Collaborative Designing for Youth Wellbeing

The Story of Our Design Day

10.29.2016

YOUTHREX
Research &
Evaluation eXchange

ABSTRACT

The Design Day brought together youth sector stakeholders – youth, youth workers, policy makers, researchers, funders and citizens – to collaboratively tackle four 'thorny' challenges, or Idea Labs, that youth and youth workers experience. This event was hosted in collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This report is a snapshot of this Design Day and includes the four Idea Lab challenges that the Design Day focused on and the eight prototype pitches that participants co-developed in response to these challenges. The report includes reflections on the collaborative process along with resources and case study examples that can inspire our youth work.

KEYWORDS

innovation, design, idea lab, collaboration, strategic planning, community-based design, participatory process, youth outcomes, youth development, systems change, rural youth, Indigenous youth, racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth, youth work, collective self-care

Foreword

The Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) at the Ontario Trillium Foundation eagerly accepted YouthREX's invitation to co-host a Design Day on October 29, 2016. Together, we tackled four 'thorny' challenges that Ontario youth and youth workers experience. This report is a snapshot of this Design Day. The report includes the four Idea Lab challenges that the Design Day focused on and the eight prototype pitches that participants co-developed in response to these challenges, along with resources and case study examples that can inspire our youth work.

The **Youth Opportunities Fund** is an annual program of the Government of Ontario, administered by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. YOF provides grants and capacity-building supports to youth-led grassroots groups and collaboratives serving young people. Funded initiatives improve outcomes for youth facing multiple barriers to economic and social wellbeing. Similar to YouthREX, our work is grounded in *Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed.*

We recognize that in order to do our work effectively and responsively, we must take time to listen to and learn with and from, all youth sector stakeholders including youth, frontline youth workers, researchers, policy-makers and funders across Ontario. So often, we can end up working in silos or in pre-defined structures where engagement is confined to formal roles. YOF was pleased to co-host this Design Day with YouthREX to break down those walls, hear from each other, and connect deeply over what we can all agree we're working towards: improving the lives of youth.

Using design thinking to explore issues that matter: We were also happy to share our own learnings with YouthREX, gleaned from hosting multiple YOF Ideas Lab days, where we welcome youth to use design thinking to explore issues that matter to them and bring their ideas to life, while also learning about the YOF. We find this approach to be engaging and meaningful both for us and the youth. Collaborating with YouthREX on this Design Day was an opportunity to experience the intersection of design thinking with youth sector challenges and wisdom in a nuanced way. It was also an opportunity to explore an issue we are particularly interested in: increasing our understanding and meeting the needs of rural Ontario youth (Lab 03).

As this report shows, very fruitful dialogue and ideas were shared and explored. Like youth work, there were moments of connection and tension, times when some of us broke away from the schedule or planned activities, and many valuable learning moments – both expected and unexpected.

We hope this report continues to breathe life into the important ideas that were seeded at this event. Thank you to everyone who participated or supported the execution of this day! We look forward to collaborating again.

Tabish Surani
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*YouthREX reached out to these individuals to facilitate the discussions in each Idea Lab. They helped to guide conversations and provide contextual information based on their extensive knowledge and experience, whether lived, practice and/or research-based.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this Design Day. This report captures just a fraction of the wisdom that was shared; we are grateful for everyone who worked through the activities with a spirit of collaboration, patience, and a true commitment to youth wellbeing.

YOUTHREX DESIGN DAY ORGANIZERS

Anita Sekharan
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About the Design Day

OVERVIEW

The Design Day brought together youth sector stakeholders – youth, youth workers, policy makers, researchers, funders and citizens – to collaboratively tackle four 'thorny' challenges, or Idea Labs, that youth and youth workers experience. This event was hosted in collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Design Day participants were provided with 'challenge briefs' that provided participants with a summary of the context, key information, and suggested challenge questions to act as prompts for the day. Group of four to six individuals took on one of the Idea Lab challenges (two groups per challenge) and worked together to generate new ideas, or variations on existing innovations for advancing youth wellbeing on these issues. Everyone present was invested in the topic areas and had specific experience and knowledge to bring to the table, whether lived, practice or research-based.

This event was designed to provide participants with an opportunity to collaboratively work with peers from multiple vantage points in the sector to co-create recommendations on each Lab topic. The activities moved participants through developing a common understanding of the issue(s) at hand, ideation and prototyping solutions/ recommendations. At the end of the day, each of the eight groups shared, or 'pitched' their idea/prototype to the larger group.

YouthREX committed to sharing the solutions and recommendations from the Design Day widely within the youth sector through a knowledge mobilization strategy crafted around the contributions and outcomes of each Ideas Lab. This report is part of this strategy.

DESIGN DAY GOALS

- Share knowledge
- Learn from other perspectives
- Collaborate to design uniquely tangible recommendations or solutions for advancing youth wellbeing

PROPOSED OUTCOMES

- Increased collaboration amongst diverse youth sector stakeholders around a 'thorny' issue
- Develop a common understanding of the problem
- Design and prototype solutions

IDEA LAB TOPICS

LAB 01 // Bringing Our Whole Selves: Inclusive Programs With And For Racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA Youth

LAB 02 // Indigenizing Youth Work: Towards A New Relationship

LAB 03 // Far And Farther: Equitable Access To Programs, Services, And Opportunities For Youth Living In Rural And Remote Communities

LAB 04 // Beyond The Individual: Community/ Collective Approaches To Youth Worker Wellbeing

MaRS Solutions Lab facilitated this event, guiding participants through a collaborative process of discovery that included: problem framing, ideation, and prototyping of solutions. This approach, which included issues and stakeholder mapping, enabled participants to identify and design strategies and interventions for change.

Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation collaborated on this event with YouthREX, co-planning, engaging stakeholders to participate, hosting Idea Lab 03, *Far And Farther: Equitable Access To Programs, Services, And Opportunities For Youth Living In Rural And Remote Communities,* and participating throughout the day.

The Agenda

10 AM

Welcome + Introduction
Welcome by YouthREX and YOF
Introduction: The What & How of Design Jams
by MaRS Solution Lab (MSL)

10:15 AM

Icebreaker
Visualizing the Social Safety Net activity
by Youth Philanthropy Initiative

11:00 AM

Understanding the Problem: Mapping the Challenge

12:45 PM

Networking lunch

1:15 PM

Ideation
Generating ideas for interventions

2:15 PM

Break

2:30 PM

Prototyping
Building the pitches

3:20 PM

Idea Lab Pitches
Each of group had five minutes to present their prototype to the room and answer the following questions: What is the problem? What is the idea? How does your prototype change the user experience of your persona?

3:50 PM

Closing Remarks and Next Steps

4:00 PM

Close

01 // ICEBREAKER
Visualizing the Social Safety Net hosted by Rachel Paris, Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI)

To start the day off, everyone gathered in a big circle to participate in an icebreaker called 'Visualizing the Social Safety Net'. Participants were assigned a badge representing one of the following: 1) social institution, 2) type of social service, or 3) marginalized group/social issue. They took turns tossing a ball of yarn across the circle, identifying relationships between people and parts of the system, while holding their section of yarn to create a visual trail or 'net' to represent those connections.

This activity gave participants a visual, thought-provoking, and hands-on way to explore how the social services system works. It was an interactive way to visually see and reflect on who, why, and how diverse members of the community may be served/underserved/not served by the system, how connections can be built, and where we can support youth to engage within this system.

Design Day Activities:
A Step-by-Step Snapshot of the Day

02 // UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM: MAPPING THE CHALLENGE

Issues Map
Participants brainstormed issues and challenges associated with the challenge outlined in their Idea Lab brief.

The Stakeholder Map
This activity gave participants the opportunity to think through all the stakeholders involved in the issue outlined in the Idea Lab challenge at hand.

Experience Map
This activity had participants focusing on the experience of the key user/stakeholder they were designing for. The activity helped participants empathetically think through the issues and feelings of the user they were designing for, who this user interacts with, and what they experience/do when dealing with the challenge at hand.

03 // IDEATION: GENERATING IDEAS FOR INTERVENTIONS

Prioritizing Ideas
Participants brainstormed ideas for interventions on Post-It Notes and then mapped out all their ideas on a matrix based on feasibility and impact. This allowed them to see what ideas would have high impact and be feasible, versus those that were low impact and not very feasible.

04 // PROTOTYPING: BUILDING YOUR IDEA

The Prototype Idea sheet aided participants in thinking through key elements of the one idea they ended up choosing to prototype. The sheet outlines the idea, the user, the key problem, and how the creators could test the idea out. The second prototype sheet is a feedback sheet that gives space for the creators to write down useful feedback, assumptions, and potential changes to their idea.

Please see the Appendix for all worksheets.

