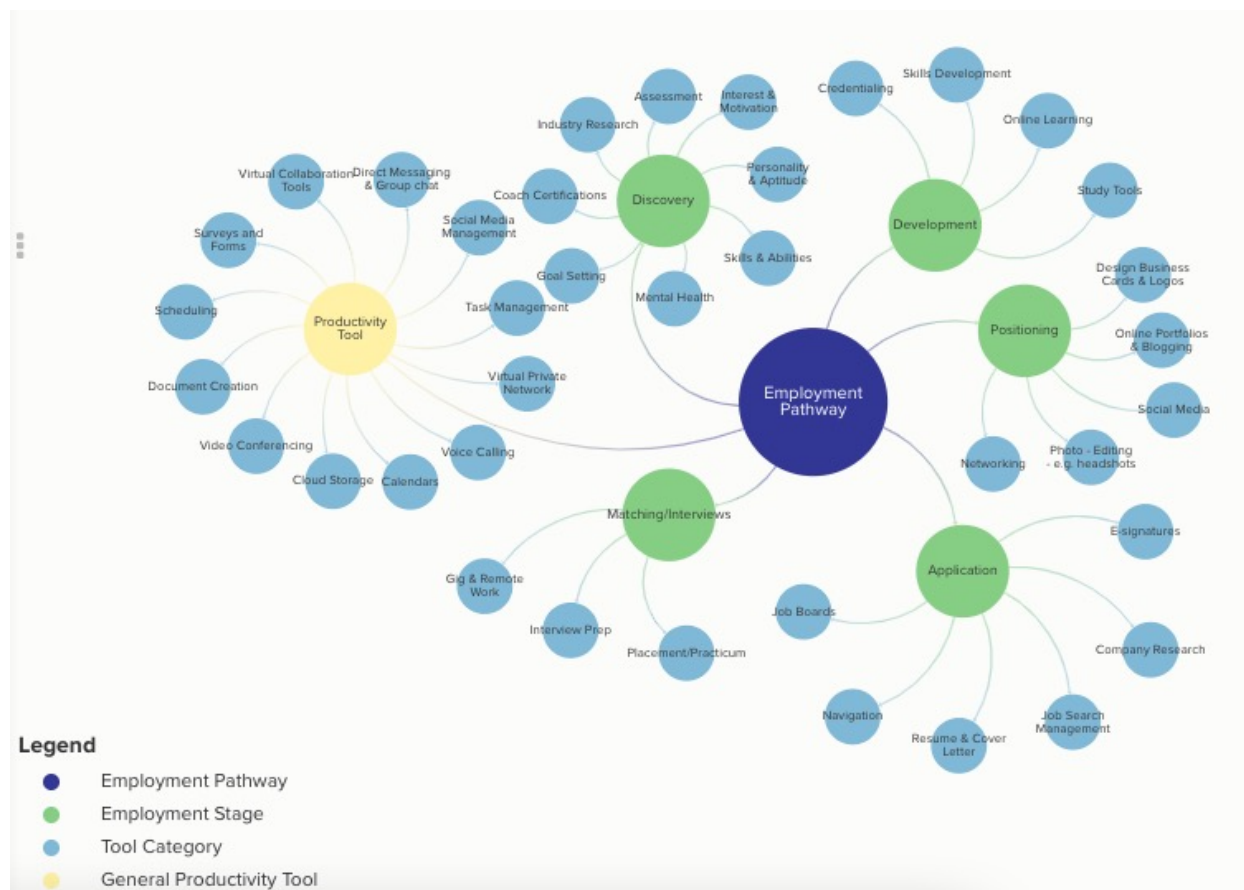


While each of these phases may appear separate and distinct, the chronology of these phases and their sub-components vary widely and are based on the individual's unique context and needs. The Youth Path to Employment is not linear, as shown in Figure 1. For instance, youth could begin their journey at the "Application" Phase before returning to the "Discovery" phase to clarify their goals and aspirations. Additionally, youth may simultaneously complete actions related to a variety of phases. The diversity of needs, skills and interests of Canadian youth must be taken into account when matching them with the right digital tools that can guide them in their journey.

