



Halton
Region
Youth In/At
Risk
Research
Report

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Background

Sheridan faculty Ferzana Chaze and Bethany Osborne worked with the Halton Granter's Roundtable over the summer and fall of 2016 with the goal of creating a Terms of Reference to work collaboratively on key projects within the region. At the end of that process, in November 2016, the roundtable determined that although there were many needs within the region, one of the needs that they all saw as a priority and that they all wanted to address more effectively was the needs of youth in the region that fall into the category of in or at risk. The roundtable commissioned a Needs Assessment of programs and services for youth in/at risk in the Halton region.

Sheridan College's Faculty of Applied Health and Community Studies partnered with Halton Granter's Roundtable to conduct the Needs Assessment. The research was supported financially by Halton Region's Social and Community Services, and was made possible through Oakville Community Foundation's connections and resources, as well as other connections made through members of the Halton Granter's Roundtable. Funding for Phase 2 of the research was provided through an additional grant provided through Sheridan College and through the generous support of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

Introduction

The goal of the research was to conduct a Needs Assessment in relation to services for in/at-risk groups of youth between the ages of 16-24 years of age within the Halton region:

1. To identify the existing services available to meet the needs of the youth
2. To identify the gaps/duplication within services in order to suggest future fundable solutions

We began by defining the population of youth that fell into the category of in or at risk. Our community stakeholders supported the formation of the following list:

- Crown Wards/Children living in foster care (aging out of care)
- Children of immigrants
- Youth with LGBTQ+ identities
- Indigenous youth
- Youth struggling with mental health
- Youth from low income households

To inform our understanding of issues facing youth in Halton region, in the province and across Canada, we accessed the different reports that have been written about youth in Halton region and also accessed literature and reports that are Ontario and Canada specific throughout this report. Literature is referenced in APA format throughout this document and a full list of Works Cited can be found in [Appendix 6](#).

Halton region is a vast area with many different needs specific to each of its regions. It was a monumental task to do a Needs Assessment for Youth in/At Risk in Halton Region. We need to acknowledge some of the limitations of this research study up front: we had a limited scope and we had limited time. As new researchers and practitioners to Halton region, we also needed to rely on our community partners to direct us to the right people to talk to and to support us in making connections. Increasingly, as we talked to program administrators and frontline workers across the region, we realized how many service providers we ‘wished’ we could talk to. We also want to acknowledge the great work that we have seen going on across the region, the different projects that we have encountered, the people that we have met, and the initiatives that we have learned about. There are wonderful and passionate people working in Halton region who are investing significantly in the lives of children and youth. When you are conducting a needs assessment and a gap analysis, the very nature of doing that work, can obscure the great work that is being done. The task of this research is looking for gaps and challenges and making recommendations for how work with youth and particularly vulnerable youth, youth in/at risk can be supported more effectively. That is what you will read about in this report. However, having done this research over the past six months, we are left with the impression of a network of committed service providers and practitioners who are

serving children and youth in the region well but are keenly aware of the limitations that they face. It is these limitations that you will read about in this report. The same service providers who keenly felt the limitations, also actively contributed to possible solutions when given the opportunity during our interviews, focus groups or through the survey questions that they completed. Their solutions are reflected in the Recommendations and Fundable Solutions section of this report.

Although we were limited by the scope of the research, we pushed the limits of our scope and our timelines to ensure that the data that we gathered was consistent and representative. When an agency or organization made a suggestion about someone we should connect to outside of our original scope, we were responsive, often following up on the connection that was made. What began as a research project that was meant to quickly gather data from six Program Administrators and six Frontline Workers working at six key youth serving agencies in the region in its first phase, ended up gathering data from a total of 76 participants working for 16 different youth-serving organizations across the region. This included meeting with 11 Program Administrators and 27 Frontline Workers through individual interviews and focus groups. We conducted a confidential online survey to gather data, using the same interview questions with one of the school boards in the region and connecting with an additional 11 Social Workers and 25 Child and Youth Counsellors. Another online survey collected data from to Indigenous service providers.

Phase Two of the research increased our scope, adding the input from an additional 14 youth who participated in three focus groups across the region. This included an LGBTQ+ focus group and a focus group with Indigenous youth, two of the vulnerable (at-risk) populations.

This Report is divided into the following sections:

What We Did

In this section, you will find our methodology. How we went about doing the research. You will also find links to all of our research questions. These can also be found in Appendix 2, Appendix 3 and Appendix 5.

What Service Providers Said

In this section, you will find the analysis of our research findings divided into thematic categories. These categories are clearly delineated in the Table of Contents.

What Youth Said

In this section, you will find the analysis of our research findings with youth as well as a sample of art created through the focus groups.

Recommendations and Fundable Solutions

In this section, you will find our different recommendations for programs and services for youth in Halton region based on our research and the input of Program Administrators, Frontline Workers and youth. Within each recommendation, you will also find a fundable solution, framed in a red textbox.

What We Did

This research study was conducted in two phases. **Phase 1** consisted of information collected from front line workers and program administrators who were able to speak to the needs of in/at risk youth in the Halton region and of gaps in services in relation to this population. **Phase 2** of the study consisted of data collected directly from youth in the Halton region. Approval for both phases of the research was received from the [Sheridan College Research Ethics Board](#). The approved research ethics protocol was also reviewed and approved by the two School Boards in the region prior to granting us permission to interview school staff.

Phase 1 of the research began by interviewing front line workers and program administrators from organizations identified to us by the Halton Granters' Roundtable. [Profiles](#) describing the work of many of these organizations are included in the Appendices.

The initial organizations that we interviewed were identified by the Halton Granters' Roundtable. However, at different points during the process, when we felt that we needed more data on a specific group of at risk youth, our community partners and/or research participants helped us identify persons/organizations within the region who would be able to speak to the unique needs of that group.

Seventy-four frontline workers and program administrators participated in this study between March and June 2017. Data was collected from 27 front line workers and 11 program administrators using a combination of face to face interviews and focus groups, using a [semi structured interview guide](#). Additionally, 11 social workers and 25 child and youth workers from a school board participated in an [anonymous online survey](#) on the needs and gaps in services for at/in risk youth. A similar [anonymous survey](#) was also administered to a group of individuals/organizations working with Indigenous youth, in which two people participated.

Interviews were recorded with permission from the participants and transcribed. We used qualitative analysis techniques to generate key themes that informed the [findings](#) and [recommendations](#) of this study.

Additionally, we have created a snapshot inventory of services available in the Halton region, using data available on the [Halton Community Services Database](#) to identify organizations located in in the four geographic sub-regions of Halton region that serve youth. This resource is available on our website www.haltonyouthneed.ca. The areas of service provision we focused on for this inventory were: Food security, Housing, Mental Health, LGBTQ+ specific services, and Education/Sports/Recreational services. Organizations that offered these services to youth up to 24 years were included in our inventory. We excluded organizations that appeared to work exclusively with other age groups such as older adults. We used the available keywords on the database to narrow down our search and get more accurate results.

