



**Future
Skills
Centre**

Centre des
**Compétences
futures**

Presented by
Signal49
RESEARCH

The Future Skills Podcast

Season 6: Episode 6

Inclusion and Workforce Innovation: Advancing Equity and Opportunity

In this episode of the Future Skills Podcast, we focus on inclusion in the workplace, examining the persistent barriers faced by underrepresented groups and the innovative approaches helping to build more equitable career pathways. Host Jeremy Strachan is joined by Golnaz Golnaraghi, founder of Accelerate Her Future, who shares insights from a recent Future Skills Centre study on the systemic challenges racialized and Indigenous women encounter in advancing to leadership roles, and what organizations can do to dismantle these barriers. We then hear from Agapi Gessesse, CEO of the Canadian Institute for Leadership Advancement and Research (CILAR), who explores how artificial intelligence and emerging technologies can be leveraged to create more inclusive labour market opportunities for Black youth. Finally, Peter Wilkins, Professor at Douglas College, discusses Reboot Plus, a Future Skills Centre-funded initiative that supports at-risk youth through a hope-based model designed to help them navigate education and successfully transition into meaningful careers. Together, this conversation highlights practical strategies and bold ideas for creating more inclusive workplaces and unlocking the full potential of Canada's diverse talent.

Guests

Golnaz Golnaraghi, Founder, Accelerate Her Future

Agapi Gessesse, CEO, Coalition of Innovation Leaders Advancing Respect (CILAR)

Peter Wilkins, Professor, Douglas College

Host

Jeremy Strachan, Manager, Education & Skills, Signal49 Research

Links

Future Skills Centre Homepage: <https://fsc-ccf.ca/>

Future Skills Centre LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/fsc-ccf>

Future Skills Centre Bluesky: <https://bsky.app/profile/fsc-ccf.bsky.social>

Signal49 Research Homepage: <https://www.signal49.ca/>

Signal49 Research Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Signal49Research>

Signal49 Research X: <https://x.com/S49Research>

Accelerate Her Future Homepage: <https://accelerateherfuture.com/>

Career Development and Experiences of Black, Indigenous and Racialized Women in the Canadian Workplace—Project Insights Report: [English](#) | [French](#)

CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals Homepage: <https://ceetoronto.org/>

Coalition of Innovation Leaders Advancing Respect (CILAR) Homepage:
<https://www.cilar.ca/>

Imagine Canada (Report)—The State of Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Canadian Non-Profits: [English](#) | [French](#)

AI-Powered Futures (CILAR Platform): <https://www.cilar.ca/ai-powered-futures>

Reboot Plus Homepage: <https://rebootplus.ca/>

Reboot Plus Expansion—Project Insights Report: [English](#) | [French](#)

Transcript

Jeremy Strachan: Welcome to Season Six of the Future Skills Podcast, brought to you by the Future Skills Centre. I'm Jeremy Strachan, Manager of Education & Skills at Signal49 Research, and your host for the season. On The Future Skills Podcast, we explore what matters most to Canadians when it comes to skills, training, and the ever-changing world of work. Since 2019, the Future Skills Centre has been driving Canada's workforce transformation by funding innovative training solutions, cutting edge research and inclusive partnerships to ensure everyone has the skills to thrive in a changing economy.

In this episode, we look at one of the most important challenges facing Canada's labour market: building a more inclusive future workforce. We begin with Golnaz Golnaraghi, Founder of Accelerate Her Future, who shares findings from a recent Future Skills Centre-supported study examining the barriers Indigenous, Black, and racialized women continue to face in accessing leadership opportunities. We then hear from Agapi Gessesse, CEO of the Coalition of Innovation Leaders Advancing Respect, or CILAR, who discusses how artificial intelligence can help create more inclusive pathways into opportunity, and why the digital divide will require coordinated action across sectors. Finally, I speak with Peter Wilkins, Professor at Douglas College and creator of Reboot and the Reboot Plus programs, a Future Skills Centre-supported initiative helping young people reconnect with education, career planning, and meaningful futures through a hope-centred approach.

