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Black Voices Across the Spectrum

Understanding the Employment Experiences of
Black Neurodivergent Individuals in Montreal

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This Study is carried out by the Black Community Resource
Center (BCRC) and World By Storme

BCRC:

The Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC) is a Montreal-based organization that strengthens community capacity by supporting youth, families, and community organizations. Through research, partnerships, and community-driven initiatives, we help create opportunities, build leadership, and connect people to the resources they need to thrive.

World by Storme:

World By Storme was founded in March 2024 in honor of Storme Moore, our CEO and inspiration. During the pandemic, Storme, an entrepreneurial “girl-boss” at heart, launched her own lip gloss line. But she also recognized a larger need: too often, businesses hire individuals with special needs for menial work that doesn’t reflect their talents or aspirations.

With the support of her parents, now joined by our Board, World By Storme was born. Our mission is to create opportunities that allow neurodivergent and differently-abled individuals to thrive, celebrate their talents, and live more fulsome, empowered lives.

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Dalia is a Black feminist researcher and education professional with a Ph.D. in Education from Concordia University. Dalia’s work is grounded in Black feminist thought, critical race theory, and Global South epistemologies. Her research examines how histories of empire, migration, and racialization shape institutional structures, policies, and lived experiences across educational and social contexts.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	04
Methodological Framework & Data collection	05
Results & Discussion	08
Recommendations	17
References	20

Introduction

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the experiences of Black neurodivergent individuals in Montreal, with a particular focus on their employment journeys, access to services, and the systemic factors that influence meaningful and sustainable employment. The study also sought to better understand how existing employment-related supports respond to the needs of Black neurodivergent youth and to identify opportunities for improving policies, programs, and service delivery. Due to Quebec regulations that restrict the collection and publication of race-based data, studies like this are necessary because they aim to better understand the lives of Black neurodivergent youth, whose perspectives are often diluted within broader data on neurodivergence and autism spectrum experiences. Without this specific focus, research may fail to adequately account for the ways in which race shapes the experiences, barriers, and support needs of Black neurodivergent youth. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. Map and analyze existing employment-related resources in Québec that serve, or have the potential to serve, Black neurodivergent adults;
2. Identify key gaps, barriers, and opportunities from jobseeker perspectives;
3. Document the lived experiences of Black neurodivergent individuals and their families, highlighting supports identified as essential for meaningful and sustainable employment

To achieve study objectives, the following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

- Are there systemic barriers (e.g., funding, policy, institutional practices) that limit service provision?
- What barriers do Black neurodivergent youth face when accessing service supports in Montreal?
- What policy changes would improve employment outcomes for Black neurodivergent youth in Quebec?

Drawing on interviews with Black neurodivergent individuals and a focus group with parents of neurodivergent individuals, this report highlights participants' lived experiences navigating education, employment, and support systems. Their narratives provide important insight into the structural and interpersonal barriers that shape employment opportunities, while also identifying strengths, support systems, and recommendations for creating more accessible supports.

Methodological Framework and Data Collection

In selecting the appropriate methodological framework for the design of this study, disability critical race theory (DisCrit) has been the most appropriate framework to address the particular nuances of this project. Rooted in Black and critical race feminist scholarship and activism, DisCrit “aims to create new knowledge rooted in intersectional commitments, seeks to understand how interlocking oppressions of racism and ableism work in tandem, and pushes the boundaries of intersectionality. It is not and was not meant to be an all-encompassing theory, but one that would thrive by being interwoven with other critical theories and perspectives” (Annamma et. al, 2018, p. 63). Applying a DisCrit lens enables this study to move beyond single-axis analyses of either race or disability. Instead, it foregrounds how service supports (education, health, employment, etc.), policy structures, and institutional practices, reproduce inequalities. By centering the lived experiences of Black neurodivergent youth in Montreal and engaging in dialogue with support persons, this study adopts a DisCrit lens to analyze how systemic barriers, institutional practices, and resource allocation shape access to meaningful and sustainable services. DisCrit allows for the centering of Black neurodivergent youth as knowledge producers, recognizing their lived experiences as data points that can be used for the development of equitable policy recommendations and the improvement of resource provisions.