Phase 2 of this study consisted of data collected from youth in the Halton region. We approached organizations which had participated in **Phase 1** of our study to ask them to connect us with youth who might be willing to participate in focus groups for this study to talk about their needs and gaps in services for youth in the Halton region. We met with a total of 3 youth focus groups between May and June 2017. A total of 14 youth between the ages 16-24 years participated in these arts-informed focus groups. Focus groups were interactive and incorporated creative elements where youth were able to share their recommendations using a creative/arts based approach. A full list of the questions used in the focus groups can be found in the [Phase 2 Focus Group Questions](#) in the Appendices. Youth responded to two questions in the focus groups using an arts-based response (canvases and plasticine). These questions: "Where do you see yourself in a few years?" and "What supports do you need to get there?" provided them with an opportunity to both reflect and respond in a way that didn't require them to only use text. Participants were given an opportunity to talk about the art piece that they created. Findings and a sample of the art work created from Phase 2 of the study can be found in the [What Youth Said](#) section of this report. A full photo gallery of these responses can be found on our website www.haltonyouthneed.ca.

What Service Providers Said

This section is comprised of thematic findings from Phase 1 of the research. Researchers took the transcripts and notes from interviews and focus groups and systematically pulled out common themes from these documents. The research team then worked together to categorize and analyze the different research findings. What follows are:

- 1. Defining Terms**
- 2. The Needs of Youth**
 - i. Vulnerable populations**
- 3. Gaps in Services**
- 4. Challenges**

1. Defining Terms

What Age Defines Youth?

“The definition of youth through the Ministry of Children and Youth services (Clinical Services) is birth- 18- after that, children age out of services and are considered adults.”

(Program Administrator (PA))

We were initially tasked with doing a Needs Assessment for Youth in/At Risk between the ages of 16-24. There are very few organization that only serve this specific age range. Organizations across Halton region provide services to a very wide age range of youth. Participants in this study had differing opinions regarding what age range the term “youth” represents. While some organizations align with the Ministry of Child and Youth Services’ definition of youth (anyone under the age of 18), there are many youth services that classify and serve youth up to the age of 30. The issue of having youth age ‘out of care’ or out of service or programs was identified by many service providers as being of real concern. After age 18, the number of Government funded services for youth are significantly reduced.

What Defines Risk?

Statistics Canada (2011) describes youth at risk to be those with a higher probability of having negative developmental outcomes, difficulties in social adaptations, academic success, and mental health. A School Social Worker/Child and Youth Councilor (SSW/CYC) participant describes the range and complexity of mental health and behavioral issues that come to her mind when she tried to describe who youth at risk are.

“So, I think maybe the, the easiest way to paint the picture, so I could have students who have, you know some pretty significant mental health diagnosis - they could be very significant on anxiety, depression, perhaps hospitalizations due to suicide attempt, risk that kind of thing and they can be very high needs around that mental health piece... Multiple suspensions, getting into trouble with the police, running away from home, kind of on that pendulum, between suicidal ideation, high risk behavior, as well as ... just regulated, aggressive, PTSD sort of presentation, so it makes it, they’re very combative, right, so it makes it very difficult for them to access service, it makes it difficult for parents to manage.”

(SW/CYC)

Not all participants categorized youth they worked with “at risk.” In fact, many participants found the term “at risk” to be a problematic one. Some shared that though this was a term that resonated more with funders and the community, it was a term that was challenging as potentially, all youth were at risk, particularly in relation to mental health, irrespective of income levels. These participants felt that the term “at risk” has been stigmatized in society and some agencies have begun to address this issue by replacing the above term with “Youth at Promise”.

“We are all at risk of mental health - we use the term mental health particularly when we are talking with our funders but we also problematize the term.” (PA).

Participants spoke of factors that might contribute to risk. Some of these factors included income levels. While low income is generally viewed as a predisposition to risk (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2007), one of the participants shared how youth from higher income households also tend to be at risk.

“Yeab, there’s kids that are signed up for two different sports, take musical lessons, you know or are part of you know their councils at their schools and mom and dad are dropping them off in expensive European cars but I’ll tell you what they’ll open up here and they problems like any other kid so.”

Academic and social/emotional struggles, conflict with the law and the loss of developmental assets required to maintain mental health and well-being during the transitional years (grades 7-10) were some other factors associated with risk. Participants also identified certain groups of youth as being particularly vulnerable and at risk. These included Indigenous youth, youth struggling with personal issues, newcomer youth, youth struggling with gender transitioning; youth involved in drugs and drinking, youth with learning disabilities; youth living without parental support, youth that struggle with bullying issues and/or lack of friendships, and those with low self-esteem and depression.

2. The Needs of Youth

Research participants identified many diverse needs of youth. *“The needs cross a broad spectrum of basic needs like housing and adequate income to social and cultural supports.”* (SW/CYC, Survey Respondent). Some common emergent themes in relation to youth needs included food security, housing, access to mental health resources, safe and developmental community spaces, transportation, support and opportunities to prevent/combat negative influence, mentorship, sense of community, access to educational resources to support learning, employment, and, access to free/affordable programing to keep youth engaged.

a) **Food security**

While Halton has much lower rates of food insecurity compared to the rest of Ontario, almost 3% of the population of Halton was found to be food insecure in 2011 (Halton Region, 2011). Participants in this study identified that many youth they encounter are food insecure. These youth do not have sufficient food and rely on food banks, lunch and breakfast programs at school and financial support.

“I would say our food basket get used, I mean it’s cleared out every, like daily. And our breakfast program is a very strong program in terms of there’s a breakfast cart available that comes in, again that’s funded by [organization name] but that gets used because we believe that students, well there’s basic needs they need to be fed in order to be able to do well at school.” (SW/CYC)

While there are many food programs in Halton region, the availability, quality and suitability of the food available at such food banks is often a challenge, particularly for families with dietary restrictions.

“We’ve had students that are accessing the food banks... there’s difficulties in trying to be able to maybe access them on a regular basis. I heard families say, we go and get the food there. [But] It’s not food that we typically eat. If they have some dietary restrictions, if the food is expired...” (SW/CYC)

Some organizations identified funding as a challenge that prevented them from being able to provide youth with meals

“Our lunch program that’s funded by [name of the organization]... they get a meal cart. Students who are identified as needing it will get a lunch card every day. Our funding has ended for our program because [name of the organization] has had some reduction in funding, so over the years we were able to carry them through to the end of the year. This year we are, well going out of our funding dollars for that so we don’t have any more cards to support our students for lunch.” (SW/CYC)

b) Housing

Research has demonstrated that approximately 15% of households in Ontario live in accommodations that are unaffordable, substandard or overcrowded and this number has increased significantly over the years (Maxwell, 2009.). Our research participants spoke about the growing incidence of youth homelessness in the Halton region. The kind of homelessness the youth in Halton experience is rural homelessness, where youth in couch surf, or stay in uninhabited shelters such as cars, sheds and tents, rather than sleep on the streets where they are visible to the public eye. Past research informs us that homeless youth in rural areas will also often return to their family homes and what are often unsafe living conditions (Grodzinski et al., 2011).

Participants in this study agreed that homelessness, as experienced by youth in Halton region is often hidden. Many homeless youth in Halton struggle with looking for a place to sleep at night.