As Canada grapples with demographic change, technological disruption, and growing demand for skills, employers and policymakers are increasingly focused on how to develop the workforce of the future. But building a stronger workforce isn't only about training more people or teaching new skills. It's also about understanding who gets access to opportunity, who advances, and who risks being left behind.

Across workplaces, communities, and educational institutions, there is growing recognition that inclusion and equity are not separate from workforce development. They are essential to it. Whether we're talking about leadership pathways, digital literacy, or helping young people navigate transitions into adulthood, creating opportunity requires systems that recognize talent, remove barriers, and support people throughout their careers.

My first guest is Golnaz Golnaraghi, founder of Accelerate Her Future. Through her research and advocacy, Golnaz has been examining how career development systems shape advancement opportunities for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Golnaz, welcome to the podcast.

Golnaz: Jeremy, it's an absolute pleasure. Thank you.

Jeremy: Let's start with Accelerate Her Future. Can you tell us about your own journey and what led you to create the organization?

Golnaz: So my journey really began long before Accelerate Her Future officially existed. And I would say that it's deeply shaped by my own story. So I'm a first-generation immigrant, a racialized woman from Iran. My family immigrated to Canada in the early 80s after the revolution carrying both hope and I would say also a deep belief in education as a pathway to stability and

belonging. Education was really big for my parents. So I did everything in the system that told me to do to be successful: everything from going to school here, building Canadian credentials and completing my MBA at a top business school. And I built Canadian work experience. I worked at multinationals as well as taught as a professor in post-secondary. And yet with all of that, I encountered career barriers in my own journey.

But I would say a notable moment for me, Jeremy, was when I was a professor in academia, I was invited to redesign a leadership development course for post-grad students with one of my colleagues. And through that, through research and studying its efficacy, we were able to secure a fairly substantial government grant to study the model further and expand it into additional courses. That particular experience took me to the US for a leadership development program for women. And what I remember from that was I really didn't feel that it addressed my needs and the things that I was experiencing in the workplace on my own journey towards advancement. And when I asked them about it, their response was, "That's intersectionality. We don't cover that in this program." And I thought, isn't that interesting? And on my way back, I remember so clearly saying to one of my colleagues how much we need something for women that have intersecting identities, particularly around gender, race, culture, etc. And at that point, I knew that I needed to create something. So Accelerate Her Future grew out of that realization, on top of my research, as well as mentoring many young people that were saying the same thing. So what began as listening became a national organization today grounded in pillars of research, which is very important to us; programs for women, but more importantly, systems change where we work within the ecosystem and with organizations. So from the beginning, the goal wasn't just to help women thrive in workplaces, but to change how workplaces work.

Jeremy: We often think of skills as the key to opportunity. But your research suggests that skills operate within systems that determine whose potential gets recognized and whose careers move forward. Why should we be thinking about career development as an equity issue, and what does that mean for the future workforce?

Golnaz: Jeremy, we talk about the future of work. The conversation is often dominated by skills, right? Upskilling, reskilling, credentials, AI literacy—all those things matter. There's no question. But we often treat skills as neutral, as if building skills automatically leads to opportunity. And our research shows that skills operate inside systems, right? And those systems determine whose skills are recognized, developed, and translated into career opportunities and ultimately advancement.

Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have told us that they are upskilling. They're taking their career development in their own hands: Earning credentials, completing leadership development programs, taking on career coaches, and being encouraged sometimes in the workplace to take on more learning. "You're still not ready yet," right? And being overlooked. And so, in the research, many participants describe receiving vague or non-actionable feedback, being told to "build confidence," or upskill more despite already doing a lot and feeling overqualified. Career development is one of Canada's most undervalued inclusion strategies as far as I'm concerned. It's what happens after people are hired or reskilled that determines whether talent actually advances. While we talk a lot about future of work, we need to ask about the future of systems. Are we asking that? And career development as an example is a system that quietly decides whose potential is nurtured and whose careers grow. And so, if we don't

redesign career development with equity at the centre, we'll keep preparing people for a future they may never really be allowed to fully access.