## Sub-categories within the Youth Path to Employment

Based on the pan-Canadian consultations and extensive research, Project Integrate has compiled and assessed an inventory of more than 350 digital tools and platforms utilized by youth and the youth workforce development sector. This inventory was used to develop further sub-categories within the Youth Path to Employment, as seen in Figure 2. The tools and platforms assessed, help youth, independently or with the support of employment service providers, navigate the various phases of the Youth Path to Employment.

**FIGURE 2: PROJECT INTEGRATE DATA VISUALIZATION (2020)**



## Shared Characteristics of Youth Workforce Development Tools and Platforms

To further understand why the tools and platforms identified through research are widely used in youth workforce development, Project Integrate assessed and identified some shared key features. The following are some characteristics that impact the suitability and usability of the tools and platforms for youth:

- Device compatibility, hardware, and licensing requirements play a role in which tools and platforms are conveniently and comfortably used by youth and service providers. A majority of the tools assessed are compatible with desktops, mobiles and tablets and support Windows, macOS, Android and iOS. Some tools also require access to specific hardware such as cameras and speakers, which may be a limitation for some users.

- One hundred per cent of the tools assessed are available in English, while over 50 per cent also support other languages. A majority of the platforms that support multiple languages also support over six languages each, including French, Chinese and Spanish. The prevalence of tools supporting multiple languages suggests that user-friendliness and tailored service play an important role in making them accessible to youth.
- A large number of platforms and tools allow users to create and save personal profiles to customize their experience and ease subsequent use. A number of the platforms assessed have data storage and profile development capabilities which encourage future use as youth do not have to re-enter their preferences each time.
- Of the 350+ tools and platforms assessed, a majority of platforms have negligible or no skills and capability prerequisites for users. Less than five percent of the tools and platforms assessed require users to have prerequisite skills or capabilities, and are built to maximize usability at any skill level. The platforms that do have prerequisites either need basic course or content-related knowledge, basic IT and software skills, or basic project management skills.
- A majority of the tools and platforms assessed have a multi-tier pricing structure to maximize user accessibility and to efficiently meet user needs. Many tools employ a “freemium” pricing structure where basic services are provided for free, but advanced features can be unlocked by paying a fee. This multi-tiered pricing structure allows youth to try different platforms and services, but also offers access to additional, premium resources for professionals and service providers for a fee.

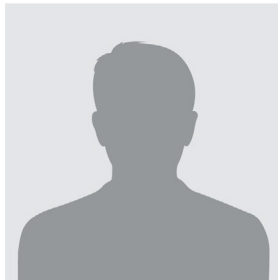
## Hypothetical Youth Personas and Their Career Journeys

Every young person’s career journey is different. As such, Project Integrate has also developed some fictional user personas based on consultations with youth employment service providers, employers and youth. These personas were developed to explore the career journeys and needs of four hypothetical youth with different life circumstances, interests and barriers. The personas further provide a lens through which to assess why different youth may use different training, employment and career navigation tools and why the Youth Path to Employment is not necessarily linear.

The hypothetical persona of “Dylan” in this section is an example of how different individuals have access to, and need varied digital training, employment and career navigation platforms based on their experiences, goals and phase within the Youth Path to Employment. Three additional hypothetical personas can be viewed in the Appendix, to highlight how the interests and life circumstances of youth can affect which digital tools they access.

The platforms and tools used in the user personas have been matched based on the value proposition of each tool and the specific barriers faced by each persona. The value propositions are derived from the platform websites. The needs of the fictional personas, as well as factors such as target audience, pricing structure, supported languages and hardware requirements of tools have also been considered when matching personas to tools.

# Dylan



"I just need something that pays the bills."