Data collection

Participants

Neurodivergent youth

The study included interviews with six neurodivergent participants, the majority of whom were between the ages of 18 and 34. One participant was older than the targeted age range; however, their data was retained because it offered a unique perspective that was not represented among the other participants. Specifically, this participant was the only individual who relied on the solidarity tax program as their primary source of income and expressed no interest in pursuing employment. Their experiences provide important insight into the diversity of employment aspirations and support needs within the participant group and are discussed in greater detail in the Discussion section of this report.

The participants represented a range of employment and educational experiences. Two participants (James and Sonia) were employed at the time of the study. One participant (Alex) was a student who was actively seeking employment. Another participant (Tarik) had recently completed a work placement and had previous experience operating a business in another province. One participant (Stella) was not currently employed but had experience running a business in Montreal. The remaining participant (Rodrigo) was unemployed, relied on the solidarity tax program, and indicated that they had no desire to pursue employment at the time of the study. This diversity of experiences provided valuable insight into the varied employment pathways, aspirations, and challenges encountered by neurodivergent individuals.

The final sample was capped at six participants as data collection reached saturation. Saturation refers to the “criterion for discontinuing data collection and/or analysis in qualitative research” (Rahimi and Khatooni, 2024, p. 2). This means that the study reached a point in the data collection process where “new data or information does not contribute significantly to addressing the research question, or when existing data is replicated” (Rahimi and Khatooni, 2024, p. 4).

Interviews

Each participant completed a two-interview data collection process, with each interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The first interview was a life history interview designed to develop a holistic understanding of each participant's lived experiences. This interview explored participants' personal histories, including their experiences in educational settings, social relationships, family life, and other significant aspects of their lives. By adopting a life history approach, the interview provided important context for understanding how participants' identities and experiences shaped their educational, social, and employment trajectories.

The second interview focused specifically on participants' experiences with employment and support systems. Questions explored their access to social services and employment supports, their experiences seeking and maintaining employment, career aspirations, perceptions of the programs and services they had accessed, and their ongoing and future support needs. Together, the two interviews provided both a comprehensive understanding of participants' life experiences and a deeper exploration of the factors shaping their employment journeys and interactions with provincial and community support services.

Parents

A total of four parents participated in the parent focus group. Three participants were mothers of neurodivergent young adults between the ages of 18 and 35, while one participant was the mother of a neurodivergent child under the age of 10. Although the latter participant's child fell outside the primary age range of the study, her contributions provided valuable perspectives on navigating services, advocating for supports, and preparing for future transitions into adulthood. The focus group offered important insights into parents' experiences accessing services, supporting their children's educational and employment journeys, and identifying ongoing challenges and unmet needs.

Results and Discussion

This section explores participants' experiences navigating employment, social support, and service system. Across interviews with the six neurodivergent Black folks and the parent focus group, participants described barriers that limited their opportunities for inclusion, independence, and access to resources. While experiences varied according to support needs and life circumstances, several common themes emerged, including feelings of social isolation, the importance of employment as a pathway to autonomy, challenges accessing formal services despite receiving a diagnosis, limited awareness of available supports, and the central role of family in providing practical and emotional assistance. These findings illustrate how structural barriers, social exclusion, and gaps in service provision shape participants' everyday experiences and influence their ability to pursue meaningful employment and community participation.

Isolation

One participant, Alex, expressed that they often felt like they were “adjacent to society”. When asked about how this adjacency manifests in their daily interactions, Alex explained:

“Like, I've always... had friends growing up, but it felt like I was never completely understood. Or that, like, even though I had friends, I was still, like, weird, and people would treat me like I was weird. It was kind of an alienating experience. Like, I felt very othered.