Jeremy: Throughout this season, we've talked a lot about skills, training, and workforce development. But your findings suggest that even the best skills strategies can fall short if the systems around them aren't working equitably. Why do we need to think systemically about career development if we want inclusion efforts to translate into real advancement opportunities.

Golnaz: I think thinking systemically about inclusion means recognizing that equity is not a side initiative or a value statement, right? It's not about building an impression. It's really a core operating condition for whether workforce strategies actually deliver results, right? It has to be embedded within core business functions and that includes our conversation today. Again, what our research surfaced is that inequity is rarely caused by a single moment. It's produced across a system through how potential is defined; how managers exercise discretion; how advancement decisions are made behind closed doors as some examples.

We pressure tested some of the insights that we got from our research with employers. So alongside the research, we convened five executive roundtables across the country with more than 140 HR, DE&I and talented people leaders across 95 organizations in five cities. And through some experiential exercises and dialogue, we found two patterns that I want to talk about. The first is that leadership pipelines are breaking down well before senior leadership, right? When we think about pipelines to leadership, leaders consistently acknowledge that there is underrepresentation of, particularly, Indigenous and Black women but also racialized women from that director to VP to executive level roles, often describing a sharp drop off at manager or senior manager roles. Many organizations reported progress on women in leadership, while simultaneously recognizing that those gains were concentrated amongst white women. So gender progress without racial equity and succession pipelines were frequently described as maybe subjective in some cases or needing some work with ready-now talent that does have that representation that we're talking about. That tells me that they're thinking about it; they're trying to solution and there's good intentions, but there's work to be done.

Second, investment patterns tend to be somewhat misaligned with advancement outcomes. So investment in career and leadership development opportunities for talent. In these roundtables, when we looked at broad themes, there's a heavy reliance on employee resource groups—ERGs—and those have work to do in themselves, right? In terms of how much free labour are we asking of people? How are those ERGs really designed? But they're leaning heavily on ERGs, broad leadership programs and generic development initiatives with limited targeted investments tied to promotion, sponsorship, or succession decisions for Indigenous, Black and racialized women. So efforts exist but it's rarely connected to the decision point that actually can move careers forward. I heard there's some really good piloting happening and there's good learning that's coming from it and that gives me a lot of hope with what lies ahead.

But again, I often talk about the employee life cycle where these insights often reinforce, again, where inclusion lives or dies, who is hired into which roles, who receives early feedback and advocacy, who has high potential, and who exits when systems fail to recognize their contribution. We really need to look at that whole life cycle and design solutions that

systemically address what's happening. So again, without redesigning the pipelines, systemic strategies, even the most ambitious skills agendas will continue to benefit the same people.

Jeremy: Golnaz, thank you for the conversation. It's been great talking to you.

Golnaz: It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

Jeremy: Golnaz reminds us that inclusion isn't just about who gets hired. It's about who gets access to development, sponsorship, and advancement opportunities throughout their careers. Those same questions are beginning to emerge around AI and the future of work. As organizations race to adopt new technologies, how do we ensure they're expanding opportunity rather than creating new barriers?

My next guest is Agapi Gessesse, CEO of the Coalition of Innovation Leaders Advancing Respect—CILAR—an organization working to make innovation and emerging technologies more inclusive. Agapi joins me to talk about AI, digital inclusion, and what it will take to ensure underrepresented communities can fully participate in the economy of the future.

Agapi, welcome to the podcast. It's great to have you on with me today.

Agapi: Yeah, I'm really happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Jeremy: So you've had a powerful career leading front-facing and community-focused organizations like CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals in Toronto. And I'd like to ask you about the experiences and your journey that brought you to the moment working where you are at this intersection of digital inclusion and equity and also systems-level change at CILAR.

Agapi: I think it's a twofold. Number one is I saw an issue that needed to be solved. And one of the issues that I was seeing doing workforce development, really my entire career leading organizations, when I was at CEE, we had really amazing results, but I also understood what technology was meaning for the future of work. And so that traditional way of finding like an employer to hire the entire cohort, that was becoming a lot tougher. But then also the ramifications of like, how is AI actually influencing the work? Because there, my philosophy was, okay, if I can find where the largest labour gaps are in the market, then the Black youth I'm supporting go from the back of the unemployment line to the front, because the industry is going to be so desperate, they're not going to care what they look like, who they are. And if I can get as many of them as possible, then inclusion will then provide the diversity part of it.