**Age:** 22

**Gender:** Male

**Relationships:** In a Committed Relationship

**Location:** Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

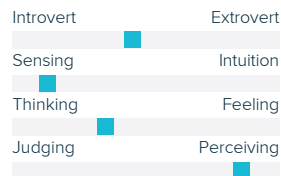
**Education:** High School Diploma + Pipefitting Certificate (Incomplete)

**Previous Work:** Informal/Labour

**Expected Income:** 30 - 50 K

## Personality

ISTP - "The Craftsman"



Resourceful  
Independent Realist

## Career Goal

- Obtain sustainable employment that serves his short-term needs, and allows him to remain independent

## Biography

Diagnosed with a learning disability, Dylan always struggled in school. After years of conflict with his teachers and school administration, he finally completed his high school diploma. Upon graduation, he spent a year working on the shop floor of a local factory. Eventually, he decided to pursue a certificate in pipefitting. He'd heard there were plenty of jobs in the trades in Alberta. While at college, Dylan fell into a pattern of recreational drug use. Eventually, he was ejected from college, which launched a downward cycle and more drug use. His family finally intervened and Dylan agreed to a stint in rehab.

Having recently been released from rehab, Dylan is trying to decide what to do next. He thinks he might be able to get a job in pipefitting without a certificate but he's not sure if that's what he wants to do. He's always enjoyed cooking, and being a cook would mean he could stay in Nova Scotia with his girlfriend rather than relocating to Alberta. Maybe he could even work in a bar? Though, that environment might reignite old vices.

The reality is that Dylan has no idea what he wants to do - nor does he know what he would be good at. He just knows has to get started. It's overwhelming at times. Not having any income means he can't afford to relapse. So, he's tried to avoid his old circles, but that means he's been isolated, lonely, and at risk of depression. He knows he needs to find a job soon so he can get into a positive cycle. Otherwise, he risks falling back into old habits.

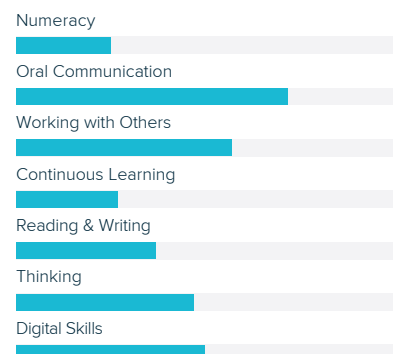
## Motivations

- Staying happy and healthy
- Avoiding relapse and enjoying his 20's

## Key Challenges

- Discover Phase - Understanding career path options and determining what to do next
- Develop Phase - Building essential and employability skills
- Apply Phase - Staying motivated and keeping on top of the job search
- Match Phase - Putting his best foot forward at interviews

## Skills



## Relevant Tools

ALIGN from OTEC - Integrated Personality Assessment and Career Exploration Tool (Discover)

"Explore Job Prospects" - Industry Research Tool (Discover)

123Test - Competency & Work Values Testing Tool (Discover)

Kijiji Jobs - Search Tool for Entry Level and Casual Work (Application)

Quizlet - Flashcard-based Interview Prep App (Match)

Habitica - Gamified Habit Forming (Various)



# In Conclusion

Digital training, employment and career navigation platforms are becoming increasingly integrated into the workforce development sector in Canada. Through extensive research and consultations, Project Integrate has built an understanding of how youth navigate the complexities of the employment journey today, as well as the tools and platforms they use along the way. The phases of the Youth Path to Employment and the sub-categories within, provide insight into the roles digital tools and platforms play in youth employment today. While the youth personas provide perspective on how each individual has different interests, priorities and life circumstances that affect the various platforms they use. Together, Project Integrate’s research examines how a single, technology-enabled employment pathway can be created to enhance youth’s outcomes and improve their career navigation experience.

# APPENDIX

# Esam



"I heard Canada had so many opportunities. Now that I'm here, I feel like I'm letting my family down."

**Age:** 29

**Gender:** Male

**Relationships:** Married, Father

**Location:** Winnipeg, Manitoba

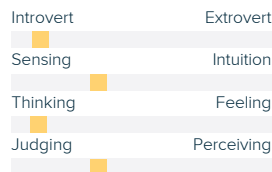
**Education:** MSc Electrical Engineering

**Previous Work:** Electrical Engineer

**Expected Income:** 80 - 100 K

## Personality

ISTJ - "The Inspector"



Thorough  
Efficient  
Organizer

## Career Goal

- Finding a job in his field that allows him to continue along his established career trajectory

## Biography

Esam, a newcomer to Canada, was born and raised in Dakar, Senegal. Trained as an electrical engineer at Université Cheikh Anta Diop - Senegal's #1 ranked university, Esam spent six years with Senegal's state power authority.