LAB 01

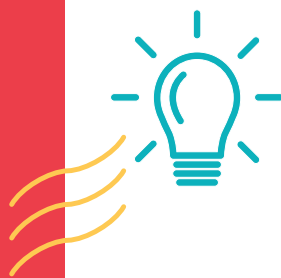## Bringing Our Whole Selves: Inclusive Programs With and for Racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA Youth

> "Anytime those worlds start to `cross over` in terms of `race` and `culture` and `class`, I think a lot of stuff goes along with it."
>
> – DALEY ET. AL, 2007, P. 22

> "The `more 'isms'` you have to deal with, the harder it is."
>
> – DALEY ET. AL, 2007, P. 22

a. Background

THE CONTEXT

Racialized LGBTTQ2SSIA youth offer unique insights, perspectives, experiences and solutions to an array of contemporary challenges and yet they face significant and overlapping barriers to inclusion. LGBTTQQ2SIA youth and racialized youth disproportionately experience bullying and violence, discrimination, homelessness, poor physical and mental health outcomes, and lack of interpersonal and community support. When youth are both LGBTTQQ2SIA and racialized these challenges are compounded; these youth face interlocking structures of disadvantage. For the purposes of this Idea Lab, *racialized*[1] refers to those who are Aboriginal and non-White in race.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Recent studies indicate that the vast majority of research on racialized youth of colour focuses on a single dimension of their experience rather than engaging with intersectional realities and compounded outcomes. Furthermore, the majority of studies take an individual, pathological, deficit or risk assessment approach rather than viewing them as community leaders and placing their experiences within broader structures and systems. Additionally, "there is mounting evidence of racism within the White LGBTQ community. In addition to overt racism, racial and ethnic minority individuals have reported experiencing different forms of discrimination in their LGBTQ communities" (Ghabrial, 2016). Studies confirm the recently articulated position of Black Lives Matter Toronto that there are relatively few positive youth development opportunities for racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth. The fact that mainstream practitioners are predominantly white is another issue; this could hinder access to services for racialized youth. Where services do exist, youth are often forced to choose between race/ethnicity and sex and gender. Research concludes: "intervention strategies based on single identity constructions of LGBTTQQ2SIA youth may be of limited help" (Daley et. al, 2007, p. 24).

While there is limited research that is specific to the Ontario context, within the youth sector there are programs, services, and organizations that are designing opportunities for racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth. However, the supports and services offered are still relatively few and often work in siloes from the broader youth sector. Due to a lack of research, practitioners are often left guessing how to best work with racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth, with the potential consequence that the youth do not benefit from experiences that are culturally responsive.

[1] Race is a social construct, as opposed to a biological reality, and racialization is a process of "othering" or of ascribing difference between people. Technically we are all racialized. Based on context, some people benefit from processes of racialization and others do not. In this case, we are looking at the negative effects of racialization on Aboriginal and non-white youth. Both the Canadian Census and the Employment Equity Act exclude Aboriginal peoples from its definition of visible minorities (or what we now know as racialized). However, Aboriginal peoples, like us all, are racialized and suffer negative impacts associated with the way they have been racialized in Canada. Even though Aboriginal peoples have been historically excluded from the definition of visible minority or racialized people, we choose to include them because the groups' exclusion reinforces their invisibility from research and projects such as this.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How might we move beyond identifying the service needs and gaps that racialized LGBTTQ2SSI face, to pro-actively designing pathways to inclusion in the youth sector?

How might we design youth sector services, programs, and opportunities that critically embrace intersectionality?

How might we critically create positive and inclusive youth development opportunities for all youth?

THE CHALLENGE

The realities and needs of racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth with intersectional identities are not being met. The demographics of Ontario are becoming increasingly diverse and as a sector we need to offer opportunities for all youth to thrive and bring their whole selves, not just one dimension, to our programs, services, and initiatives.
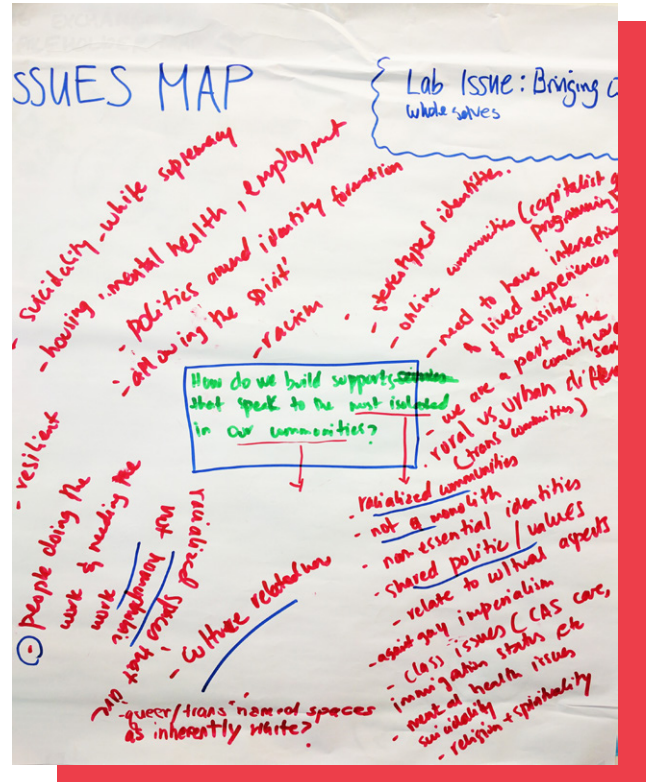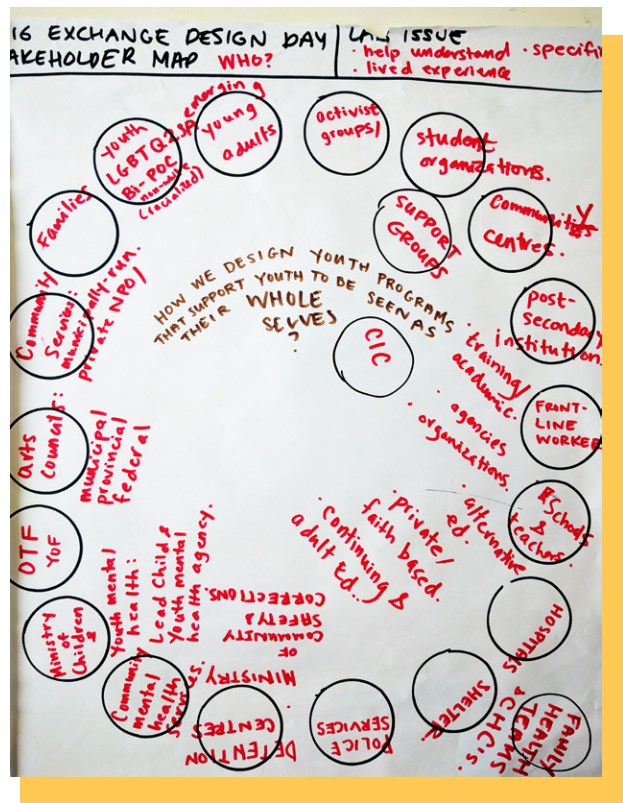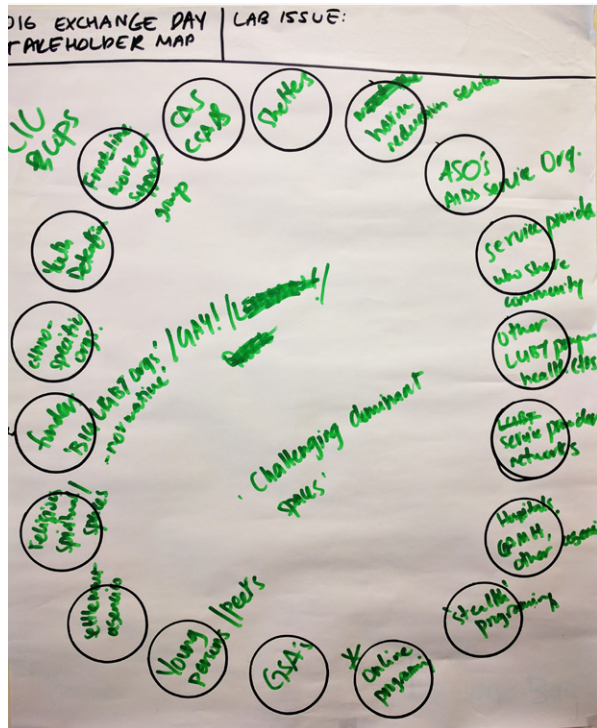
Thinking Notes
from Lab 01

b. Exploring the Issue
Mapping the Challenge for Interventions

Racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth experience a range of barriers to wellbeing. While groups took care to attend to issues of intersectionality that extend beyond race, gender, and sexuality, they also identified intersectional identities as strengths and not problems to be solved. If the challenges racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA experience are emphasized over their strengths and gifts, this can reinforce deficit-driven and pathologized responses. The problems youth face are not within the youth themselves but are embedded with current social orders that are exclusionary and not designed to be sufficiently responsive to: a) addressing challenges and b) promoting the strengths and gifts of racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA.

Both groups identified racism and white supremacy as real and permeating mainstream services and institutions. While groups described the need for spaces, networks, and opportunities for racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth to positively explore and develop their intersectional identities, they also highlighted immediate service needs related to: mental health (suicidality), housing, employment, and physical health.

Resource scarcity presents a significant barrier to being able to provide responsive programs and spaces as well as make services accessible by providing food, money, transit, vouchers, and employment. Most of the funding goes to large established organizations. Some of the stakeholders outside of "the Big 5" that can offer opportunities and supports to racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth identified by the groups include:

- Ethno-specific organizations (Punjabi orgs, Aid Service Organization)
- Peers with lived experience
- Frontline workers support groups
- Spiritual/religion groups
- Online supports
- Recreation spaces
- Informal networks
- Arts councils
- Grassroots activist groups/students

Groups recognized and engaged with the systemic barriers racialized LGBTTQQ2SIA youth experience, but both kept the youth and their needs at the centre of their proposals.

c. Ideation

ISSUES

Suicidality

White supremacy

Housing, mental health, and employment

Politics around identity formation

Stereotypes and identities

Online communities

Racism

Racialized communities

Class issues

CAS care

Immigration status

Health issues

Religion and spirituality

Intersectionality and lived experiences

Resilience

LGBTTQQ2SIA/trans spaces

Layers of oppression

IDEAS

Funders to distribute funding more evenly (outside Big Gay 5)

Resource non-Black, non-Indigenous pocs

Space for LGBTQ folks in non-LGBTQ agencies

Group spaces to build connections

Low-income passes

Accountability for workers to be LGBT+

Tangible supports such as food, money, and employment

Food and tokens without hassle

Decriminalizing drugs and sex work

d. Prototyping & Pitches
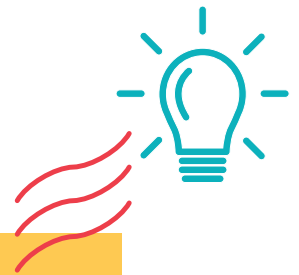
A QTBIPOC MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

How do we build supports that speak to the most isolated in our communities?