And as a service provider, you're not only concerned about them getting this skill, you're also concerned about their well-being and their social determinants of health. So we had social workers, we had psychotherapists on staff. We're doing full wraparound supports. Then we're working with partners to create curriculums for the hard skills, working with corporations to try and get them to hire the folks. And then to add this on to the equation of, like, what does AI mean for this industry and what programs are we going to teach the young people? And getting funders to understand it's going to cost \$5,000 to license us for the year for a young person per person—nobody had caught up to that. And I'm like, who's doing this? Who's just doing this part here? The systems building work, the orchestration, so that I don't need to explain this to funders because funders, if I'm telling them, they're going to think that I'm just here because I need more money. And employers are trying to figure out what AI means for them to begin with.

So they can't influence it. So, like, who has the time to build relationships with all of these conglomerates and these tech companies to say, hey, can you support this work?

So that problem needed to be solved because it started to become a bottleneck. It's like, you can put all the effort possible, but if nobody's actually systems orchestrating, then what are we going to do? I was really thinking about like, okay, what does my social impact look like in this next chapter of my career? Either I want to work on the foundation side so that I can change philanthropy's mind around this, or I want to enter into an organization that's doing systems building work. And technology was top of my list no matter where it is. Because the second part to that is technology is going to change how we do everything. And I think, yes, there is a great wealth transfer of people who had money, but there hasn't been an opportunity like this in our lifetime where you can actually learn a skill. And yes, you can become—it's just like when social media influencing came up, like normal people could now become famous, right? Like I look at that in the tech space. It's like if you gain this skill, you actually can create something. It's never been easier for that to happen, but that is only accessible to the few that know. And that part to me is what really excited me: I actually have an opportunity to make sure that my community is included in this wealth of skill transfer, right? And when the opportunity for CILAR came up, I'm like, this is exactly what I've been thinking about, the problems that I'm trying to solve, all wrapped into one.

Jeremy: You've touched a few times on the need for organizations to move beyond simply providing access to technology and start thinking about the systems that support its use. One of the projects you're leading at CILAR is an AI governance toolkit. Can you tell us a bit about that initiative, what problem it's trying to solve, and why governance is such an important part of ensuring AI benefits everyone?

Agapi: One of the things that I was hearing very, very often was around AI. Even in the organization I was running last, I really was struggling with like, I don't have enough money to necessarily give everybody, because we were using Microsoft at the time, a Co-Pilot license. But I also know that people are using AI on their own. I have an obligation to create a policy around this. I reached out to mentors and folks around and experts to try and figure out, okay, well, how does this necessarily work? Because even for myself, I was questioning like, can I impose a policy when I'm not necessarily able to give them the tools that are necessary? So that really led to me learning for myself and understanding just because you don't have the resources to provide it, the guardrails need to be made. Our data security around the people that we're serving—like we think we're just going into ChatGPT or Co-Pilot or Gemini, asking it to help you with your job, but you're now storing that data. And I don't think that, well, particularly for Indigenous communities who have data sovereignty constraints, like we don't know what we've already put into this thing, right? And we might not be able to see the ramifications of that years down the line. And so not-for-profits and the charitable sector, we have a much larger obligation because we're serving more vulnerable communities more so than anyone else.

We're working with Deloitte to create an AI governance toolkit. So the toolkit would basically work very similar to a chatbot where you will ask a series of questions like, how many employees do you have? How many of them have licenses that have been given to you? How many of them do you think on average might be using their own? What type of data are you

using? Are you serving Indigenous folks? We'll ask all of these questions and then provide to you an opportunity to create an AI governance tool. So here's a policy that you could use. Here's some other suggested policies that you need to put in place based off of this. So that toolkit is really meant to use AI to then solve the AI governance issues in organizations.