In early 2020, Esam relocated to Canada with his wife and two young children. He'd heard there were better opportunities in Canada, and since his wife had family in Winnipeg, they chose to relocate there.

Since arriving in Canada, Esam has struggled to integrate with the community and to find full-time work. His first language, French, turned out to be less helpful than he thought for finding jobs - at least in this part of Canada. He's been able to find some odd jobs, but nothing related to his field.

Esam has been hesitant to take on anything permanent that doesn't leverage his education and skills, but now he's facing pressure from his family to start earning. Should he continue to bet on himself and hope for a big pay off, or is he only putting his family further and further behind? Esam's starting to think he may have to change direction, but if he does, to what? If he doesn't, what does he need to do to convince local employers to give him a shot?

## Relevant Tools



Memrise -  
Language  
learning app  
(Develop)



Degreed -  
Professional  
Upskilling  
(Develop)



International  
Credential  
Transfers  
(Position)



Eventbrite -  
Events and  
Networking  
Tool (Position)



Grammarly -  
Advanced  
Editing Tool  
(Position)



LinkedIn - Job  
Search &  
Application (Apply)

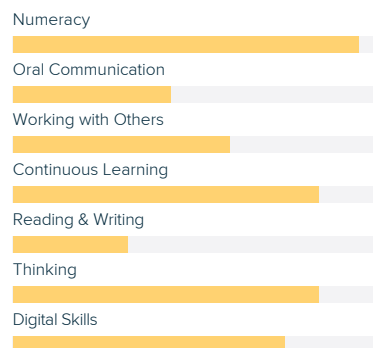
## Motivations

- Delivering on his career goals
- Supporting his wife and two children and moving out of his extended family's home

## Challenges

- Develop Phase - English language proficiency
- Position Phase - Foreign Credentials, Discomfort with networking
- Apply Phase - English-language lexicon and grammar, access to the professional job market

## Skills



# Kahwihta



"I know I'm capable of more than this - I just feel stuck."

**Age:** 20

**Gender:** Female

**Relationships:** Single, Mother

**Location:** Ohsweken, Ontario

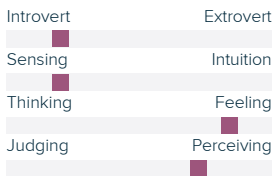
**Education:** High School Diploma

**Previous Work:** Cashier

**Expected Income:** 30 - 50 K

## Personality

ISFP - "The Composer"



Observant

Artistic

Caregiver

## Career Goal

- To transition from precarious employment to a job with long-term career prospects

## Biography

Kahwihta, of the Mohawk First Nation, was born and raised in the Six Nations of the Grand River Reservation in Southwestern Ontario. At 19, Kahwihta has a one-year-old daughter. Kahwihta has worked at a small shop since she was 16. She's always loved people and genuinely enjoys her job. It gives her the opportunity to take the pulse of her community. Additionally, the shop owner has always treated her well, and when her pregnancy became public, he offered her the flexibility to return to work whenever she was ready.

Despite the comfort in her current position, she feels she needs to do something more in order to give her daughter - and herself - the life they deserve. Kahwihta and her daughter live with Kahwihta's mother. Expenses are low, but so is earning potential on the reserve - and her position depends on the success of the shop. She's toyed with the idea of moving to Hamilton to find work, but for the sake of her young daughter - and to avoid paying rent - she's decided to stay home for the time being.

Kahwihta thinks there may be opportunities with the local government - as a clerk, for instance - or doing graphic design work for local businesses. She's always been artistic, and the idea of doing something that leverages that side of herself is really appealing. That said, with a young child at home, she also needs to be pragmatic and flexibility is a must.