THE PROBLEM

The group described some of the major issues disproportionately affecting LGBTTQQ2SIA BIPOCS, such as racism, suicidality, poverty, and stereotypes/ discourses. They also noted the challenges of providing safe housing, meaningful employment, and mental health services.

THE PITCH

The strategy focused on mental health services by and for BIPOCS (Black and Indigenous People of Colour), prioritizing Black and Indigenous service providers. These services would include support by and for peer workers; it aims to address issues of isolation, invisibility, gaps in services and silos. This group stressed that "mental health is not sexy – we don't need it to be. There is no pressure to be 'innovative', just to meaningfully address the issues at hand."
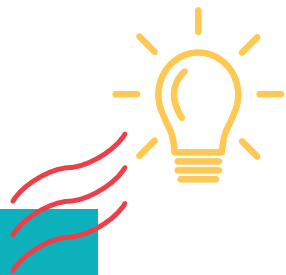
A MOBILE OUTREACH TEAM

How do we design youth programs that support youth to be seen as their whole selves?

THE PROBLEM

Racialized (Black and Indigenous) youth are discriminated against and treated unfairly. Intersectionality of being both racialized and LGBTTQQ2SIA creates complexity. We need to move beyond the language and practices of pathologizing and presenting 'queerness' and 'being racialized'.

THE PITCH

The Mobile Outreach Team would connect youth in need to services for LGBTTQQ2SIA youth of colour by travelling to identified sites (ie. schools, community hubs etc.) to provide in person support and resources. This idea addresses the lack of existing visible community advocates and increases outreach and the ability for communities to collectively identify and support youth in need.

Mobile York South Simcoe Youth Walk-In Clinic (MOBYSS)

www.mobyss.ca | #LetsMeetInRealLife

WHERE: York Region and South Simcoe

WHO: Youth 12-25 years of age

HOW: A youth-centered and holistic perspective influences MOBYSS framework. The team consists of a nurse practitioner, youth counselor, and peer support specialist. The team provides confidential sexual health and education for youth, using a 'welcoming, non-judgmental, and inclusive approach'. Some of the services they provide include contraception, pregnancy testing and counseling, testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, cervical screens and pelvic exams, sexual orientation support, and sexual health education.

The nurse practitioner provides various health care services, including: assessment, diagnosis and treatment of acute illnesses, preventative health care, wound care, and lab testing. Furthermore, they provide medical referrals and video access to specialists in the RV. The Youth Mental Health Workers and Peer Support Specialists are trained to support youth with mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidality. They approach their work with a harm reduction perspective and knowledge/experiences of issues unique to LGBTQ youth.

CASE STUDY

BYP100 Black Youth Project 100

byp100.org | @byp_100

WHERE: BYP100 has chapters in cities across the United States, including Chicago, Milwaukee, Washington, New York City, and New Orleans.

WHO: 18-35 year old members of the Black community

WHAT: BYP100 is dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all Black people. They do their work through a Black LGBTTQQ2SIA feminist lens. They work as a collective to organize and advocate on behalf of the Black community.

Through grassroots organizing training, they empower Black leaders to make an impact on their communities and share their message. They bring together Black leaders to advocate for the rights of LGBT people and women. They also run campaigns and advocate for the dismantling of the criminalization of Black youth and police brutality against Black youth. Their work seeks to be inclusive of all young Black people and they are committed to creating a welcoming environment. Members pay a monthly $10 fee and are expected to dedicate 3 hours a week of their time to BYP100. In return, they receive voting power, campaign and project proposal power, and are invited to attend local and national events.

CASE STUDY

LAB 02

Indigenizing Youth Work: Towards a New Relationship

> "[There must be] a change in perspective about the way in which Aboriginal peoples would be engaged with Canadian society in the quest for reconciliation.. [We cannot] perpetuate the paternalistic concept that only Aboriginal peoples are in need of healing...The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing. ... How can a conversation about reconciliation take place if all involved do not adopt an attitude of humility and respect? ... We all have stories to tell and in order to grow in tolerance and understanding we must listen to the stories of others."
>
> – REVEREND STAN MCKAY,
>   RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR

a. Background

THE CONTEXT

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes reconciliation as the ongoing commitment to building and renewing healthy relationships that are based on honesty, mutual respect, and an understanding of identity. In order to improve outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living on Turtle Island, youth sector stakeholders need to participate in the restorative work of truth and reconciliation. Non-Indigenous members of the youth sector need to ask what our role is in remedying injustices and establishing relationships grounded in the principles of reconciliation.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Truth and reconciliation are interrelated processes. First truth needs to be shared, received and understood, then we move to reconciliation. There are many truths to be shared, among them: there is an urgent need within the youth sector for non-Indigenous members to understand the role we can play in undertaking the shared work of reconciliation. Presently, the Indigenous population of Canada is very young: 42% are under 24 years old.[3] Historical and present actions have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences. Indigenous communities are still working to recover from the 60's scoop, the legacy of the residential school system, and range of historic injustices.

Not unrelatedly, First Nations youth are 5-7 times more likely than non-first nations youth to take their own lives.[4] 76% of on-reserve First Nations youth surveyed perceived alcohol and drug abuse to be the main challenge currently facing their community.[5] Indigenous young people are vastly over-represented in the Child Welfare system and the Criminal Justice system. Note the word "system", as these are not the result of solely individual mistakes or failings. An ecological systems approach to youth development understands that youth development is embedded in overlapping and reinforcing contexts; it implicates us all in these systemic failings. We will all benefit from participation in truth and reconciliation.

[3] Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

[4] Health Canada, 2006

[5] Ontario Regional Health Survey, 2008/10

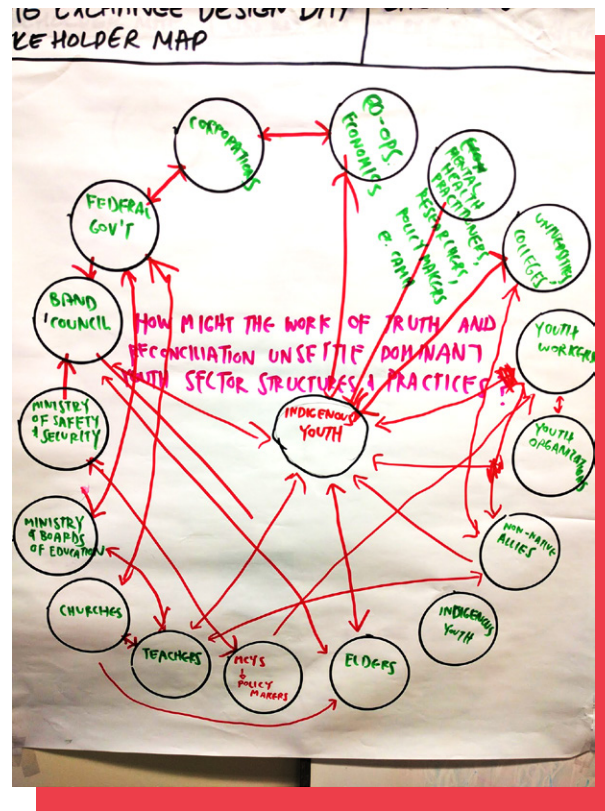How might the work of truth and reconciliation unsettle dominant youth sector structures and practices?

How might we learn from and integrate Indigenous experience, history, theory and worldviews into youth work practice?

How might youth sector stakeholders contribute to the development of community-driven and -delivered, holistic prevention-based youth services?

How might the youth sector work 'in a good way' with others to address the legacy of residential schools, close gaps and remove barriers, support Indigenous culture, and reconcile relationships with Indigenous people?

How might we reimagine a youth sector that actively learns from and integrates Indigenous experience and knowledge to better meet the needs of all youth?

THE CHALLENGE

One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action suggests a direction for youth work. The TRC calls for federal and sustainable funding to support "community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices." Given this call, we ask, how might we take up truth and reconciliation in youth work?