At least, I've gotten a diagnosis for ADHD. I got that maybe, like, four years ago. Maybe over four years ago. But it's only recently that some people are also like, ‘Maybe you're also autistic’ I guess, like, for specific examples, at least growing up, because I, you know, was still being socialized and molded into a human being, I would be really blunt about things. I wouldn't notice that maybe it would be rude to say.

Like, an example would be if my friend was like, ‘Do you want to do something with me?’ and I'm like, ‘I'm actually not interested in that, but because I'm with you, like, yeah, sure,’ you know? Which some people are like, ‘Ooh, that's like a diss’

Like, it always felt like people were judging me for not communicating in the right way. Or, like, I'd get in trouble for trying to explain why I do things the way I do or how I interpreted things, and people would just get mad at me about it”

This experience of being othered also resonates with other participants in the study. Rodrigo for example, who expressed that he is no longer interested in gaining employment, explains that he was made fun of for being different in various environment, from church to the spaces where he tried to gain employment. When speaking to Rodrigo, whose mother was accompanying him during the interview, she explains:

“He was able to go to school with his lunch bag and take the bus. But when he got there [his employment place] ...they were making fun of him... And [the social worker] take him to other jobs, like the police station, where they wash cars. Again... he never feels welcome. That's how he feels” (Rodrigo’s mother)

Such feelings of isolation may also contribute to barriers to accessing support. When individuals feel misunderstood, judged, or excluded, they may become less likely to seek help, disclose their needs, or trust that available services will be responsive to their experiences. Additionally, internalized beliefs about hyper-independence, specifically in what relates to Black women, could influence their motivations to seek support; as Sonia explains: “I was sort of hyper-independent and didn't feel like I deserved or could access support. It felt like a very, you know, white autistic thing to do [seek support]” (Sonia).

Employment and Independence

Interview results revealed that participants overwhelmingly viewed employment as a pathway to independence and autonomy. Rather than defining employment solely in terms of earning an income, participants described work as an opportunity to gain financial independence, develop confidence, build meaningful relationships, and participate more fully in their communities. Employment was closely associated with having greater control over their lives, making independent decisions, and reducing reliance on family members. For example, when asked about why they wanted to have a job, one participant, Stella, said that a job helps her “to be independent, to have my own independence, and to... go somewhere every day” (Stella)

Stella's response illustrates that participants attached meanings to employment that extended beyond financial security. Her reference to “going somewhere every day” reflects the importance of having a consistent routine, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for social participation. For many neurodivergent individuals, predictable daily structure can provide stability and support overall well-being, while regular engagement in the workplace creates opportunities to develop skills, build confidence, and establish meaningful relationships with others.

Employment therefore represented not only economic participation but also a means of cultivating self-autonomy. These findings suggest that employment should be understood as an important social determinant of inclusion, with benefits that extend well beyond wages to encompass psychological well-being and social connectedness.

Employment and independence also emerged as significant concerns among parents, who viewed meaningful employment not only as a source of financial stability for their children but also as a critical factor in ensuring their long-term well-being and autonomy. Many parents expressed uncertainty about what would happen as they aged or were no longer able to provide ongoing support, highlighting the importance of employment opportunities that align with their children's interests, abilities, and support needs. Their reflections underscored that concerns about employment were inseparable from broader anxieties about independence, quality of life, and the availability of sustainable support systems in adulthood. As one parent explained:

“I think if he was to go look for a job right now, it would be very, very hard. He'd probably maybe get a job, which he hated. He. They trained him in Tim Hortons. He hated it. He said everybody, everybody there was giving him the dirty job, which basically meant he was ... cleaning the floors and doing that stuff. Heaven forbid that I'm not here. I would hope that maybe one or two people in my family would be there to assist him. But if, if not, it's going to be hard for him to, to navigate in this world.” (Parent 4).