## Motivations

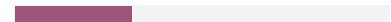
- Finding work she enjoys and that inspires her
- Being close to home and having the flexibility to be to support her daughter

## Challenges

- Discover Phase - Identifying her talents and opportunities in the job market
- Develop Phase - Learning basic graphic design skills in a flexible and convenient way
- Position Phase - Getting her work online and building an audience
- Apply Phase - Finding something that pays the bills while her graphic design business grows

## Skills

Numeracy



Oral Communication



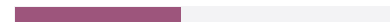
Working with Others



Continuous Learning



Reading & Writing



Thinking



Digital Skills



## Relevant Tools



Enneagram from Truity - Personality Assessment Tool  
(Discover)



Udemy - Online Learning Tool  
(Develop)



Dribbble - Portfolio Tool for Creatives  
(Position)



Upwork - Gig and remote work tool  
(Apply)



Indeed - Job Search Tool  
(Apply)



Any.do - Task List and Scheduling Tool  
(Various)

# Priya



"I feel like I've done everything right along the way and it's still not enough for employers."

**Age:** 23

**Gender:** Female

**Relationships:** Single

**Location:** Mississauga, Ontario

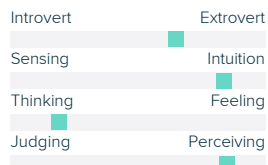
**Education:** Recent Graduate - Bachelor of Computer Science, University of Toronto Mississauga

**Previous Work:** None

**Expected Income:** 60 - 80 K

## Personality

ENTP - "The Visionary"



Curious  
Analytical  
Creator

## Career Goal

- Find a company that can accommodate her physical disability and allow her to launch her career in IT

## Biography

Priya was born in Delhi where she spent the first few years of her life. Born with a condition called Cerebral Palsy, which impacts her mobility, much of her early life was spent learning to manage her condition. In 2006, her family relocated to Canada - Priya's condition was one important factor in that decision. In Canada, Priya found the support she needed. While she still struggled to maintain close friendships, she began to flourish academically and gravitated toward math and computer science.

Upon completion of her high school education, Priya was awarded a scholarship to attend University of Toronto's Mississauga Campus, where she pursued her undergraduate degree in Computer Science. Eight months ago, Priya completed her studies and began to search for her first professional position - and in fact, her first job ever. Priya expected to find a variety of positions available to her upon graduation but has been disappointed in her search. Sometimes she thinks that because of her physical disability, employers discount her technical ability. Her lack of work experience also leaves her on the defensive when it comes to interviewing. She's open to remote and gig work to try to build her portfolio, but she's found it hard to break into the market without any prior work experience. It feels like an uphill battle.

She's worked hard all her life. She's overcome so much to reach her goal of graduation. Yet, it seems like she's back in the same position she's always been trying to escape - dependence on her family.

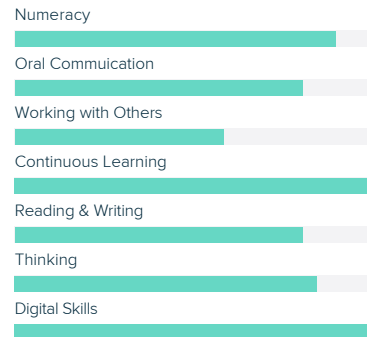
## Motivations

- To have her own independence
- To knock down every barrier and to prove the nay-sayers wrong
- To show that people with physical disabilities can make a mark on the world

## Challenges

- Develop Phase - Breaking into the market, finding practical work experience
- Position Phase - Demonstrating her competence, overcoming false perceptions
- Apply Phase - Finding companies that genuinely value diversity and can accommodate her physical disability

## Skills



## Relevant Tools

Riipen - Project-based Virtual Internships **(Develop)**

LinkedIn - Certificates & Skills Tests **(Position)**

Ten Thousand Coffees - Professional Networking **(Position)**

Resume Genius - Optimized resume templates **(Position)**

Disabled Person Canada - Job Board for People with Disabilities **(Apply)**

Glassdoor - Company Information and Reviews **(Apply)**