“I consider Halton rural homelessness. It’s not what you would see as stereotypical homelessness in the city - people in the street. Most of our youth are couch surfing. They might have friends whose grandparents are snowbirds in Florida and they will be sleeping in the garage. There are parks that are frequently used. For the most part, even to the funders when I talk to them it’s invisible... People don’t realize that youth homelessness is such an issue in Halton (PA)

There is much public misconception around why youth are homeless. One of the participants shared *“Some say “these behaviour kids should just go home.” And that really isn’t the reason for homelessness in Halton.” (PA).*

Past research has shown that youth homelessness is linked to poverty, substance abuse, mental health, abuse, family breakdown, and a history of trauma, conflict and instability in the home (Grodzinski et al., 2011). Past research with youth in the Halton region has indicated that the causes of homelessness amongst youth centred on family/home conflicts. Commonly identified issues included substance abuse, loss of parents due to death or family breakdown, and lack of money/income (Transitions for Youth, 2007). Youth transitioning out of care (Rutman, Hubberstey & Feduniw, 2007) and LGBTQ+ youth (Abramovich, 2012) are also likely to be vulnerable in relation to homelessness and/or require housing supports.

c) ***Access to mental health resources***

Access to mental health resources was the most identified need of youth in the online survey of school social workers and child and youth counsellors. 97% (n=36) of the SW/CYC who participated in the survey identified access to mental health services as a need and 75% (n=27) identified it as the most important need of youth in the Halton region. Participants in this online survey shared that the most pressing needs/challenges of youth in accessing mental health resources included: long waitlists when accessing programs and services; smaller communities lacking the resources that are needed to target mental illness as opposed to larger communities; inadequacy of long-term mental health support services; inadequacy of concurrent disorders program to support youth with mental health challenges; inadequacy of mental health care to meet the needs of the population of Halton; and, insufficient preventative mental health programs.

“The care of psychiatry available to youth mental health is inadequate. Students have been triaged and felt dismissed by [name of organization] and have had to access [name of organization] to fill the mental health gap. Youth who present as having significant needs have had to seek care outside the region and are frustrated with the lack of response by our adolescent services that are hospital based. Mental health services have waitlists. Brief service supports serve to problem solve short term, families often leave feeling like it was not helpful as it was too focused on the presenting issue and not really addressing the broader issues, while waiting for waitlist families become reluctant to re-engage as they perceive supports like [name of organization] didn't listen before so why return”. (SW/CYC Survey Respondent)

“There is not as much access to mental health resources in the North (Georgetown, Milton, Acton), and there are many families who do not have access to transportation, so that they can obtain access these supports in other cities (i.e., Oakville, Burlington, etc.)”. (SW/CYC, Survey Respondent)

Interviews with front line workers, program administrators and school social workers/child youth councillors shed further light on these issues.

“Nobody is doing long-term support, nobody in the community is doing that, and these families need it.” (SW/CYC)

“So, we either didn't help those people well enough in the first place, or didn't help them properly, or we need to be circling around these families for long-term to make sure they've got it and to make sure change is happening.” (SW/CYC)

Participants shared the need for more child and adolescent psychiatrists in general. They shared the need for direct referrals from the schools' social workers. Currently, in order for most referrals to be made, the family doctor must be involved. This renders the social worker incapable of making direct referrals, which delays the process further. For most of the mental health programs the wait lists are very long. These findings mirror the situation in the rest of Ontario. Kim (2016) informs us that there are thousands of Ontarians currently sitting on waiting lists for vital services including supportive housing, mental health, and addictions services.

Fragmented services pose as a barrier for wrap around services. As a result, many look into private services but are discouraged because of the costs. Some programs are addressing the issue of waitlists by adding certain services to be accessed while individuals are currently on waiting lists for other services.

“We also have psych-ed consultants within the board, who do full psych-ed evaluations on kids where we do look at if there’s a learning disability getting in the way. They can diagnose a few things, ASD, ADHD, but it’s a year waitlist for that as well, and if you want to go private it’s \$2500.” (SW/CYC)

““If you don’t want, let’s say they’re saying we want to admit you into [name of treatment facility] but we don’t have space, you’ll have to stay in our general emerg [emergency department], it’s different, general emerg. is an emerg. right. It’s not the same. We’ve had a lot of changes around; I know there’s a huge need in terms of child and adolescent psychiatrists in general that are attached to the program. They’ve been able to hire some more but again, I have a lot of high risk students right now that I feel are, so [name of hospital] is their I would say primary health care provider.” (SW/CYC)

Most of the agencies that serve youth with mental health issues have limited staff and limited funding. Limited staff leads to longer waitlists and less accessibility to services. Although the budget allocation for overall health care in Ontario is substantial, the allocation for the community mental health and addictions sector are a small fraction of the health budget (Kim, 2016). This minimal funding occurs despite mental illness and addictions being one and a half times the burden of all cancers, and seven times the burden of all infectious diseases in Ontario. (Kim, 2016)

“And we have more and more people who need support these days, based on whatever, health, or mental health, and we just keep cutting back these services, and then you wonder why you have so many mental health workers or doctors or nurses off on leave.” (SW/CYC)

There is a need for better coordination of programs. One participant talked about the challenges that fragmented, uncoordinated services pose barriers in relation to serving the needs of youth.

“So, we’ve got fragmented services. We’ve got [name of many organizations]. We’ve got all these, kind of different partners, so, how do we do a model?” (SW/CYC)

d) Safe and developmental community spaces

Safe community spaces was a need identified by 36% (n=11) of the SW/CYC survey respondents. An interview participants explained that it is important for youth to have access to safe community spaces where they can spend time with their friends, away from authority figures such as parents or teachers.

“Specifically, in the winter months when it’s cold. Walking into a facility and saying, “I’m just going to chill here with my friends, text a few people” (Front line Worker (FW)).

Another participant felt that simply having a safe space was not enough as that does not stimulate or encourage growth and change. Instead, youth need access to spaces that utilize a developmental mentorship model, wherein older youths positively mentor those younger, who in turn become mentors themselves, thus creating a self-sustaining cycle of positive growth among the participants.

“I think in Oakville, again, going specific, kids don’t need a place to hang out, they’re hanging out at peoples’ houses, they can hang out, anywhere. But, that’s not changing anybody, in fact, so you kind of really have to be out, I really love a developmental mentorship model, saying, I’m really sold out to that. That the older, become models for the younger ones, and when the younger ones grow up, and go to high school, they become, mentors themselves. That youth leaders, and youth workers, are models to those, who are modelling others. (FW)

e) **Transportation**

Thirty percent (n=11) of our survey participants identified transportation as a need of youth in the Halton region. Interview participants also identified lack of / limited public transportation as a significant barrier in the Halton region, preventing many youth from accessing much needed services. This need was most prominently felt in North Halton among families that had one or no cars and/or had parents who were unable to drive youth to services.

“I worked at a school called [name of school] in [name of place], Ontario which is part of the [name of] School Board and it’s this tiny little spot and you feel like you’re out in the middle of nowhere, and some of these families they don’t have a car and they’re in this little bubble and they have access to nothing.” (SW/CYC)

It isn’t only the youth who are impacted by lack of access to adequate transit. Research participants observed that children are impacted by this phenomenon from an early age because their parents don’t have access to adequate transportation and this impacts their access to needed resources.

“All of Halton Hills, Georgetown does not have any transportation...So youth up there are stuck. So youth cannot afford taxis or Uber. They are basically left to walk from point A to point B. In the winter time, you know the challenges there. And some families don’t have that affordability to transport their son or daughter or maybe they’re limited to one car only and single mom or whatever. So, we feel their pain up there too”. (FW)

f) **Support and opportunities to prevent/combat negative influence**

Youth need support to counter negative influences that may come from their peers, from substance use or from unhealthy family influence. Some participants viewed early support as crucial to help youth build the necessary social skills and the academic foundation to succeed.