Thinking Notes
from Lab 02
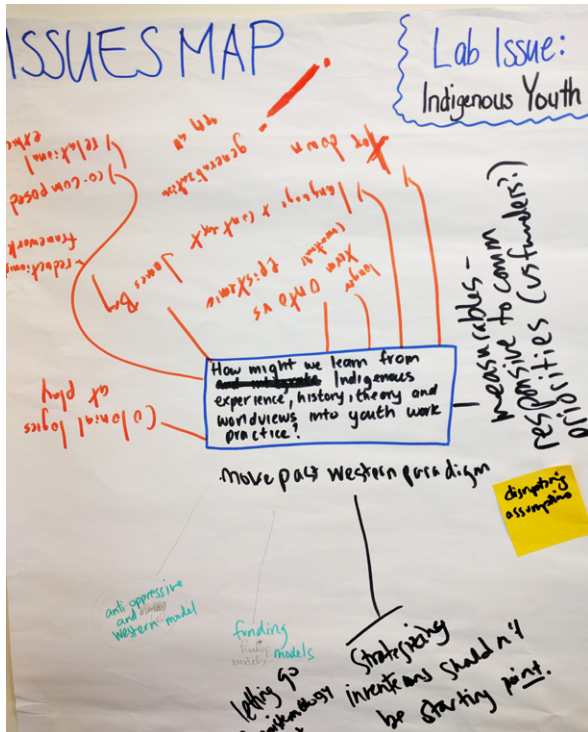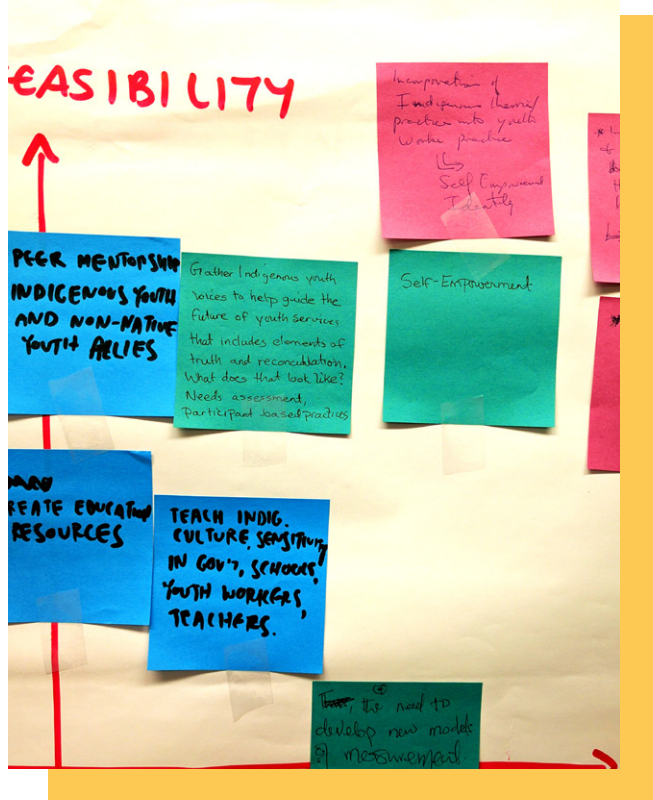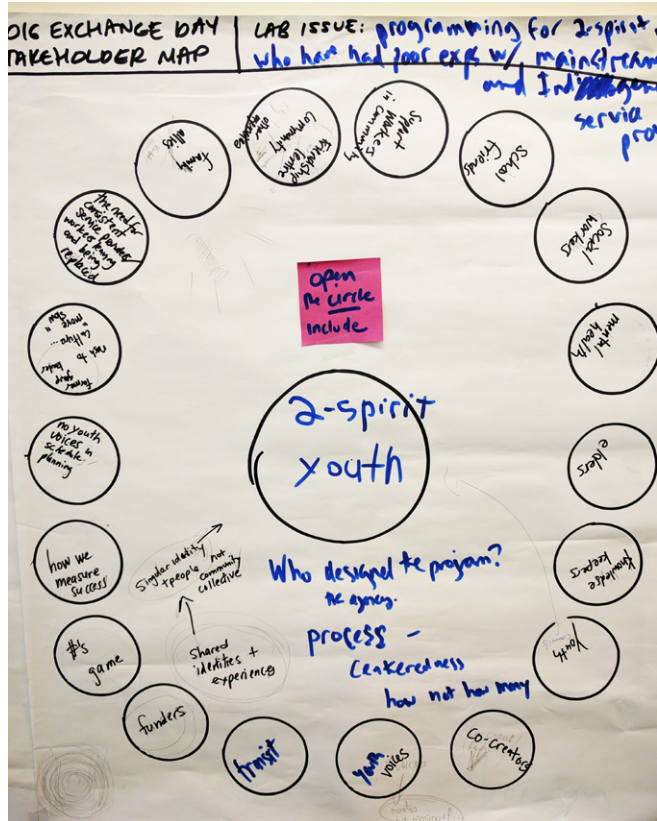
b. Exploring the Issue
Mapping the Challenge for Interventions

Each group had noticed or experienced a lack of Indigenous youth voice in program development, policy and decision-making. They also shared experiences within mainstream processes and services, such as the education system, that embody colonial logics, assumptions, and structures, and need to be changed in order to move toward truth and reconciliation. In terms of truth and reconciliation within the youth sector, both groups agreed that Indigenous youth must be at the centre. Their "truths", voices, and perspectives must be heard, valued, and responded to.

Both groups imagined opportunities, platforms, and initiatives that will amplify the perspectives and knowledge of Indigenous youth as leaders in creating a youth sector that embodies the values of truth and reconciliation. Education was at the heart of both of the groups' ideas and the youth were positioned as teachers and knowledge keepers. Moreover, the groups saw knowledge from lived experience as critical. In order to work toward truth and reconciliation in the youth sector, settlers (non-Indigenous Canadians) need to learn from Indigenous youth experiences, perspectives, worldviews, histories, and narratives. Structures and resources should be put in place to support the creation or expansion of opportunities for learning from Indigenous youth across the youth sector.

c. Ideation

ISSUES

Colonization and assimilation

Education system

Lack of knowledge due
to colonization

Indigenous youth exclusion from
program development, policy, and
decision-making

Lack of aboriginal youth voices
and perspectives

Lack of accountability

Lack of long term commitments

Sovereignty challenge
= regional government and different
levels of power

Can't "Apply All"

Numbers game

Rush to "culture"

Lack of youth voices

Physical barriers - lack of transit from
reservation to services

Western paradigm is pervasive

Top-down strategies

Reductionist frameworks

IDEAS

Youth as co-creators, partners in
reconciliation

Create education resources to
support reconciliation

Peer mentorship - Indigenous youth
and non-Indigenous youth allies

Teach Indigenous culture within
government and schools, and to
teachers and youth workers

Gather Indigenous youth voices
to help guide the future of youth
services that includes elements of
truth and reconciliation using a
participatory approach

Integrate Indigenous worldviews
into the education system and youth
work practice

Incorporate mandatory truth and
reconciliation history and outcomes
in the social services and humanities
studies

d. Prototyping & Pitches

INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK

How might we learn from and integrate Indigenous experience, history, theory and worldviews into youth work practice?

THE PROBLEM

Often youth work functions within a reductionist framework and one-size-fits all, generic models are foisted onto Indigenous and other communities. This approach is without connection to places and people. Top-down, "apply all", approaches work in opposition to traditionally relational Indigenous worldviews. This group, therefore, considered how to 'begin in a different way' that is careful to not reproduce the colonial logics that inform many youth programs and practices.

Members of the group noted that models of working in a grounded and respectful ways already do exist, or have existed in the past, but perhaps because they were not adequately supported, we haven't been able to learn about their full potential. The group considered what existing ideas and models could respond to our question and go further with proper support. The group prioritized designs, models, and practices that are responsive and accountable to communities, first and foremost. The group identified some guiding principles for youth work and programs that wish to integrate Indigenous experiences, history, theory and worldviews. They are:

- Co-composed, rooted in places, ways, stories, histories
- Relational, ethical
- Contextualized; knowledge is situated in particular places and experiences

The group looked for an approach that will create processes and spaces that "animate life" by telling "small stories" and "in-between" stories rather than subscribing to overarching and metanarratives about who youth are and what they need.

One of the challenges that this group had with the processes and templates of the Idea Lab concerned the assumption that a disparate group of people, each

from different places and experiences, any many without direct Indigenous experience, could create a generalized and dis-placed solution. Moreover, the nature of this challenge inherently relied on a non-colonial approach and yet the group felt that the Idea Lab structure often worked against a relational, grounded, and experiential process. For example, the Idea Lab structure demanded focus on a particular area and the production of "outcomes" before moving on to the next activity. The activities started from "idea" and not from experience. The group identified the processes themselves as enacting a displaced and disembodied orientation to solution-forming.

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE SCENARIO
The group discussed a particular scenario where an organization seeks to offer services and supports to Indigenous 2-Spirited Youth but is having a hard time engaging them. Not only is the service off-reservation and public transportation is infrequent and unreliable, but a key program facilitator who had relationships with many of the youth had left because funding ended. At the same time, the organization is facing demands similar to many in the sector: its funding is tied to "numbers" and evidence of impact. In order to engage youth, the organization invests in reaching out to important knowledge keepers including: youth, elders, friends, teachers, allies, family, social workers, and teachers as well as institutions like friendship centres and schools for insights on how to design a program that Indigenous 2-spirited youth will benefit from. The organization committed to moving slowly despite the significant pressures, and invested in building relationships. The organization moved from seeing youth as service recipients to seeing them as important co-creators of the program.

THE PITCH
This group asked, 'how might we design youth programs in a different way?' They concluded that Indigenous youth are essential partners in the journey of truth and reconciliation in Canada. The Indigenous Youth Leadership Network will support youth sector stakeholders to design programs in a different way – with the experiences of Indigenous youth at the centre. In this network, Indigenous

youth are knowledge keepers. They work with Elders and a range of other knowledge keepers to offer fee-for-service organizational educational and capacity building related to designing and implementing youth programs that don't reproduce colonial harms.

Youth will support process-oriented strategies that are grounded in relation to land, language, and history.

The Canadian Roots Exchange – Youth Reconciliation Initiative

www.canadianroots.ca/youth-reconciliation-initiative

WHERE: Across Canada

WHO: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian youth

WHY: Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE) brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth together with the intent of strengthening inter-generational relations and breaking down divisive stereotypes.

HOW: The Youth Reconciliation Initiative engages youth leaders (ages 18-29) across Canada in building a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who work together in team who reconciliation/education activities in their respective regions. The CRE is committed to cultivating respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that are based on mutual understanding and appreciation. To contribute to this vision, CRE engages young people in shared learning about Indigenous communities in Canada through respectful dialogue, recreation, and laughter. Youth participate in a retreat where they are oriented to the process of reconciliation and decolonization, gain facilitation skills, and learn about "Indigenous history, culture, and worldviews." The youth teams then deliver community engagement workshops to youth in their region, and participate in regional/national exchanges and conferences. The program is youth-led.

CASE STUDY

YOUTH-INFORMED WEBSITE/APP ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

How might the work of truth and reconciliation unsettle dominant youth sector structures and practices?