Diagnosis doesn't lead to more access to resources

One parent's story indicated that receiving a specific diagnosis doesn't make it easier to receive provincial support. On the contrary, she believed that delays and waiting times make the process more exhausting for parents where significant personal effort is required:

“For me, I find at the beginning, when we first suspected my son had autism, there was a lot more support in place. His pediatrician was the one who noticed it because when he was a toddler, he was able to speak a little bit around maybe 18 months, a little under 20 months, he was speaking some words. And then at 2 years old, when we went for his regular checkup, he had lost all his words. And so [the doctor] made the referral. And we already had a social worker, so we gave her the referral. [My son] was put on the waiting list for an assessment and also for services so that as soon as he was diagnosed, he would get services. So the first time around, because I had the social worker already, we had a lot of follow up.

Every other week I would get updates. And about 18 months later, he got his assessment, his diagnosis. But that's kind of when problems started because then I had to hound them down for the report to be able to apply for the disability tax credit...

So I knew of all these things that were available, but they make it so hard to access it in the first place. And it was only [six months later] that I received the reports because I was leaving voicemails every week. And before the holidays, I said that if I didn't get it before, let's say the 15th of December, that I would be making a report to the supervisor of whoever the doctor that diagnosed him" (Parent 3)

In addition to challenges accessing services, parents also highlighted the difficulties created by frequent transitions between service providers. They emphasized that their children's needs evolve over time, yet the responsibility of ensuring continuity of care often falls on families as they navigate changing systems and providers (e.g., doctors, social workers, and other support personnel). Despite their child's records and medical history being documented and accessible, parents described having to repeatedly explain their child's history, needs, and circumstances to new providers. This process requires significant emotional and administrative labour and creates additional barriers to receiving consistent and responsive support.

"You get used to somebody in every institution. You're used to a bank teller, then the bank teller is gone. You're used to a particular doctor, the doctor is gone. Like every minute, there's somewhere you can barely have a relationship with anybody before it changes. And then when you get the new person, nobody reads anymore. So nobody can delve to see what went on?

And this goes back to when she was born. She was premature and stayed an extra eight weeks in the hospital. When there would be a shift change, I would be the one who would instruct the nurses, well, this is where we are, where we last left off, like a soap opera. And sometimes, if they miss something, I would go, well, what about this? ...Then you see them run and read the paper and say "oh, yeah"

And that's because anywhere I go, I keep notes like crazy. Who said it, at what time, on what date? ... Anytime you talk to anybody, take the document" (Parent 2)

Social Assistance Programs and Community Resources might be available but participants/support systems are not aware of, or the process is complicated

This sentiment was expressed by both Black neurodivergent adults who participated in the study and parents who took part in the focus group. Across the data, participants identified a consistent challenge in accessing available supports, including both provincial and community-based services.

Participants described these supports as difficult to navigate due to limited visibility, lengthy wait times, and a lack of clear information about where and how to access appropriate resources. Many participants emphasized that accessing services often required significant personal effort, including independently searching for information, contacting multiple providers, and navigating complex systems without adequate guidance.

One mother highlighted the challenges parents face when trying to identify and access appropriate supports for their children, emphasizing the need for clearer pathways and centralized information system:

“So, in essence, I wish that someone had given me a list of places, say, okay, these are the areas where you can go out and reach and find out the community and everything, and fill in the forms... that [way], as parents, are not jumping from Social Worker 1 to Social Worker 2, to Dr. This, to Dr. That, to find out all of this.... The first doctor could have given you the sheet and say, hey, fill the form here and submit it. It's that simple for me” (Parent 4)

In relation to accessing employment supports that cater to the needs of various neurodivergent folks, one participant, Sonia, who identifies as low-support needs, explains that finding resources that address her particular employment needs are extremely rare. Sonia's experience was also unique because of her low support needs as she didn't find that general neurodivergence, autism, or disability awareness/programs take into consideration the various spectrum of needs:

“I think I had looked into these types of [employment] resources and found that for support for, like, neurodivergent folks, there's a lot of centering around folks with, like, high support needs, which is great, but also kind of leaves the rest of us in this weird space where there's no support. So I was. Yeah, I didn't find anything. I didn't come across anything that was relevant to the kind of support that I needed. So that's why finding this program that I went through was surprising, because I was like, okay, yeah, I had peers with, like, similar support needs” (Sonia)

For participants like James, securing employment was made possible through a practical work placement program associated with his schooling. Now in his thirties, James is satisfied with his job, where he sees potential for promotions. However, it's important to emphasize that his positive experience is largely due to the significant support he receives from his direct supervisor, who has been a strong advocate for him ever since he joined the company through the work placement program.

James works for an enterprise in Montreal that specifically supports neurodivergent adults by providing training and work experience in areas such as warehousing, administration, and print operations. He was able to be connected with this enterprise through the Miriam Centre which provides “educational, residential, vocational and community services to persons with intellectual disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorders” (Miriam Centre). This tailored employment program plays a crucial role in advocating for neurodivergent adults, enabling James to aspire towards a more supervisory role in the future.

Participants receive the most support from their households/schools

Interview findings revealed that participants relied primarily on support from their households and educational institutions. Family members, specifically mothers, were consistently identified as the most significant source of emotional, practical, and financial support. Participants described family members as advocates who helped them navigate education, access services, complete administrative processes, and support their employment quests. For many, family support filled gaps left by formal systems and was essential in helping them overcome barriers related to service access. For example, when asked who they seek support from, James referred to his boss at work and his mother to navigate other barriers.

For other participants who identify as high support needs, their household units proved to be the most consistent and reliable support system. For example, Stella, who launched her own business during the pandemic, her parents and siblings’ support and labor is what made it feasible for her to launch the business and sell her products. Stella’s family is a strong advocate for her needs and often work towards providing Stella with the necessary tools to achieve more independence. Some of these tools include event planning skills that she gained due to helping her mother with various community centered events around the city. When asked about how she felt when having to do this work, she says:

“a little bit stressed. Okay. A little bit happy. Because I knew I was gonna have to buckle down in pressure to come up with an idea. And that's why I sat in my office. I just said I need a team. I need a team to help me. I can't do this by myself” (Stella).

Another high needs participant also has experience running his own business, but in a different province. For Tarik, what started as a quick summer job, quickly turned into a business due to the high demand and success in the city he resided in at the time. Tarik compared Montreal to this other city saying that he found it easier to work in this other city. When asked why, his mother, who was present during the conversation in order to support her son, when necessary, said that:

“He had more of a support system in [city name]. Out there are for a lack of better words... [they are] accustomed to children or individuals with special needs. [Which] I find Montreal as well, but Montreal has a very long waiting list for everything. And in [other city name] it moves a little bit quicker.” (Tarik’s mother)

While schools emerged as an important space for neurodivergent youth, it appears that career paths provided to them through their educational institutions are often centered on manual labor such as lawn mowing, packaging, organization, etc. The benefit of educational institutions appears to be in helping neurodivergent youths with socialization. This was particularly important as schools provided important opportunities to build peer networks, develop friendships, and foster a sense of belonging. Several participants described school as one of the few environments where they were able to establish meaningful social connections. For Tarik for example, his schooling experience in Montreal was positive, and when asked as to why, he referred to the friendships he developed with his classmates saying: “they’re all my friends. Like, they’re really cool and they’re respectful to me a lot” (Tarik).

However, when asked about the career-related support they received during their time in school, participants found it difficult to recall specific or consistent employment preparation initiatives offered by their educational institutions. While schools were generally viewed as important sources of academic and social support, participants described career development services as limited, inconsistent, or insufficiently tailored to their needs. Few participants were able to identify structured opportunities that helped them prepare for the transition from school to employment.