“What we’re doing is we’re removing negative influences, or influences that could take away from someone’s life choices, so, that means, you know, maybe a negative peer group, maybe it means the influence of some sort of substance, maybe even it’s a home, where it’s a negative influence, where it’s not so healthy. So, we’re going to say, while we’re here, we’re trying to provide, some sort of preventative action”. (FW)

“We need to equip them, so when they finish, when they finish high school, they not only have discipline, they have some academic, an academic foundation, they have some of the social skills, and some of the other things that they need, and maybe what they need, is the support of the community. They get that opportunity to go off to post-secondary education, they can succeed”. (FW).

g) ***Mentorship***

A few participants stressed the need for mentorship, and the importance of youth developing positive relationships. Youth need positive role models with whom they can open up to for issues such as bullying.

“There is nothing more powerful for youth than to hear the stories of other youth who are struggling with and overcoming experiences with mental health” (FW)

Mentorship was also seen as an important need for international students who live and study in Canada without any familial support.

“And also the young people [international students] will complain that they don’t feel as supported. There are times when the young people don’t really have anyone with whom they can actually speak, because they’re not seeing their parents obviously, because they’re still in China.” (SW/CYC)

Participants shared that though there are many “mentorship-type” programs for youth in Halton, the waiting lists are very long and often youth age out of these programs before they even get into them.

“We’ve stopped making referrals to [name of organization] because it’s a three-year wait list. I can’t even sell that, you know what I mean? How do you sell that to a parent?” (FW)

h) ***Sense of belonging/community***

Focus group participants shared that youth in Halton region were “starving for connections”. Youth “need to know what’s going on” and “how they can get involved”. A front line worker we interviewed elaborated:

“the lowest income family, has a TV, and Internet. Most of them. So, why are they here [at the agency]? They’re not here for that. They’re here because of something, and mostly I think because you’ve built a community, and an expectation, that this, is where their friends are. This is a safe place, they’ll never recognize that. They’ll just recognize it as a place, where everyone comes, their friends are here, and they get to do what they want”. (FW)

A sense of community was seen as an important protective factor or a support, particularly for youth who might belong to families with alcohol or drug issues: “how do we get them, to connect them into a community, where they’re not just dependent on their parent”. (FW)

i) ***Access to educational resources to support learning***

Over 44% of the CYC/SWs (n= 16) who participated in the online survey identified access to educational resources to support learning as an important need of youth. They felt that youth needed more in-home family support options for alternative programs to traditional education. They also suggested that more resources are needed for students who do not prefer a traditional school setting.

“There is a need for more free/ accessible resources for families, especially prevention and parenting support/ education resources in the community. Lack of variety in community organizations. If one organization is not a good fit for a family there are few or no other accessible options for them” (SW/CYC, Survey Respondent).

*j) **Employment***

Youth face the challenge of finding employment. University students are graduating and cannot find a proper job afterwards. This leads them to take up part time jobs which are mostly filled by high school students trying to build on their employment skills.

“Youth unemployment is an issue, especially when you have university students that are graduating, can’t find a job, so they’re taking part-time jobs while they find full-time jobs, yet those part-time jobs, then, are taken from high school students that are trying to obtain employment, employment skills.” (PA).

“So, the challenge is ours. We do have a high population of youth that need additional supports”. (PA)

*k) **Access to free/affordable programing to keep youth engaged.***

There needs to be more access to free or affordable arts and sports programming to keep youth engaged.

“It can be an art program, it can be music, something where there is a talent there but due to you know lack of funds at home, They don’t have that opportunity.”(FW)

“In the community where okay, if a single mom can’t afford their child to participate in a soccer league, what other activities or resources for youth for those that are you know, not as privileged are available to them. I think there needs to be more of that in our community to keep them engaged, to keep them involved”. (FW)

i. Vulnerable Populations

While the needs identified above apply to all youth, participants of this study identified the unique needs of three vulnerable groups of youth. These groups included LGBTQ+ youth; Immigrant/refugee youth/International Students; Indigenous youth and youth living without parental support.

LGBTQ+ Youth

The literature describes the unique vulnerability in relation to the LGBTQ+ population. LGBTQ+ youth have been found to be at higher risk of depression, suicide ideation and chemical dependency compared to other youth (CCHRC, 2002). These youth have been identified to be at a higher risk of running away from home (CCHRC, 2002) and at an increased risk of homelessness (Abramovich, 2012).

The participants in this study identified LGBTQ+ youth population as a highly vulnerable group with diverse needs including: medical needs, need for information and education, and also a great need for mental health support. Medical needs included the need for access to medical staff whom the youth felt comfortable approaching based on their gender identity or who were able to help them with transition. One participant shared how these needs are often unmet when youth are not able to access suitable medical services.

“Students who are wanting to transition or starting to transition or questioning their transition. This goes to their medical needs. ... Some of these students have not seen a family doctor because they don’t identify as their biological sex and they don’t want to have a physical. They don’t want to have to go through and explain to their family doctor, right? So, who’s servicing these students?” (FW)

Many LGBTQ+ youth experience bullying in schools. Some kids are out to the agency but not to their parents. They experience isolation from both peers as well as within their own households. There is a need for more accessible programming for LGBTQ+ specific youth. Programs for LGBTQ+ youth were often at a distance from where they lived. With limited and sporadic public transportation, it becomes challenging for youth to access LGBTQ+ specific programming, even more so if they have not come out to their families.

Immigrant/Refugee youth and International students

Many newcomers to Canada grapple with “culture shock” they experience due to differences in the culture and systems in their countries of origin and in Canada. Newcomer families may struggle with financial hardships caused due to challenges in securing employment, which have been associated with poor psychological health and lowered sense of wellbeing (Asanin-Dean & Wilson, 2009; George et al, 2012), which has implications for parenting in such families (Tyyskä, 2007). Immigration is a stressful process and impacts newcomers in many aspects of their lives, including family relationships (Anisef et al, 2001). The stressors caused due to immigration and the increased potential for interpersonal conflict within the family after migration can contribute to child welfare involvement (Stalker, Maiter & Alaggia, 2009; Alaggia & Maiter, 2009). The research also informs us that migration can impact existing family dynamics (Anisef et al, 2001). Immigrants may also experience prejudice and discrimination in their host country (Hyman, 2009).

Participants in this study shared that newcomer youth suffer because of discrimination/racism that they face in schools. This, according to a participant leads to social isolation which not only has implications for mental health but also for the newcomers’ integration into Canadian society.

“Some of our newcomers have told us that they’re facing so many other pieces around racism, the discriminatory pieces, the discrimination, discrimination just by merit of what you physically look like. So those are all factors of isolation. So, when there’s social isolation then we’re in big trouble, because what are we breeding then?” (SW/CYC)

Refugee youth might enter the country with low language skills as well as a myriad of other needs including financial needs, mental health needs emerging from their exposure to trauma and needs for supports around managing familial/parenting responsibilities that complicate their successful integration into the country. Many refugee youth arrive with language acquisition levels between a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) 1 to 5, and have very unique and diverse personal backgrounds. Some of these youth may be pregnant, and/or parenting young children of their own, others are married, are family providers, and may have particularly traumatic backgrounds and/or mental health needs. They may also be illiterate in their first language and are likely experiencing some degree of financial stress. These challenges often prevent these newcomer youth from succeeding in the standard education system offered in Ontario.