THE PROBLEM

The voices and perspectives of Indigenous youth are often missing from program development, policy, and decision-making. Canadian institutions and society lack knowledge about the history and experiences of Indigenous peoples and their communities. Colonial structures silence Indigenous youth and their communities.

Group participants discussed how the incongruity between Indigenous and colonial worldviews creates barriers to reconciliation and they provided several examples based on their lived experience. One participant described how the Government Ministry they worked for didn't want people doing ceremonies. When asked, "how does Indigenous ceremony help Indigenous youth?", this participant described having to come up with justification and

curriculum to demonstrate the rationale behind Indigenous science. Another example of how colonization impacts youth work in Indigenous communities concerns the privileging of writing over speaking: "Elders are forced to do things they've never had to do before like writing down their practices and teachings, which is contrary to Indigenous oral history." Two members of the group were Social Workers and they described how when doing their intakes, they felt conflicted because they want to get to know youth, but the case notes and statistics that are required by management get in the way. They described experiencing more of a focus on statistics and data than on the personal story of each youth. To be a good social/youth worker, you have to be able to adapt to the situation you're in and to gain the trust of youth. They felt that the mandatory interview questions that they are required to fill out aren't always sensitive to the needs of youth and yet they feel a lot of pressure from the Ministry to have meticulously documented case files.

Recognizing that youth voice and perspective is often missing from youth work and highlighting the fact that youth use technology constantly, this group decided to prototype a website/app that would give Indigenous youth a voice.

This website would allow youth workers, teachers, non-Indigenous allies to ask Indigenous-focused questions directly to Indigenous youth. An online space dedicated to increasing knowledge related to Indigenous perspectives and experiences, this site would amplify youth voices and carry on the Indigenous oral storytelling tradition. It will increase awareness about Indigenous culture and ways of being while providing a space for people to ask questions and learn in an engaging format.

The idea is that people can anonymously post questions about Indigenous cultures, practices, experiences, history and youth work and receive answers from Indigenous youth. This allows people to ask questions that perhaps they are too nervous to ask in person or questions that they feel like they should know the answer to. By featuring Indigenous youth voices, it allows them to be seen as experts with valuable knowledge to share. Youth would record their answers in video format (or even just audio), which would allow the continuation of the oral storytelling tradition. There would be a main website to host all of the questions and answers. A website allows for anonymity which in turn allows for questions without judgment. The project would also have social media channels so if people feel comfortable, they could ask their questions on those platforms too.

Mushkegowuk Youth Department

www.mushyouth.com| @MushYouth #MUSHYOUTH

WHERE: Mushkegowuk communities and surrounding areas, including: Kaschechewan First Nation, Fort Albany First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation, Taykwa Tagamou Nation, Attawapiskat First Nation, Missanabie Cree First Nation and Moose Cree First Nation (Ontario, Canada)

WHO: Youth, youth councils, and youth workers in Mushkehowuk and surrounding areas

WHY: The Mushkegowuk Youth Department emerged from the recognition that young people in their communities are experiencing a range of challenges including low self-esteem, lack of opportunities, and historical and intergenerational trauma related to colonization.

HOW: The Mushkegowuk Council Youth Department serves as a platform that supports Mushkegowuk youth to strengthen their Cree identity. They amplify youth voice through the creation of youth councils and other opportunities, build the community capacity of First Nations youth workers and organizations, and increase opportunities for youth by supporting grant-writing and fundraising initiatives. Because many of the communities are remote and disconnected, communication is a key part of the Youth Department's strategy. They produce original content and they engage their community extensively through all social media channels. Their new website is currently in development.

CASE STUDY

LAB 03

Far and Farther: Equitable Access to Programs, Services, and Opportunities for Youth Living in Rural and Remote Communities

Hosted in collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Fund, Ontario Trillium Foundation

> In a constantly urbanizing world, how can we ensure that young people living in rural and remote communities are not 'left behind?'

a. Background

THE CONTEXT

We recognize that youth living in rural and remote communities do not have access to the same level of services and supports as youth in urban communities. There are fewer programs and services for young people to choose from. Where programs and services exist, distance and lack of transportation make it difficult for youth to participate. Rural communities can be defined as geographic areas, cultures, or ways of living.[6] Rural [and remote] areas differ widely, and may include farming communities, resource-based communities (e.g. mining or logging), communities that are living off the grid or off the land, and communities that are supported by a tourism resource such as a natural or historical feature. Northern rural communities often describe themselves as "remote" rather than "rural"[7] It is important to remember that vast differences exist between rural and remote communities. For the purposes of this discussion it may be helpful to think of rural and remote communities as follows:

- Rural communities tend to be within range of major roads and highways.

- Semi-remote communities tend not to be accessible by major roads or highways, but a secondary road is typically available and used for travel in and out of the community.

- Remote communities are typically accessibly by air year around, and by road only during the winter on ice roads.

In 2006, 14% of Ontarians under 25 years of age lived in rural areas.[8] Due in part to the lack of access to quality programs, services, and opportunities in rural and remote communities, young people face the challenging decision to leave home and move to urban centres to seek access to programs, services, and opportunities. Of particular consideration in the context of rural and remote communities is the needs of Indigenous young people who face many additional challenges (i.e., underfunded schools, racism, intergenerational trauma, etc.). Indigenous people are the fastest growing population in Canada.[9] They make up 6% of the population in non-metro census divisions with a population under 100,000[10] and 15% of the population in non-metro divisions with a population under 25,000.[11]

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

There are many barriers to participation, including lack of transportation, lack of specialized supports and also gaps in the services and opportunities available to youth living in rural and remote communities. Although largely focused on physical infrastructure, the 2012 Roads and Bridges Review found that the per capita infrastructure gap for the northeast and west regions of Ontario to be double that of central Ontario.[12] It is clear that rural and

[6] du Plessis, V., Beshiri, R., Bollman, R. D. (2002). Definitions of "rural". www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/21-601-m/2002061/4224867-eng.pdf

[7] Best Start Resource Centre (2010). How to Reach Rural Populations. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: author. http://exchange.youthrex.com/report/how-reach-rural-populations

[8] Statistics Canada. 2006. "2006 Census of Population - Catalogue No. 97-558-XCB2006006."

[9] Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. 2006. "Fact Sheet – Urban Aboriginal Population in Canada." https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100014298/1100100014302

[10] Rural Ontario Institute. (2013). "Focus on Rural Ontario – Aboriginal identity population." http://www.ruralontari oinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/Focuss%209%20Aboriginal%20identity%20population.pdf

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ministry of Transportation and Association of Municipalities of Ontario. (2012). Provincial-Municipal Roads and Bridges Review. https://www.amo.on.ca/AMO-PDFs/Reports/2012/Provincial-Municipal-Roads-and-Bridges-Review-Fina.aspx

remote youth often face additional difficulties in accessing programs, services, and opportunities. The Best Start Resource Centre identified specific challenges facing people living in rural and remote communities and organized these under 8 broad areas: employment, transportation, access to Internet and cell service, privacy and confidentiality, isolation, funding realities, being accepted, and meeting needs.[13] Additionally, the overall health of rural, remote and northern communities is significantly poorer than urban communities.[14] Addressing issues related to access and availability of services, programs, and opportunities in rural and remote communities can minimize risk factors related to health and wellbeing, foster connections and community development, and reduce outmigration. Research by The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement revealed that, 'Youth who were engaged in structured activities were less likely to use cigarettes, marijuana, hard drugs and alcohol, less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour or become pregnant, less likely to engage in violent behaviour or be arrested, less likely to drop out of school, and more likely to complete a college degree, than youth who were not engaged in these kinds of activities."[15]

THE CHALLENGE

The Ontario Ministry of Finance projects that the population of youth between the ages of 0 and 19 living in non-metro census divisions with a population under 100,000 will decrease in coming years.[16] Despite this, we must seek solutions to the inequitable provision of and access to quality programs, services, and opportunities in rural and remote communities or we run the risk of further marginalizing those young people who continue to live in these communities. In a constantly urbanizing world, how can we ensure that young people living in rural and remote communities are not "left behind?"

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How might we meet the specific needs and interests of diverse youth living in rural and/or remote communities?

How might we invest strategically and meaningfully in rural and remote communities to address inequitable access to programs, services, and opportunities for youth?

Do the current models of investment (e.g., per capita formulas) make sense in rural and remote communities?

How might we creatively engage youth in rural and remote communities, and facilitate stronger peer connections?

How might we address transportation barriers sustainably for youth living in rural and/or remote communities?

[13] Best Start Resource Centre (2010). How to Reach Rural Populations.

[14] Ministerial Advising Council on Rural Health. (2002). Rural health in rural hands: Strategic directions for rural, remote, Northern and aboriginal communities. http://exchange.youthrex.com/report/rural-health-rural-hands-strategic-directions-rural-remote-northern-and-aboriginal.