And then on the other side to that is, yes, AI governance is great, but then, how do we ensure that everyone is using AI efficiently, effectively? And so we've partnered with Imagine Canada, who has been doing phenomenal work in this space. Their report [*The State of Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Canadian Non-Profits*; see links at the beginning of this transcript] actually is what had contributed to us really thinking through like the ramifications of this from a governance perspective as well. And so we're working with their organization to create an actual course so that nonprofits, the charitable sector, can actually learn how to use AI, the tools that they could use to become more efficient. If we're talking about grant writing, we're talking about AI ethics, like when to check your work, when not to, that will be really fundamental. So our hope is that CILAR can support nonprofits, the charitable sector, but also small businesses as well on how to be able to not only have strong governance in AI, but also ensure that you're also using AI effectively to become more efficient, et cetera.

Jeremy: We've talked about AI as creating enormous opportunity, but also new risks when it comes to inclusion. From your perspective, what does the digital divide look like today, and how do we make sure that underrepresented communities aren't left behind as AI becomes more embedded in work, education, and everyday life?

Agapi: I think in the last couple of years, particularly with [the] Future Skills [Centre] coming out, like that has been just instrumental in the proof piece, right? Because again, frontline organizations don't necessarily have the resources to then do the research around what this looks like. How do I have a proof of concept on someone? And people were often saying to me, well, why are you serving only Black youth? Why not everyone else? And you know, over time, you know, these reports became valuable for me to have that proof of concept. So I think, a) like that's really important. I think then what do we do with the data, right? And I think that's why I think organizations like CILAR are so valuable because somebody has to be working with government because we all sit at that intersection. If you're in the charitable sector, you're sitting at the intersection at least with government, community, and corporations. At some point you're touching those three, right? But CILAR kind of expands that ecosystem and it's working with most importantly, of course, community, but philanthropy, government, corporations, post-secondary institutions—because all of our programs are co-certified, because also we're forgetting: Post-secondary institutions are also figuring out what AI means for them, right? And the solution can't be getting rid of all the students that are using AI because that will leave us with no one left, right?

And so part of it is having a systems orchestrator. And right now we have a mandate to upskill 100,000 Canadians. If the vision, which is—just like we have a Future Skills Centre that the government has funded to be able to provide research—if CILAR could become that systems orchestrator with AI to train Canadians across the country for free, in upskilling and all of—you want to know how to create a bot? Well, if you go to CILAR, if you use our inclusive innovation platform that's powered by DISCO ["AI-Powered Futures," see links], if you sign up, then you'll be able to do that. Because it's not only about upskilling, it's also about how we're using

technologies to create an inclusive environment. And I think it's not just about upskilling, it's about the entire ecosystem. How can we work with all of these people to rethink how we're redesigning our social contract, how we do the future work, how we create workplaces, schools, et cetera. And I think that's the solution here. Everybody has to play a part and somebody has to be the orchestrator. And I'm excited for CILAR to be that.

Jeremy: That sounds like a wonderful spot to end on. I'd like to very much thank you, Agapi, for joining me on the Future Skills Podcast. It's been wonderful talking with you.

Agapi: Amazing. Thanks.

Jeremy: Agapi's message is that inclusion requires intentional systems that connect people to opportunity. That challenge doesn't start in the workplace. For many young people who struggle in traditional educational settings, the pathway to post-secondary education and meaningful work can feel out of reach. One initiative helping to bridge that gap is Reboot Plus, a Future Skills Centre-supported program at Douglas College. Reboot Plus gives high school students the opportunity to spend 16 weeks on a college campus while completing their secondary education, where they receive skills training, career development support, and exposure to post-secondary life. Through career exploration activities and connections with professionals, participants gain the confidence and experience that they need to make informed decisions about their futures.

Peter Wilkins is a Professor at Douglas College and the creator of Reboot and Reboot Plus. He's here to tell us how the program is helping young people reconnect with education, discover new possibilities, and build pathways toward meaningful careers. Peter, welcome to the podcast.

Peter, welcome to the podcast. Thank you for joining me today.

Peter: Glad to be here. Thank you for having me.