“And so when I was trying to tease out, ‘What are some of the specific needs [of refugee youth]?’ they were articulating that ‘We have a unique profile, just by merit of just being a newcomer, with migration pieces, with the past migrations and the integration into this country. So, there are just very unique features and some of us come with a bit of a history of trauma.’” (SW/CYC).

“So, you typically have language acquisition levels of anything between a CLB 1 to 5, which for us is a stage 1-3. They are in this age group, they are between 1 and 4 years in Canada, they could be pregnant, have young children, be family providers, be married, may have a high school diploma that is not equivalent to an OSSD, they may have gaps in education, they may not have school records, they may be illiterate in their first language. So, they may have financial needs and they may have mental health needs. So it’s the language level and the age group. Those are the two constants, and being newcomers, and then all of these other parts are a part of that profile.” (SW/CY)

Refugee youth and youth that have language barriers struggle to perform in school. Although there are school-based programs that help these students to learn English in a day school they are only available for these below the age of 21 years. These youth will also often not have previous school records to provide.

The other challenge when introducing students with language barriers to the school system is trying to communicate. An interpreter is often used to allow service providers in school to communicate with parents but immigrant parents and service providers are often dissatisfied with this service. When there is no interpreter, the immigrant family might use children as interpreters which can be disruptive to the child’s education.

“Families have told me ‘I don’t mind you pulling in an interpreter, I don’t mind you pulling in a cultural broker, those are all really great things, but I don’t want to have a middle person. If I’m speaking to you about something, I just want to speak directly to you in my language, for the fluidity, for just the content of the thing, so nothing gets lost in translation, all of the soft nuances that sometimes gets missed, I need to be able to convey that.’” (SW/CYW)

“I’m trying to speak through an interpreter, and the interpreter is not translating properly. The students get very frustrated, and I’m also at times frustrated with the interpreter or the cultural broker when it’s not verbatim. Word-for-word. Thank you very much, but no thank you for your thoughts about what you [interpreter] think about it. Seriously, just translate it as we’ve stated.” (SW/CYW).

“I’ve had children come in to tell me that they have to miss school because they have to accompany a parent or a grandparent to the doctor to interpret”. (FW)

Increasingly, Halton is the destination of choice for many international students. Students in homestay arrangements often reside in undesirable living conditions, without access to even the most basic services.

“Some of them may not have windows, may not allow them to have access to laundry facilities. Some may not go ahead and have cooking, some of the basic needs, it’s not communicated as clearly and as thoroughly and so it leaves sometimes some friction.” (SW/CYC)

The students also find themselves living in isolation, away from their parents, with little to no supervision, guidance or mentorship from their guardians and/or host families. They live with host families but not always they are treated well. Many international students experience isolation and often don’t have the necessary skills —like making meals, shopping and budgeting— to be independent. Isolation, distance from families and lack of connection often exacerbate mental health issues.

“They’re, the, these youth are isolated, they don’t, they’re not coming with life skills, so how to, how to make a meal, how to budget, how to go, grocery shop, so, these youth are feeling isolated.” (PA)

“Some youth are with extended families, so they’re incorporated or integrated into those families, but for the most part, they go home, they do homework, or they play videogames, so there’s no socialization. So, they’re feeling disconnected. Then you have the mental health issues that go along with that. Of being not, with their families etc.” (PA)

Indigenous Youth

A long history of colonization, discrimination and forced assimilation as well as poor current socio economic conditions contribute to Indigenous youth being vulnerable to mental health issues (Ritchie et al, 2009). Indigenous families often live in poverty and in substandard housing conditions. The Indigenous community often report higher suicide rates, have more children in foster care and lower levels of education and employment than non-Indigenous populations (Wittenberg, Dan, Blackstock & Day, 2015). Youth that identify as Indigenous in Halton struggle with isolation and being disconnected as there is no identifiable First Nations, Inuit or Metis communities. Indigenous practitioners identified a culturally safe space —where youth can identify as Indigenous without any negative repercussions—as one of the most important needs of Indigenous youth. These practitioners shared that youth in Halton region often do not feel safe to identify as Indigenous due to the racism they experience. Indigenous youth require dedicated spaces where they can explore their unique culture, history and identity, but Halton region does not have any culturally responsive services to address the needs of this population. In order to avoid the possibility of loss of culture, these youths must be able to access safe spaces where they can feel comfortable self-identifying.

“There is a profound reluctance for people in Halton to self-identify as Indigenous. With no identifiable First Nations, Inuit or Metis community in Halton, people are disconnected and isolated. There is also distrust of mainstream services and service providers due to the legacy of colonization, Indian Residential Schools, the 60s scoop, Millennial scoop, racism and intergenerational trauma.” (Indigenous Survey Respondent).

“Where is the safety in identifying as Indigenous? The only consequence is to increase experiences of racism” (Indigenous Group Meeting, FW).

“No culturally responsive spaces exist for indigenous youth”. (Indigenous Group Meeting, FW).

Youth without parental support (excluding international students)

Our participants spoke of the unique vulnerability of youth who lived alone. These may include youth who were transitioning out of care. A group who has been found to be at a higher risk of not completing their education, experiencing homelessness, and are disproportionately represented in the youth justice system. (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2013).

Youth who were living on their own face unique challenges related to balancing adult responsibilities alongside schooling with little or no support. Their life experiences makes it difficult for these youth to relate to their classmates in school.

“I, had students that have moved out at sixteen, and they’re living on their own, they’re working, they’re... ..you know, life is very different for them, than I think, when they go into a regular classroom and they’re hearing kids talk about, “oh God, my Mom you know, she took my cell phone away last night”. They just are living such a different life, ...that, that in and of itself can be a real barrier to them. Feeling comfortable in a classroom like that” (SW/CYC).

The combination of living on their own, in poverty and/or while experiencing mental health challenges makes these youth particularly at risk.

“It really is those high risk students, you know that are living on their own, that’s where you really feel the gap, because there is no safe home base for that, umm for that child, and you know even things like there’s been a few Christmas’s where I’ve gone home for Christmas break, and I’ve been very worried about a student, because they’re living on their own, I know they’re gonna be totally alone over the holidays, there’s some significant mental health issues, and I can let them know about places where they can go over the holidays, but they’re strange places right” (SW/CYC).

Students who are living on Ontario Works or working, to pay for room, some of them are living in, deplorable situations. They’re probably renting in places that realistically are fire traps”. (SW/CYC).

While there are group home facilities that are very helpful in the community, these are not always suitable for youth who might be struggling with significant mental health issues. A SW/CYC participant explains:

“[Name of Group Home] do provide a really good home, living arrangement for students who are over 16 up to believe 18. It is a home environment, they have excellent structure, you the kids are, they work as a family, they make meals together. There’s homework time, there’s structures, there’s rules, there’s expectations. They get to connect with resources, they work with us as the community in terms of things, so it’s a really great resource for students, but students... that will do well at CYP are your students who are organized, attend well, have routines, can follow the rules, are basically sort of, you know..... your kid that’s, can’t live at home, living on their own, but still... pretty organized. So, students, like my student who’s the you know, the pop in kind of kid, ...they’re not gonna do well... they’re not going to be, able to attend a place like that”.