[15] Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. (2003). Youth Engagement and Health Outcomes: Is there a link? http://www.engagementcentre.ca/files/litreview1_web_e.pdf

[16] Ontario Ministry of Finance (2014a). Ontario's long-term report on the economy. http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/ economy/ltr/2014/ltr2014.pdf

Thinking Notes from Lab 03
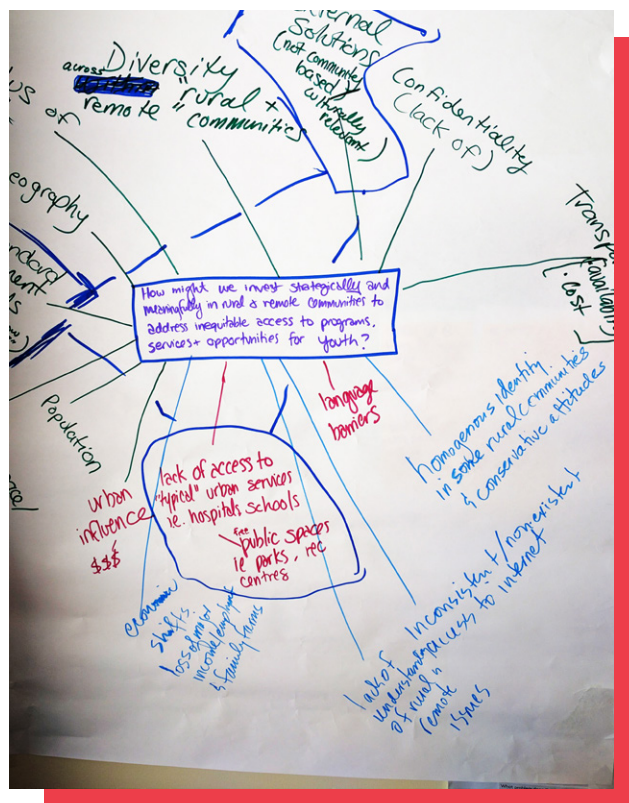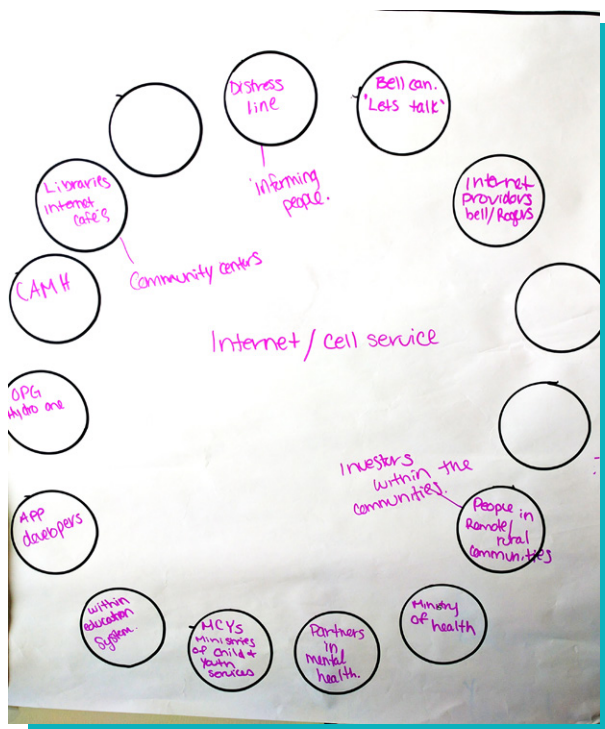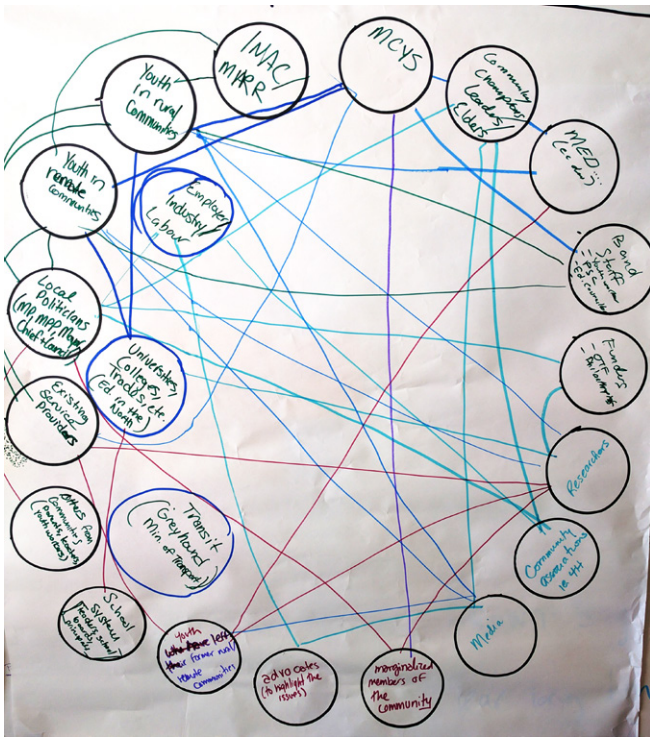
b. Exploring the Issue
Mapping the Challenge for Interventions

Rural and remote communities do not have the same levels of access to services and resources as urban communities. Both groups focused on the need to improve services and resources in order to respond to the mental health needs of youth living in rural and remote communities. Group participants represented a mix of people with urban, rural, and remote experience, as well as range of experiences in relation to the topic. Participants from rural and remote communities described how a lack of resources and services contributes to youth leaving the communities. For example, if a young person has a mental health need and services aren't locally available, they may need to travel significant distances, or even leave their community, to access services. If they cannot or do not want to travel or leave, they must stay and not receive services.

The groups discussed how because of population density standard investment models privilege urban areas for everything from services, like Internet access, to service workers like trained counsellors and mental health professionals. Because resources are so limited, there is a need to invest strategically and meaningfully in rural and remote communities. Both groups sought to maximize local resources while at the same time identifying external stakeholders, like governments, funders and businesses that could help to develop essential infrastructure. Other issues that contribute to mental health challenges in rural communities include poverty, lack of employment and other opportunities, lack of transportation, stigma associated with mental health, and issues related to the need for confidentiality. Finally, the groups also emphasized that rural and remote communities are diverse and they should not all be painted with same brush. Strategies need to be locally and culturally grounded and relevant, most especially in the case of Indigenous communities.

c. Ideation

ISSUES

Lack of access to typical urban services in hospitals and schools

Lack of confidentiality

Exodus of youth

Geography

Standard investment models

Physical space and infrastructure

Language barriers

Homogenous identity in some rural communities and conservative attitudes

Lack of consistency/non-existent understanding and access to Internet of rural remote spaces

Diversity across remote rural communities

External solutions (not community based or culturally relevant)

Transportation (feasibility and cost)

Online services, internet/cell services, and investment

Not enough research

Mental health

Lack of supports

IDEAS

Schools having more resources

Youth council

Brochure/library on local resources in hospital

Education for hospital/medical staff

Regional Youth Worker

Community council

Change in hospital culture

Resources (high feasibility)

CAMH and MCYS involved in decision making

Upgrading cell towers

d. Prototyping & Pitches

RURAL YOUTH VOICES NETWORK

How might we invest strategically and meaningfully in rural and remote communities to address inequitable access to programs, services, and opportunities for youth?

THE PROBLEM

This group focused on the mental health issues, and resulting negative outcomes that result when support isn't provided in a rural context.

THE PITCH

The Rural Youth Voices Network strategy will be directed at rural youth, 14-18 years of age, who live within an hour of a hospital. It will specifically target communities with a population of less than 10,000 people. The strategy will be a provincial network of rural schools. Each school will have a youth council, a community council, and youth workers on staff. The youth workers will be focused on youth barriers and challenges in each region. The network will provide training and grant writing support. The youth council meetings will occur in the schools, over lunch. Teachers will provide support to the youth council,

as well as connect with the community council. The youth will identify community and individual needs. The schools will work on housing more resources out of the school.

The group acknowledged that many young people, especially in rural and remote communities, feel isolated. The Rural Voices Network would help foster an environment where young people are making important decisions in their communities, are helping to strengthen youth supports in rural areas, and are working closely with other key community members and stakeholders.

Potential benefits as a result of this network include: active citizen engagement, skill building and education, reducing isolation and building a sense of community, structured activity, building capacity within existing structures, minimizing transportation barriers, building youth and adult relationships, giving youth a reason to be in school, building relationships between youth and communities and leveraging youth voices.

The group suggests testing the idea by piloting it in certain regions.

Teck John Baker Youth Leaders Program

https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/community-health/project-examples/850

WHERE: Rural Northwest Arctic Borough, Alaska

WHO: Middle and high school students

WHAT: Teen suicide rates in rural Northwest Artic Borough, Alaska were 7 times higher than the statewide teen suicide rate. The Teck John Baker Youth Leaders Programs was created to train youth to provide support to their peers. They equip youth with tools and resources to support their peers. Their curriculum and philosophy is based on the Foundation for Healthy Generations Natural Helpers program. The goals of the program are to reduce school bullying and help peers support each other through challenging times. Youth are provided with training to provide comfort and seek adult aid for students having suicidal thoughts or ideation.

The youth leaders address a variety of issues, including suicide prevention, anti-bullying, and anti-domestic violence. Each year, the program selects middle and high school youth from villages in the rural Alaska area and provides leadership training. Youth leaders actively participate in and lead the training. They return to their village and share knowledge with their classmates about substance use, bullying, trauma, suicide, and other topics. They participate in planning school and village events, as well as student policy development and administration. They also work with school employees in implementing health promotion and prevention activities.

CASE STUDY

YOUTH TALK APP

How might we invest strategically and meaningfully in rural and remote communities to address inequitable access to programs, services, and opportunities for youth?

THE PROBLEM
This group also focused on rural youth facing mental health issues, emphasizing the detrimental effects of teachers, youth workers and caregivers being stretched for time and capacity and unable to singularly provide the support needed. Moreover, because rural communities are smaller and often close-knit, issues of confidentiality, stigma, and safety are a significant concern for youth seeking mental health services.

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE SCENARIO
The group described a situation wherein a teacher or youth worker notices a difference in a student and becomes worried and calls their parent and doctor. The staff is looking for resources, including counselling. At the same time, they are trying to balance lesson planning and teaching the class. They begin to feel burnt out and tired. Meanwhile, the student is experiencing anxiety and panic attacks. The student sees a doctor it is unclear whether or not this is helpful. In the end, the student connects with a supportive friend.

THE PITCH
The Youth Talk app would address youth facing mental health barriers, linking them to crisis workers, mental health workers, doctors and peer support workers. The app would include a chat, education and support function. It aims to build community and help youth in need by providing a safe, confidential space that includes access to support.