For example, James, who is currently employed, recalled only a brief resume writing workshop as the primary form of career support he received during his education. He explained that the session was short and did not leave a lasting impression, noting that he was unable to retain much of the information presented. His experience reflects a broader pattern across the interviews, where participants struggled to identify meaningful career guidance or employment preparation despite spending many years within the education system. As he explained:

“They had, like, a CV...they do, like, CVs. That’s, like, one time, or maybe twice during the [year]. That’s all. And they actually ask, like, what job would you like to do, and stuff” (James)

Skills for Success (SFS) Framework

As part of this study, one of the goals is to assess the types of employment supports provided in accordance with the Skills for Success (SFS) framework developed by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The SFS framework is designed to “provide Canadians with the foundational and transferable skills needed to get and keep good jobs in today’s economy” (ESDC). The following infographic names the relevant skills:



Sources: Employment and Social Development Canada. Skills for Success Program (SFS).
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/understanding-individuals.html>

For participants who benefited from employment resources (2 out of the 6 neurodivergent Black youth participants) – Sonia and James – the assessment of the Skills for Success (SFS) indicated that the employment services they received placed considerable emphasis on developing interpersonal and workplace-readiness skills, particularly collaboration and communication. In James’s case, these skills were embedded directly within employment preparation and training for warehouse positions, where successful participation requires individuals to work closely with peers, coordinate tasks, and communicate effectively within a team. His experience therefore provided a relatively clear context in which to observe the relevance and potential activation of SFS skills through participation in employment services.

Sonia’s experience, however, presented a more complex case for assessing the applicability of the SFS inventory. She participated in a more targeted employment program focused on practical aspects of entering the workforce, including CV development, job searching, and navigating the application process.

While these services were clearly relevant to her employment goals, the nature of the support made it more difficult to identify and measure the specific SFS skills being developed or applied. In particular, the program appeared to prioritize concrete employment-related tasks rather than explicitly developing broader competencies such as communication or collaboration.

As a result, although SFS may have been relevant to Sonia's experience, its applicability was more difficult to capture. This suggests that the extent to which SFS can effectively assess the benefits of employment services may depend not only on the individual's needs and goals, but also on the type and structure of employment support being provided.

Employment Programs Inventory curated by PERT

The Provincial Employment Round Table (PERT) curated an inventory of English employment programs in Quebec.* As part of this study, we wanted to assess how this inventory of employment resources is accessible and beneficial to Black neurodivergent youth in Montreal. The findings in this study indicate that participants face significant barriers when accessing support, making the inventory potentially beneficial as part of the recommended resource guide.

Within the PERT inventory (total 357), we identified a total of 135 employment resources serving the Greater Montreal region. Of these, 14 provide services to people with disabilities and neurodivergent youth, while only two organizations provide employment support specifically for Black individuals in Montreal: DESTA Black Youth Network and Centre de recherche d'emploi Côte-des-Neiges. However, neither organization offers programs specifically targeting neurodivergent Black youth. Additional research is needed to determine how existing resources could be adapted, or new programs developed, to better serve neurodivergent Black youth and address some of the barriers identified in this study.

As participants did not access any of the resources identified in the inventory, it was not feasible to assess the effectiveness of the programs in the inventory or whether the Skills for Success (SFS) framework is being applied in practice.

*The inventory data used in the analysis is from an earlier version of the inventory received on March 17, 2026.

Recommendations

The findings from this study suggest that improving employment outcomes for Black neurodivergent youth requires more than expanding access to jobs or vocational programming. Rather, participants' experiences point to the need for a holistic ecosystem of care that recognizes employment as one component of a broader network of social, educational, familial, and community supports. A holistic ecosystem of care acknowledges that successful transitions into adulthood and employment depend on coordinated supports across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, social services, community organizations, employers, and families. Such an approach emphasizes continuity of care throughout different life stages, ensuring that youth are not required to repeatedly navigate disconnected systems or independently identify resources. Instead, services should be designed to complement one another, recognizing that employment readiness is strengthened by access to mental health supports, peer relationships, mentorship, family engagement, culturally responsive programming, and opportunities for skill development that extend beyond traditional vocational training.