3. Gaps in service

There were a number of gaps in services that our research participants identified. These are illustrated thematically below through the different areas represented and through different quotes from research participants.

a) ***Program constraints due to insufficient or unstable funding***

Participants shared that many agencies and services in Halton region operate under the constant stress of insufficient and/or unstable funding for their operations. While participants were grateful for the funding they receive, they often have tremendous difficulty securing sustainable funding, despite the fact that they continuously provide services and programs to Halton's most vulnerable populations. Agencies are forced to reapply for grants, a process which puts additional stress on employees, and creates uncertainty and lack of stability for the organization. Funding is typically for programs while staff positions that are critical for relationship building with youth are underfunded.

“I think back to mine [childhood], and I was involved in a lot of church programs, youth groups, recreation department, I can remember nothing. In terms of what I learned, I can't remember one lesson, I don't remember, the only thing I remember from my rec. department is the bad things, like oh, the 15 goals that were scored on me. All the traumatic stuff. But what I do remember...are the people. I remember, exactly, the people who spoke to me, who cared for me, who invested in me, who loved me, and that, has never changed. That will never change. So, I think that's a huge gap, is that, we don't fund programs, we don't fund people”.

b) ***Lack of access to programs***

There are parts of Halton that have access to many fewer programs and services than others resulting in the youth having to travel. However, many of these youth are unable to for a variety of different reasons. There is also a lack of affordable and free programs for the youths which cause many youth miss out on many positive activities.

“In the community where okay, if a single mom can't afford their child to participate in a soccer league, what other activities or resources for youth for those that are you know, not as privileged are available to them. I think there needs to be more of that in our community to keep them engaged, to keep them involved. To give them those opportunities that some of the other families, it comes down to funding and having the money to support their son or daughter to participate in some positive activities. It's not just sports, it can be anything, right? It can be an art program, it can be music, something where there is a talent there but due to a lack of funds at home, they don't have that opportunity.” (FW)

c) ***Insufficient mental health services for youth***

Insufficient mental health services was the most frequently identified gap in relation to services for youth in Halton region. Many participants spoke of the long wait lists that prevent youth from accessing mental health services in a timely manner. The long wait list for mental health and other services due to a small allocation of provincial funding for community mental health services has been a cause of concern for mental health advocates (Kim, 2016).

Participants felt that youth lack access to medium and long-term therapy, as many of the existing services only offer short-term and/or walk-in therapy. Medium and long-term therapy was seen as important to help youth overcome the more ongoing and complex mental health issues and trauma that walk-in/short term therapy cannot treat effectively.

Participants also felt that currently, mental health programs force youth to receive services with much older adults once the youth turn 18. Despite the fact that an 18-26-year-old youth is likely has very different problems compared to a 40 or 50-year-old adult, they are often forced to receive services together, due to rules around age cut off in mental health services. This could adversely affect youth's chances of receiving appropriate and effective treatment. The participants' views are reflected in the literature that describes the difficulties young persons have when they are abruptly required to transition from child and youth based programs to adult programs when they turn 18 years (Goffin 2017)

Participants felt that Halton region currently lacks the collaboration between hospitals and school boards that is required to increase the amount of day treatment programs available to youth.

“Any or all of the day treatment provided around here is strictly from the school boards and they don't have a ton of ability to collaborate with psychiatry in the community.”(FW)

d) Long waitlists for resources and services in Halton region

The waitlists for resources and services in the Halton region has gotten to the point where people will stop making referrals to certain services due to unrealistic wait lists. The wait lists can be as long as years. The long wait lists apply to resource or service in Halton such as trauma treatment, addictions and mental health. One participants spoke about lack of coordination as a possible reason for long wait lists:

“So even some of these spots on waitlists are probably wasted spots, because they could be getting service from [name of the organization]. Does anybody call and take them off of that list? I don't know. What happens there? There's nobody overseeing all of it, right? So, there are lots of families that are getting a duplication of service, and that's not always great.”(SW/CYC)

e) Lack of services for 'behavior youth' over 12 years

A few participants were concerned about the gap in services for youth past the age of 12, who due to severe mental health or behavioural issues require special classrooms in the school, what the participant called “behavior classrooms”. The participant shared that if a student is not making progress and still requires a ‘behavior classroom’ past Grade 6, there is little to no options available for them.

“We do have one school I think that will hold them for Grade 7 and 8, but I mean, and those cases are rare, don't get me wrong they're very rare, but it's still a huge gap in service.” (FW)

f) *Lack of resources available in north Halton*

There is very few resources available to youth in north Halton. This results in the youth having to travel to other parts of the Halton region and even the Peel region. However this is unsustainable as it is very hard for the families to access these resources on a regular basis.

“When I used to work up in North Halton, I worked up in Georgetown and Acton, we often referred families to Peel because there was just nothing in North Halton for them.” (SW/CYC)

Some other participants spoke of creative ways in which they provided services to youth in North Halton such as by providing taxi fare for the youth to access services.

g) *Lack of dual language social workers*

Halton region faces a gap in service regarding the hiring of dual-language social workers. An increase in qualified dual-language social workers would reduce the need for third party workers such as interpreters, translators and cultural brokers when working with international/newcomer youth.

h) *Lack of programs and services for adult learners who don't meet language requirements*

Newcomer youth between the ages of 18-21 years with low level language acquisition or education that is not recognized are unable to access adult programs because they do not meet the required language acquisition level. They lack a program that will meet their unique language learning needs. Newcomer youth aged 18-21 years are unable to access the adult education programs currently offered by the school boards unless they meet the language requirements of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)... While these students are still permitted to attend day schools, the gaps in their education often result in them being placed in classrooms with children who are much younger than themselves, or in essential level courses that prevent them from qualifying for post-secondary education programs. Newcomer youth over the age of 18 years do qualify for the Language Instruction for Newcomers Program (LINC), but they are generally placed into classes with older students who have varying degrees of linguistic ability.

“Newcomer youth between the ages of 18 to 20 with low levels of language acquisition, and/or gaps in education, or education that is not recognized, are unable to access adult education programs because the required language acquisition level is CLB or step 4. As a result, their ability to acquire academic skills is halted until they have acquired the desired level of language acquisition, and while eligible to attend day schools they are often placed in Grade 9 course with students who are much younger than them, or essential level courses if offered by the school, which [affect] their ability to access college or university later on. In the Language Instruction for Newcomers Program (LINC) they are grouped with much older adults, and this gap in services puts these learners on a path towards continuous low income, and an inability to fulfill their true potential”. (FW)

j) *Lack of support, guidance and resources for international high school students*

International high school students face many gaps in service, particularly in relation to mental health. They lack a support system and have to pay for health care which poses a barrier to their accessing services.

“There are times where young people don’t have really anyone with whom they can actually speak, because they’re not seeing their parents obviously, because they’re still in China.” (FW)

“International high school students who require treatment for their mental health face a tremendous gap in service, as their legal status as international students prevents them from qualifying for most services and treatments in the area, leaving their guardians to remedy the situation the best that they can. Some are presenting with issues before they arrive in Halton region, and those issues are only worsened while they are here”. (FW)

“Therefore, they’re silently suffering with their mental health profile. Some of the guardians are not equipped to be able to support that.” (FW)

k) Lack of affordable housing

The cost of owning or even renting housing in Halton is expensive and beyond what youth can afford. Landlords are typically not looking for youths as tenants as they assume they will be troublesome.