The group's prototype focused on the development of a mental health app, developed in conjunction with Bell cell towers. Internet access is often limited so getting the providers on board is important. The plan involves persuading investors and deciding on a fair agreement. CAMH and an app developer/social media specialist would also be involved. The youth are the ultimate stakeholders and the ones that would benefit from this strategy.

The users of this app are youth and mental health professionals. This app will result in increased support for youth in rural communities, as well as provide educational supports and a safe cyber space. The app will allow for increased levels of confidentiality and provide a sense of community. The group would test the idea by having developers pilot the app with youth in the James Bay area. Some of the components the app include: crisis support services, psychiatrists, mental health workers, and peer support.

LAB 04

Beyond the Individual: Collective/Community Approaches to Youth Worker Wellbeing

> "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is **self-preservation**, and that is an act of **political warfare.**"
>
> – AUDRE LORDE, A BURST OF LIGHT: ESSAYS (1988)

a. Background

THE CONTEXT

Frontline youth workers and the work they do are critical to the youth sector and the wellbeing of youth in our communities. Their work engages the intersection point between youth and 'the system' – they bear witness to the development, changes and challenges that the young people they support face; they can be the first person these youth connect with in times of need. From providing moral support, to finding pathways to education or employment, mediating between tensions within a youth's life and more, for many frontline youth workers, 'work' is not a 9-5 endeavor, but one that can take up consistent and significant emotional and physical energy.

While frontline youth workers often share a passion for positive social change, common cultural understandings, experiences, and empathy with the youth they work with, they may also face challenges of their own such as precarious work employment and continuously seeing, hearing, and (ironically) personally experiencing the same oppression and trauma that affect the youth they work with. Oftentimes, they are also youth themselves! These elements combined can have negative effects on youth workers: burnout or vicarious trauma are two examples of this.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

In 2009 Frontline Partners with Youth Network (FPYN) did a report called *Frontline Systems of Support.* In this report, they found that 100% of frontline youth worker respondents said they suffer negative health impacts and 96% of respondents stated that they suffer mental health distress as a result of their work. Respondents also identified that changes to organizational practices would help to alleviate the negative impacts of the grief and trauma experienced through their work as frontline youth workers. While it has been seven years since the report was launched, the issues it brings to the forefront related to self-care, burnout and vicarious trauma, are still extremely relevant, and are issues that are still brought up time and again in the youth sector, especially among frontline youth workers and organizers.

"Self-care becomes a radical act when we take the risk and allow ourselves to be truly seen, and taken care of, by others. Let's take risks and take care of each other, honestly and accurately name problems and renew our innate gifts as healers, artists, organizers, creators and maintainers of healthy systems. The term "self-care," as it is currently used by the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, is a continuing tactic to individualize collective problems needing collective solutions and social change."

– JENNY KATZ, FOUNDER OF FPYN

THE CHALLENGE

Support for mental and emotional wellbeing is too often a responsibility left to frontline workers to manage themselves, who may prioritize the wellbeing of others before themselves. While we often think of self-care as an individual responsibility, we know that if we, as a sector, are honest, there is much work to be done in our organizations, in our communities and in our systems to really make frontline work a healthy career path. Further, in order to truly address youth wellbeing, we must also foster the wellbeing of those who often have close relationships and 'access' to youth who may not otherwise engage. What this looks like, is still to be determined. While some organizations may build in mental health supports for workers, others may not; there are some initiatives such as the continuing work of Frontline Partners with Youth Network (FPYN) that also aim support a community of frontline youth workers but these initiatives are not widely acknowledged by stakeholders across the 'system' nor are these policies addressing the wellbeing of youth workers built into funding structures and expectations.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How might we create the conditions for frontline youth work to be a healthy path for those who choose it?

How might be move to a collective, sector-wide approach to ensuring youth worker wellbeing?

How might we cultivate a culture that views youth worker wellbeing as a priority and integral to youth wellbeing?
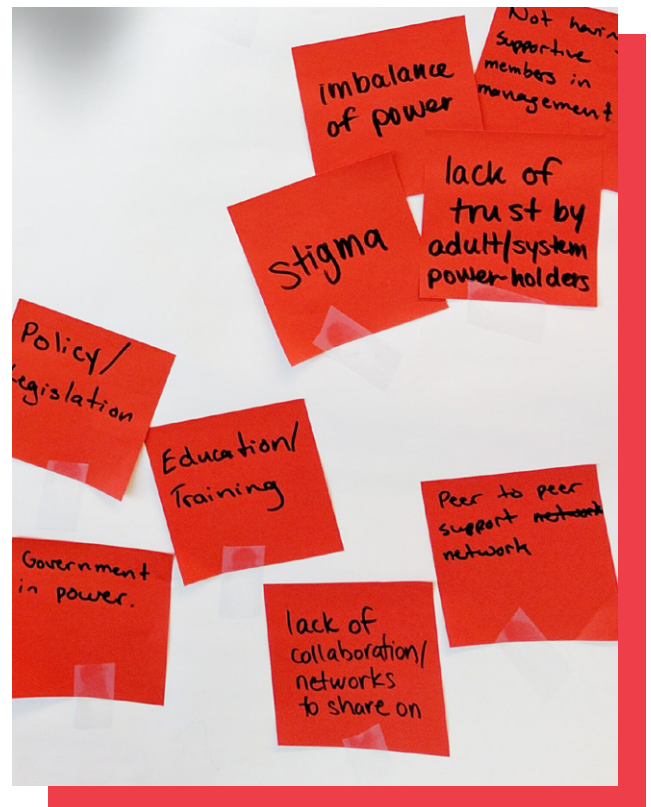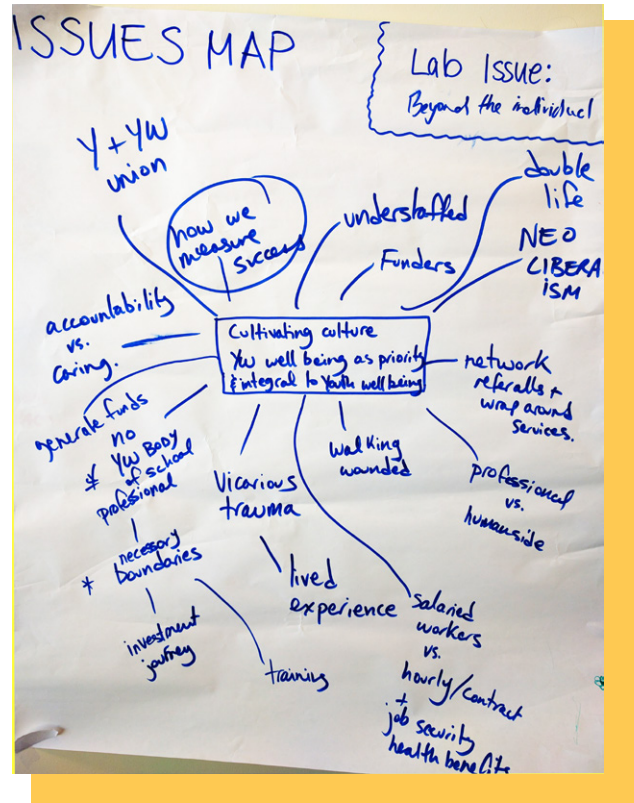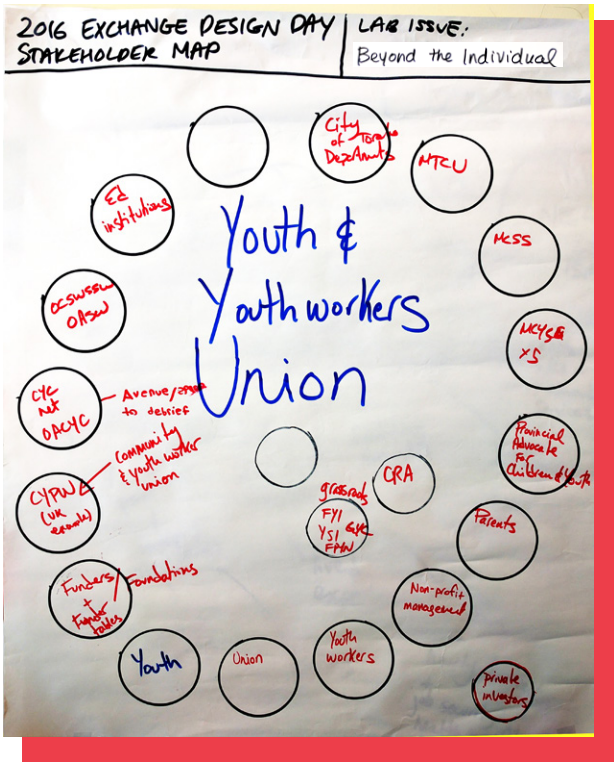
b. Exploring the Issue
Mapping the Challenge for Interventions

Participants in both groups shared their personal experiences in the field as youth workers, and the challenges and barriers to wellbeing. They spoke to the increasing workloads and frustrations associated with securing funding for their positions. They described the challenges of being advocates for the young people they work with, while also adhering to the bureaucratic structure and rules of the organizations they work for.