Jeremy: I'd love for you to just tell us about Reboot Plus, how it's gone through a number of different cycles. It's been active for around 10 years in various iterations and we'd love to hear who the program's for, what are its objectives, and how are you getting students and young folks involved in the program?

Peter: This program is funded by the Future Skills Centre and since the beginning, it has been for students who are in high school, usually in grade 11 or 12, but they're falling between the cracks. They are not progressing on time. They may have attendance issues. They may struggle to complete things. And mostly I think they've just been exhausted by the whole high school experience. So our job at Reboot Plus is to bring those young people to the college, give them some career development—hope-centred career development—training, some upskilling and career exploration to reconnect them to the possibilities of education, to show them what post-secondary education is like, what the environment and context is, and how that's different from high school; and to just give them a new perspective on how they could get as much education as possible in a field that they feel really invested in. And that can give them not only hope to graduate, but a longer-term vision of what their life is going to be like.

Jeremy: A central part of Reboot Plus is its use of a hope-centred development framework. For listeners who may not be familiar with that approach, what is a hope-centred framework, and

why is it particularly effective for young folks who may have become disengaged from education?

Peter: It's a model that was developed at the University of British Columbia, and it's a career development model that focuses on optimism, right, on strengths, and on a kind of fluidity that career development practices did not have some time ago—that the idea was just to get somebody a job, get them a salary. And the idea was that the people would stay in that job forever and ever. And we know that's not true, right? You know that people's employment lives, their working lives are varied and multiple. And this model is, it adapts for that. But it's very important for our young people because it is very much guided by their own principles, their own values, their own sense of what they want to do in the world. Our objective is to have people discover things about themselves that allow them to work in the world and have employment that gives them a satisfaction that's not just a monetary satisfaction, right? A sense of, like, mission; of engagement; of making the world a better place even.

These are people who, as they've been in high school, they're a little bit like square pegs and round holes, right? There's something about the context that's not working for them. And the way I always describe it is, you remember those, do you remember balsa wood airplanes with the little rubber band? You would wind up and let it go. The way I describe it is like, these are young people, their rubber bands are either broken or hyperextended, right? And they need a little repair work. And the way to get at that repair work is to really find out about them and what they think is important and how they can translate that importance into the world of work. So it's a little bit backwards from, oh, here's the job market; these are the in-demand occupations. We never start from that. We always start from the desire of the participant. And it's a little bit like going back to being a kid and people asking you, what do you want to be when you grow up? It's not what job do you want to have? It's more ontological and existential than that. And if we can revive that in young people who are struggling, then we can take a relatively small group of people who struggle in high school and sort of reintegrate them into the system on their own terms with their own strengths, so that we can prevent a lot of dropouts; we can prevent a lot of over-reliance on social safety net; engagement with the legal system.

I think there's a lot of work to be done on a relatively small group of people because in our calculations, it's usually like between 10, 15 per cent, around there, of young people who struggle to graduate from high school. If you don't do anything about them, then they will fall through the cracks and they will struggle to find meaningful work and a lot of bad things might happen. They won't make as much money, just to put it bluntly in capitalist terms. There's a lot to be gained from focusing on this group and allowing them to see the world in their own terms and being a success.

Jeremy: So before this interview, you told me about Reboot Plus creating what you call “virtuous circles.” What do you mean by that, and why is it important to think about skills development and career pathways as part of a broader ecosystem rather than just focusing on individual participants?

Peter: I want to answer it properly because another way of looking at this is that skills training, education, it's not a zero-sum game, right? It's not like you win or you lose. It's like a systemic thing, a network. And if there's a weak point in the network, then everybody suffers. But if the

network is strong throughout, then everybody gains. What that means for Reboot is, high schools struggle with this group of students to help them graduate and to get them into the world. If they can refer them to us, these students can benefit because they get back on track. But the school can benefit as well because they feel that their mission is enhanced by helping all of their students, the ones that are struggling. And we've had a lot of really good feeling from the high schools involved in the project to refer the students to us, that they do get something out of the program, they feel more motivated, they move closer to a mission in life.