“There is quite a stigma attached to young people and landlords you know... if I owned an apartment I would be looking for the ideal tenant right? And that’s what we find most landlords in Halton are looking for. There is a real significant lack of affordable housing in Halton, especially for youth.” (PA)

l) Lack of long-term wrap around services

Youth in Halton lack access to more long-term and wrap-around services, according to participants. Families in the region lack access to long-term services and programs that provide proper treatment, and ensure that positive change is occurring before releasing the youth from the program or service. There is a gap in service in regards to agencies and programs that provide such services, as most tend to offer a pre-determined amount of sessions followed by release from the program.

“Nobody is doing long-term support, nobody in the community is doing that, and these families need it. So, what happens is they do their six sessions or eight sessions or maximum of twelve sessions with an agency and then it’s ‘see you later, bye!’ and then six months goes by, a year goes by, where they’re just coping and managing, and then they get re-referred again, so then they sit on another waitlist and then it happens all over again.” (FW)

“Agencies and programs that are servicing youth also need to offer wrap-around services to ensure that the families of youth are receiving treatment simultaneously, in order to ensure them the best chance of future success. There is currently a major gap in service in this regard, as no such policies or coordination exists to provide reliable wrap-around services to youth and their families in Halton region.

“We know that they make the most progress when all of these things are happening at once, when a family is wrapped around and they’re getting all that intensive support at one time, to be doing it then.” (FW)

4. Challenges

There were a number of challenges that service providers face as they work with youth. Below are the thematic areas that emerged from our interviews, focus groups and survey data collection.

a) Working with youth

Participants spoke of the challenges of working with youth. One participant talked about the values and attitudes prevalent in many youth today that include a “*sense of entitlement*”, and a “*non-committed attitude*” (FW). This participant felt that the youth had no role models to inspire them and that they were “*spectators in their own lives*” (FW). Practitioners find it challenging to work against the values and expectations that internet and reality television has set up youth for.

“Reality television sets a lot of youth up for impulsive goals. You know we want to encourage but you might not get discovered and be famous. And in the interim of that not happening for you what else is it that we can be helping you to work towards? Work towards that goal perhaps. Not quashing it but making it a bit more of a reality. There is all these stories about how Justin Bieber got discovered. Singing and acting. And professional athletes. A lot of youth come in with those same goals. But it’s the reality of how often do youth get discovered and get rich and famous. But social media does really feed into this.” (PA)

According to a few participant youth often demonstrate little or no desire or motivation to engage in anything and value things less. “*So I often say to people when they ask me what I do, is, I’m trying to engage youth, who do not want to be engaged*”. (FW).

“I will say to the kids on Thursday night – I’ll be like, “Okay tomorrow we’re having like, this person come in like, free pizza”. Like, and the kids will show up and I’ll be like, “Okay guys turn the video games off. Come and gather up and I’m going to go grab pizzas and we’re going to listen to this presentation” and they’ll be like, “What’s going on?” And it’s the same kids.” (FW)

Other participants spoke of the logistical challenges in organizing programs for youth. Boys and girls often required different types of programming, and youth of different ages wanted separate programming. Getting the information out to youth about programs could sometimes become challenging. Sometimes it is difficult to get youth to come to programs because of the youth were busy with school and extra-curricular activities.

“A pair of brothers that come that are in grade 6 and grade 8. They come every day, but only for about half an hour and then mom picks them up. And their older sister’s in grade 10 and she comes and she stands out front. And I’ve talked to her a dozen times. In the middle of winter, I’ve been like, “Hey, why don’t you just come inside”. So for her because there’s younger kids in here at that time it’s like poison. She’s like, “I’m not going to the daycare”. (FW)

“We’re finding that a lot of kids in the system in Grade 7, 8, and beyond that still need these social skills groups... I tried to run one in the high school, but I mean, it was hard-pressed to find a girl or boy in high school that wants to give up their lunch to come to a social skills group.” (SW/CYC)

b) Involving parents and families

Service providers face many challenges when trying to and involving the parents and families of youth. Youths in Halton come from diverse home situations and backgrounds. While some parents might have the resources to support youth, others do not either due to the multiple issues parents are undergoing in their own lives, or due to the long hours parents work.

“Parents in the region have so many stresses on them. We call them currency parents. We talk about the cocktail moms and currency parents- busy with making money and maintaining an image or status quo”. (PA)

Many youths in Halton want independence from their parents and are resistant to service providers contacting them. Sometimes, the challenge when working with parents who are involved and are accessing programs and services for their children is they will not fully understand the circumstance their child is in. Some parents are not always willing to follow through with the help their children need. Some others might have unrealistic expectations of organizations and the services they provide.

“And you get some parents who, like we have kids with ADHD for example whose parents refuse to medicate, totally their choice, but when your child is yelling out in class or hitting people impulsively or doing all of those things, they want you to go ‘Oh, well he’s got ADHD.’ Well it doesn’t work that way, you know?” (SW/CYC)

“Often parents perceive that the fault with their child’s issue lies with the school board because it the place where students spend a lot of their time. They have huge expectations on what the school board is able to do with and for their child. They very often don’t take responsibility for their role in their child’s development. They also don’t realize that so often the school board is limited in what they are able to do because of rules, regulations and resources”. (PA)

At other times, it might be stigma around accessing a service that proves to be a barrier for families to send their youth to certain programs.

“It’s not also the norm right? For me to pitch an idea like when I was in South Burlington I would say ‘Hey have you heard of the [name of the organization]?’ and they would say, ‘Of course we have, we know somebody who went there and they loved it.’ But when you pitch that idea in a place like Limehouse, they’ve never heard of it, their kid doesn’t need something like that, because it’s not normalized and there’s still such huge stigma attached to those things”. (FW)

Many youths have parents and families that do not speak or understand English leaving the kids to act as their parents’ interpreter. Many times these youths will have to miss classes in order to accompany their parent or family member to appointment so that they can interpret.

“But the parents expect the child to deal with it. I’ve had children come in to tell me that they have to miss school because they have to accompany a parent or a grandparent to the doctor to interpret.” (SW/CYC)

c) Challenges faced by Parents

Parents of young children who may potentially be experiencing developmental issues are not afforded the luxury of time when it comes to diagnosing their children. There are many resources available to children under the age of six years in Halton region, but parents must make a decision to act upon, and accept help from these resources, which can often be very challenging.

“I think it’s reasonable for a parent about their four year old even, to think ‘Oh maybe they’ll grow out of it’, I get that, but they have until their sixth birthday to figure it out.” (FW)

Parents also face challenges in regards to high stress levels, which can have potentially adverse effects during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome disorder can also result in many challenges for parents, should their child be diagnosed with the disorder.

“High stress levels in parents because of costs of living and/or long commute times leads to increased cortisol- this impacts our students- we see the impacts of mom’s who are pregnant in hyper-arousal- this has an impact on their pregnancies” (PA)

“Large number of kids suffering from FASD (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder)- alcohol over time makes changes to the brain- it isn’t just the typical ‘addict’ or ‘alcoholic’ who has a child who can be impacted by FASD, children born into ‘nice’ homes, to ‘nice’ parents with good incomes can be impacted by FASD. One of the big impacts that we see is an increase in kids/ youth who can become addicted themselves because they were exposed to addictive substances over time in low doses and/or saw it modeled for them.” (PA)

d) Funding priorities/requirements

Participants spoke of the challenges of delivering programs in an environment of limited funding and funding cuts. In the case of mental health services, There is limited funding which affects the number of beds available to youth in healthcare facilities. A lot of the time, because of this, youth end up discharging themselves. Participants shared that funders often needed to see immediate results and that funding for future programs was tied to numbers of youth attending the program.