The groups identified several factors contributing to the issue of burnout and compassion fatigue in this field of work, including:

• High turnover rates

• Precarious employment and low pay

• Lack of resources

• Stereotypes and discourses that undervalue the profession

• Vicarious trauma

• Capitalism

• Lack of training and education

• Funding difficulties

Thinking Notes from Lab 04

2016 EXCHANGE DESIGN DAY STAKEHOLDER MAP | LAB ISSUE: Beyond the Individual

Youth & Youth workers Union

ISSUES MAP | Lab Issue: Beyond the individual

2016 EXCHANGE DAY STAKEHOLDER MAP | LAB ISSUE Beyond the Individual

c. Ideation

ISSUES

Understaffing

Accountability vs. Caring

No youth worker school/
professionalization

Vicarious trauma and lived experience

Salaried workers vs. hourly/contract
workers

Lack of job security and health benefits

Funding challenges

How we measure success

Burnout of youth workers

The expense of self-care

Underpaid and undervalued profession

Unrealistic funder expectations

Lack of training and education

Vicarious trauma, personal experience

Not enough time for self-care

Skipping lunch to support youth

Administrative work

\Working against the bureaucracy

Management burn out

Youth needs vs organizational
requirements

IDEAS

Organizational practices that nurture
self-care

Allies inside and outside of the sector

Decrease isolation

Media coverage on youth work stories

Peer support network

Strategies to address alienation and
powerlessness

Permanent youth work jobs

Make private companies accountable

Workplace benefits and access to
services

Mandatory training for managers on
the importance of wellness

Sector-wide wellness conferences for
youth workers

Updating policies and procedures
manual in organizations

Scale online for burnout levels

Space for youth workers to honestly
share about their experience without
consequences to their job

Allocate time for leaders to support
team members

Opt-in for insurance coverage for
counselling

Wellness plan for staff, developed with
supervisors

d. Prototyping & Pitches

YOUTH AND YOUTH WORKER UNION

How might we cultivate a culture that views youth worker wellbeing as a priority and integral to youth wellbeing?

THE PROBLEM

The problem is burnout and poor working conditions for youth workers. Many factors contribute to this issue, including precarious and contract work, funding challenges, vicarious trauma, and a lack of job security and benefits.

THE PITCH

A Youth and Youth Worker Union would give youth workers a space and platform from which to advocate collectively for improved working conditions and equity, potentially addressing issues such as precarious work, lack of mental health support, poverty, social, economic and racial injustice etc. The union will address many of the factors contributing to burnout, including low pay and lack of benefits. The union will also reduce isolation and bring youth workers together to advocate for collective change.
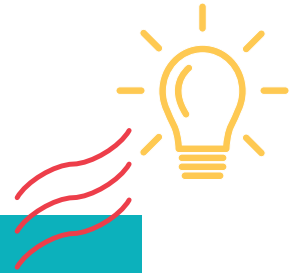
How might we move to a collective, sector-wide approach to ensuring youth worker wellbeing?

ONLINE PLATFORM FOR YOUTH WORKERS

THE PROBLEM

The problem is the lack of youth worker wellbeing. All of the group members have experience as youth workers in the field and understand burnout and compassion fatigue on a personal level. It is challenging work, and they are often underpaid and feel unsupported in a variety of ways.

THE PITCH

An online platform (website and app) that would be a space for youth workers to connect around advocacy and policy change, expand their networks, and find resources, tips and tools to help inform their work. The three main components of the platform are:

- A chatroom where youth workers can connect with other youth workers, share their experiences, their frustrations and success, and exchange advice and resources.

- Resource sharing platform where youth workers can upload and share resources (for example: new articles on burnout prevention, consent tools, etc.).

- Insurance opt-in for youth workers that will provide them with benefits, including extended support related to wellbeing (counselling services, massage services, etc.)

Community, Youth, and Playworkers in Unite! (CYPW)

http://www.cywu.org.uk | #PayUp4YouthWork

WHAT: CYPW is part of United the Union, the biggest trade union in Europe. It is committed to obtaining high standards of delivery of care in youth work. Their main interest lies in establishing high professional standards, fair treatment of staff, and positive partnerships with employers.

WHERE: Birmingham, UK

WHO: Members of this union work with, or are training to work with, children, young people, and communities.

HOW: CYPW offers a voice to unite playworkers, community workers, youth workers, and other allied fields. They provide professional training and support to members, as well as hold specialized conferences. The core interests of the union are achieving professional standards and fair treatment of staff. The National Committee of CYWP meets several times a year to implement policies, manage sections, and provide policy direction to the movement. They have several items on their current agenda, one of which is increasing pay for youth workers and allied fields. They recently joined Unite the Union, the biggest trade union in Europe. Youth and play work students are also encouraged to join and become involved in the union initiatives, as well as submit articles and resources for the website.

CASE STUDY

The eXchange by YouthREX

exchange.youthrex.com | @REXforYouth

WHAT: The eXchange brings youth development knowledge from research, practice and lived experience together in one online space, in diverse and accessible formats.

WHERE: Online. YouthREX is an Ontario-wide initiative based out of York University in Toronto.

WHO: Youth sector and youth wellbeing stakeholders including: youth, youth workers, researchers, students, government, and funders.

HOW: Launched in March 2016, the eXchange is an online platform connecting shared knowledge to youth wellbeing. There are three main features of the eXchange:

- A searchable Library for Youth work that has hundreds of diverse content types such as research summaries, factsheets, reports and media resources aimed at supporting youth wellbeing;

- An Evaluation Toolkit comprised of step-by-step actions, tools, templates and resources for a youth program evaluation; and

- A growing online Learning Community for the youth sector to stay informed about and engage with current youth related news and issues. This community will be further developed to include a chat function for visitors to connect, share information directly with each other and network.

Visitors are able to sign up for an account so they can save articles and resources to their personal library, and members of the eXchange mailing list receive a monthly newsletter with resources, reflections, tips, and highlights from the eXchange community.

CASE STUDY

> "There is no pressure to be 'innovative', just to meaningfully address the issues at hand."

Conclusion

The Design Day was rich in ideas, connections and learning!

This was the first time YouthREX used design-thinking to frame an event of this kind, and we learned so much from the experience and from all the participants. We would like to conclude by highlighting five of the ideas that stood out to us based on feedback forms completed by designers and our team's experiences of the day:

1. Innovation is not always about the new

At the end of the day, a designer prefaced their group's pitch by saying "there is no pressure to be innovative, just to meaningfully address the issues at hand". This comment resonated with the larger group, with many people nodding their head in agreement and thanking them for making that sentiment explicit. Most of the ideas that were pitched also reflected this notion – we don't need to be inventing completely new programming or ways to support young people for the sake of "the new". Innovation can include returning to models and strategies that already exist, and then designing ways to intentionally leverage and learn from them in order to fine-tune, and/or expand them where appropriate and as needed.

2. Foster connections and support each other

While the issues/challenges that each Idea Lab came up with were specific to the context of their particular topic, there were common issues and challenges across all eight labs such as a sense of isolation, invisibility, and the pressure to bear the burden of external forces – lack of funding, resources, staff and safe spaces. In response to these issues/challenges, the pitches that labs developed focused on facilitating and enhancing connections and communication between and among youth and youth sector stakeholders. Whether online or face-to-face, it is clear that the need for people to feel connected to one another, to be able to ask questions or find/give support and to be part of community, is vital; many do not feel these kinds of opportunities currently exist (in the context of their youth sector work). Designers further expressed a need to more broadly support youth sector work by creating opportunities and conditions for engaging with each other differently, and in a more meaningful way.

3. Engage the power of technology

The pitches also reflect the desire, and perhaps need, for the youth sector to integrate technology more effectively into our work. When designed and used respectfully, groups who prototyped digital spaces such as the Youth Talk App or the Online Platform for Youth Workers cited the importance of hosting a safe space for conversation, for knowledge sharing, for connecting youth and youth stakeholders to resources and support – all in an accessible and efficient way. Digital tools and platforms have the potential of greatly increasing accessibility to information, resources, and of course, the human connections that are so valued. At the same time, technological adoption cannot replace human face-to-face relationships. One designer suggested that we need to also reflect on the effects "technologicalization" can have on change and development work.

4. Leverage what already exists

Implicit throughout all the pitches is that there is valuable knowledge, resources, services and programing that already exists, but often in silos. As such, the pitches focus on creating ways to draw out this information, create conditions that allow for connection and access to information and resources. Designers recognized value in networking their assets to provide enhanced opportunities for youth. This is not to say that new or increased funding/resources are not needed –in order to create these spaces and opportunities for human connection, resources in terms of people, time, money and different skillsets are required.

5. Adapt tools and processes to your context

Youth sector stakeholders, including youth, strongly value building connections and learning through participatory and engaging activities/processes. This is why YouthREX thought that design-thinking processes/activities might be a good way to bring people together to brainstorm and work on ideas to address "thorny" issues. Reflecting on the feedback we received on how people experienced the day, we learned that although design-thinking processes work well at engaging people to focus on the "user experience" and to think through an issue in a focused way that is collaborative and highly generative, these processes might be too focused on moving forward to solutions. This may not align with the complexity of youth wellbeing/youth sector challenges, equity and intersectionality, or the work that stakeholders want or need to do together before arriving at ideas and solutions.

Design-thinking tools and processes clearly need to be better adapted to our youth sector context. We will need ways to create more space for rich, nuanced discussions to unpack the issues and challenges we experience in our sector. Many of the challenges that youth and the youth sector are facing are deeply rooted in complexity. While there is definitely a need to collaboratively search for solutions and new approaches to addressing these challenges, there is also the need to take time to understand the situation, learn more about the system and find ways to create the conditions for change – all within an equity-focused frame of understanding.

As such, we will be asking ourselves:

- How we can use design-thinking tools and processes to support our work, but adapt them and integrate them with other processes that could better reflect and engage the youth sector?
- What kinds of opportunities will allow us to engage with complexity and systems thinking/mapping in a way that is accessible and meaningful to youth sector stakeholders?
- How can we use design thinking and its processes to support engagement with complexity?
- How might we integrate tenants of equity and social justice within all of these processes?

Final Words

We would like to end this recap of the Design Day by expressing our deep gratitude and thanks to all the community designers who came out on a cold Saturday and brought their whole selves to participate and engage in sometimes difficult conversations about how we can tackle issues of importance to youth wellbeing. Although this recap doesn't quite do enough to capture the energy, excitement and tensions of the day, we hope it offers some valuable insights to youth sector stakeholders and affirmation of the work and experiences of our community designers.

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