The following recommendations should therefore be understood as interconnected components of this broader ecosystem rather than as isolated interventions. Establishing peer mentorship programs, strengthening family support networks, creating centralized information hubs, and developing entrepreneurship and innovation opportunities each address different barriers identified by participants.

Establish peer mentorship programs for neurodivergent Black youth

As feelings of isolation and othering appear to be common experiences among neurodivergent Black youth in Quebec, there is a need to establish peer-support programs that create spaces of connection and mutual understanding. Such programs may help address the social barriers experienced by neurodivergent youth by providing opportunities to connect with peers who share similar lived experiences, reducing feelings of exclusion, and fostering environments where individuals feel validated and supported. Peer-led initiatives can also serve as important sources of guidance, identity affirmation, and community-building, particularly for youth who may have previously felt misunderstood or marginalized within existing support systems.

Create and advocate for family support groups

Create and advocate for family support groups that provide families of neurodivergent youth with guidance, resources, and opportunities for connection as they navigate complex systems of support. These groups can help families better understand and access social services, employment resources, and educational supports while also addressing the challenges of navigating environments often structured around neurotypical expectations. This includes helping families with navigating conversations around neurodivergence, providing better care for neurodivergent youth by fostering shared learning and collective support. Family support groups can help caregivers to advocate more effectively for their children's needs and promote more inclusive practices across community and institutional settings.

Creation of information hub to support neurodivergent Black youth and their families with access to information, social services, and community supports

Participants consistently emphasized that accessing information about available services, employment supports, and community resources often depended on personal networks, repeated referrals, or extensive independent research. In response to these challenges, parents highlighted the need for a centralized information hub dedicated to supporting Black neurodivergent youth and their families. Such a hub could serve as a single point of access for information on provincial and community-based services, employment and educational supports, financial assistance programs, advocacy organizations, and culturally responsive resources. Beyond simply listing available services, participants envisioned a resource that would provide clear guidance on eligibility requirements, application processes, wait times, and referral pathways, reducing the administrative burden currently placed on families. This centralized information hub could support the other recommendations of peer support networks, mentorship opportunities, and culturally relevant programming that recognizes the intersecting experiences of race and neurodivergence. By consolidating information into an accessible and regularly updated platform, an information hub could improve awareness of existing resources, facilitate earlier access to support, strengthen connections between families and service providers, and reduce the time and effort required to navigate fragmented systems.

Startup incubator for Neurodivergent individuals

After speaking with participants and parents, it became evident that the career pathways available to Black neurodivergent youth, particularly those with higher support needs, are often concentrated in a narrow range of occupations, including warehouse work, packaging, and other forms of manual or service-based employment. Participants acknowledged that these positions can provide important benefits, such as routine, structure, skill development, and opportunities for social interaction, all of which can support successful employment outcomes. However, they also described these pathways as restrictive, offering limited opportunities to explore careers that align with individuals' interests or long-term aspirations. Rather than being supported to pursue a diverse range of occupations it appears that employment programs and educational transitions implicitly directed neurodivergent youth toward a small set of jobs that are traditionally viewed as appropriate for people with disabilities.

This narrow framing risks reinforcing low expectations and limiting opportunities for career advancement, professional development, and economic mobility. Parents specifically emphasized the importance of expanding employment supports to recognize the diversity of neurodivergent abilities and interests, ensuring that career planning is individualized rather than based primarily on disability status or perceived support needs. Tarik's mother described her son as highly skilled with his hands, explaining that he has a natural ability to work with wood and create high-quality handcrafted products. However, no programming that would support Tarik's skills and strengths is available to neurodivergent youth in Montreal. As a result, pursuing opportunities aligned with Tarik's interests would require him to participate in programs designed primarily for neurotypical individuals, where accommodations and an understanding of his support needs may be limited. This gap highlights the lack of individualized, strength-based programming that enables neurodivergent youth to cultivate their talents while receiving the supports necessary to thrive.

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