But also, this is a program that we started at Douglas College. In the beginning, we had college faculty be researchers on the project, do the evaluation and do the data management of the project. So that helps the college and helps those faculty members in their own way. We've had students who are in sports science and applied psychology do practicum placements in the program or conduct their own research with our participants. So it's like everybody gets something out of it, right? So Boards of Trade benefit from the social recognition that they are participating in such a project. A lot of training for people with barriers is all about the people with the barriers and not the broader picture. We're more about the broader picture.

Jeremy: One of the themes throughout our conversation has been expanding opportunity for young people who may not see a pathway into post-secondary education or meaningful work. As you look to the future of Reboot Plus, what are you most hopeful for, both for the program itself and for the students it serves?

Peter: One of the things we're doing right now, we're in a replication project, which means we're trying to create a way that anybody can take the tools of Reboot Plus and apply them across the country. And when we were working to turn Reboot into Reboot Plus, our partners' peers had an idea that as long as you have a school district, a post-secondary institution, and a Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade, you can run this program. You just need those three elements to work together to recruit the students, to recruit professionals, to have a post-secondary environment, which has turned out to be really a strong thing for these students. Take them through the doors, show them what it's like, and then suddenly they're sparked. They want to go to post-secondary. And then we see them in the hallways, you know, six months later. So it's got the potential to work across the country to help young people struggling to graduate have meaningful work.

The real issue is funding. We've been able to make this project work for 10 years now in various forms, for at least five years in the Reboot Plus form. But it's all been short-term funding. And what would make me very happy is to have governments realize that the benefits outstrip the cost, which is, you've got 10 to 15 per cent of people in high school struggling. If you can help that group find meaning in life and enjoy themselves and do good work, then you solve a lot of problems, right? You save a lot of money.

For young people whose parents are well off and who are privileged, the transition from high school to post-secondary is kind of natural. It's expected, and they have all kinds of systems in place to help them make that move. But if you're struggling in high school and you don't think post-secondary is for you, there's no bridge. You know it's very difficult to find your way from this feeling of despondency in high school into a college, an institute, or a university. And I think it's really important that these young people get to see that. It really does fire them up. One of

the things we don't know is what is the long-term effect of Reboot Plus? Does it work after the program is over? We know that we have good uptake for going to post-secondary. What we don't know is, is this like a Rubicon moment for the participants once they pass through Reboot Plus, everything is great, or is there a kind of reversion? I hope not, but it would be sure nice to find out. But I don't think there would be because once you get people on their way and they see what kind of supports are available to them, and they start to enjoy themselves, then a lot of issues dissolve.

The issue with our participants is not intelligence. They're not struggling in high school because they're not smart. They're struggling in high school because they've been bullied, because they've been excluded, because whatever method of teaching just doesn't work for them.

Jeremy: Peter, thanks for joining me on the podcast. It's been a wonderful conversation.

Peter: Thanks very much, Jeremy, for talking to me about this project. People can always use Douglas College in Vancouver to get in touch with me if they need to know more about the program.

Jeremy: In this episode, we've explored how inclusion shapes the future of work, from leadership pathways and workplace advancement to digital transformation and youth transitions into education and employment.

What connects these conversations is the understanding that talent is distributed broadly across Canadian society, but opportunity isn't. As Golnaz explained, skills alone don't guarantee advancement when career development systems fail to recognize and support diverse talent. Agapi reminds us that emerging technologies like AI can either deepen inequities or help close them. And Peter showed us that when young people are given support, exposure, and a sense of hope, they can reconnect with education and build meaningful pathways toward work and lifelong learning.

My thanks to Golnaz Golnaraghi of Accelerate Her Future, Agapi Gessesse of the CILAR, and Peter Wilkins of Douglas College for joining me.

You can hear all six seasons of the Future Skills Podcast on your favourite podcast app. Give us a follow if you haven't, and stay tuned for more conversations this season. This episode was produced, edited, and hosted by me, Jeremy Strachan. Sound design also by yours truly. Thanks for listening.

In partnership
with:



Signal49
RESEARCH

Blueprint

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



This research was prepared with financial support provided through the Government of Canada's [Future Skills Program](#).
The responsibility for the findings and conclusions of this research rests entirely with Signal49 Research.