“When we talk about youth work, we want to see the results, now. We want to see the results, today. Because, that equals money, that equals funding, especially for not for profit groups, we want to see, the evidence of our work. You know, because it’s good for raising funds, and it’s good for more, but at the same time, sometimes it’s difficult to see those things.”(FW).

“Like the [funder] has made that commitment to you know, stands behind us and like I always say to kids the [funder] is happy to spend this money on you guys as long as like the numbers are here, you know?” (FW)

Another challenge in relation to funding was the lack of funds available for preventative work.

“Biggest challenges: agency is funded through the [name of funder] but this doesn’t include funding for any preventative programming” (PA)

A few participants felt the challenge in the region was not so much the lack of funding as much as it was the voluntary sector's limitations in terms of networking and building relationships between agencies.

"There's no shortage of money. The shortage is in our sector's ability to coordinate and to build and share a network". (PA)

"So when, you know you're partnering etc. or you're, you know, you're trying to find ways to support a youth that's in your program, there is, you know, trying to tie to another organization, they can't necessarily join forces with you because, they don't have the human capacity, to be able to support". (PA)

Many service providers felt that the lack of funding stability and sustainable programming was challenging in providing quality service to youth.

"Right now our program has funding and I think I'm really grateful for that and what it allows us to do in our work, but yeah I crave stability, I do. I, as a person do and I think in terms of programming it's always a bit like even whenever you talk about we have a four-year grant and we're in year three, people go oh so, and then I go, yes we're almost done and then we have to figure out what we're doing past that. So, I don't know if it's just we have to deal with that's the reality of the world that we live in, but I feel weird that the work that we're doing is that we're working with such vulnerable folks and vulnerable youth and especially that it's targeted prevention work and there isn't a sustainable funding for it." (FW)

"So, the hard part is, there needs to be space on campus. If there isn't any space on campus, but they want this person to be admitted, the difficulties of being in the Emerg (emergency department). So, they'll stay in the brief assessment unit. Some kids don't want to do that, so then they end up discharged. So, we're limited in terms of, and I know that's a difficulty for them as well, because they're limited. They're funded for only so many beds." (SW/CYC).

"That's one. Funding is always an issue. I mean the 40% cut that we faced 2.5 years ago was very difficult for the program, considering we still had the volume. We still had 250-300 youth kids coming in through the year. It didn't seem applicable." (PA)

Funding limitations require agencies in the Halton region to have to provide programs and services to youth while dealing with the challenges of being understaffed. Due to understaffing, staff members are only able to accommodate clients who can keep regular appointments, leaving many youth without help when they need it most.

"Workers in those programs, but they do well with students who can keep somewhat regular appointments, you know. ... there's a whole other level of students that it's like, when they're ready to do something, that's when help needs to be there, right. And nobody is able to be at the end of the phone, and you know even for me like, they can call me and say so and so's here... Can you come see them, and it's like "I'm sorry I'm booked with 4 students in row." (SW/CYC)

Participants expressed concern about programs that served high risk youth in Halton being shut down due to the small numbers of youth who attended these programs. They felt that although the numbers are low, the youth who do attend are extremely high risk or are already in risk. Such youth are looking for places to sleep and rely on these centres to be open for them and their safety.

“The [name of centre] is going to be extended at least until September at this point in time... There was a lot of community backlash around that. It’s temporarily extended but again, you don’t know what will happen with it. And they don’t serve a huge number of youth but the youth that they serve have such hugely intense needs. I wouldn’t even start to address mental health issues with those youth because they need a place to sleep... They’re not at risk youth, they are in the soup already... They’re not at, some of them are at risk of homelessness. But lots of them are going there for their food hamper. And that’s where, so they’re not a gigantic number of kids but when you look at the needs for that specific group of kids, it’s very disturbing to shut that down”. (FW)

e) *Lack of sustainability of existing community resources*

Families living in the more rural areas of the Halton region face difficulties in accessing sustainable community resources. Many agencies and programs will utilize temporary solutions to provide service to these families, but true long-term sustainable resources are not available, which results in many challenges.

“This was only two years ago, the [name of the organization] wasn’t in Georgetown at the time so mom couldn’t ride her bike from Georgetown to Milton. So just going through the problem solving of things like that, and you tell this story to the [name of the organization] and they ended up getting a [name of the organization] worker to drive from Milton to go see the family, which I know they can’t do every time but what do you do? Right?” (SW/CYC)

Over the past two decades, population and infrastructure have expanded greatly in Halton region’s northern areas. Despite this, community services have not expanded to serve these new, quickly growing populations. This leaves families in the challenging situation of living in under-resourced areas, far away from their required services. One of the participants remarked on the massive development that has happened in Halton region over the past 20 years. And the fact that services have not continued to grow to match this population growth or the particular needs of the population of people who have to move further and further away from the Centre and the south in order to afford to be able to buy a house.

f) *Staff roles and burnout*

Child and Youth Counsellors in the Halton region have been faced with challenges when trying to define and understand their purpose/role within the high school setting. These workers have been asking for clarification in regards to their role, but have not received clarification, making their jobs more challenging. Child and Youth care workers face additional challenges when working with the high school’s already established social workers, as there is often confusion and concern regarding job descriptions and interfering with one another's work.

“Because they’re not really sure what we’re supposed to be doing there, and the social workers, some of them are asking for that support because their caseloads are so overwhelming to them, in terms of intensive work that they would gladly share with a CYC, but there’s some who wouldn’t and it becomes stepping on toes, and all about the job descriptions, and leave it to the board and that kind of stuff.” (SW/CYC)

Many CYC’s have expressed that they are being replaced by social workers and they see their jobs vanishing.

“So, we’ll allow some agencies in, like [name of agency] comes in, their school based support team, which some CYC’s are threatened by because it’s not really clear. They come in and basically do the same kind of work that we do.” (SW/CYC)

Employees and staff members who work with youth face tremendous challenges in dealing with the effects of stress and burnout in the field. These workers are constantly expected to improve the lives of the youth they serve, yet this is often at the expense of their own well-being. This results in employees being forced to take leave in order to tend to their own needs, with agencies and programs becoming understaffed in the process.

“We have half of our team off on some sort of leave right now. I’m talking to [name of the organization] this morning, they had multiple members of their team down off on stress leave, right? So, we preach wellness to kids and yet none of us are well as adults, how do you expect us to make healthy children when we’re not well and healthy ourselves?” (SW/CYC)

What Youth Said

When we were originally asked to do a Needs Assessment of Programs and Services for Youth in/at Risk in Halton Region, we knew that it was important that we find a way for youth to contribute to the research. Knowing that you want to include youth in the research, having a plan to do so and being able to actually include youth in the research in a substantial way, can also be a different thing. We had a wonderful plan to include youth in the research in the second phase of the research. We applied for and received additional funding through SRCA funding at Sheridan and received generous support through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to hire students at Sheridan to support the running of Youth Focus Groups.

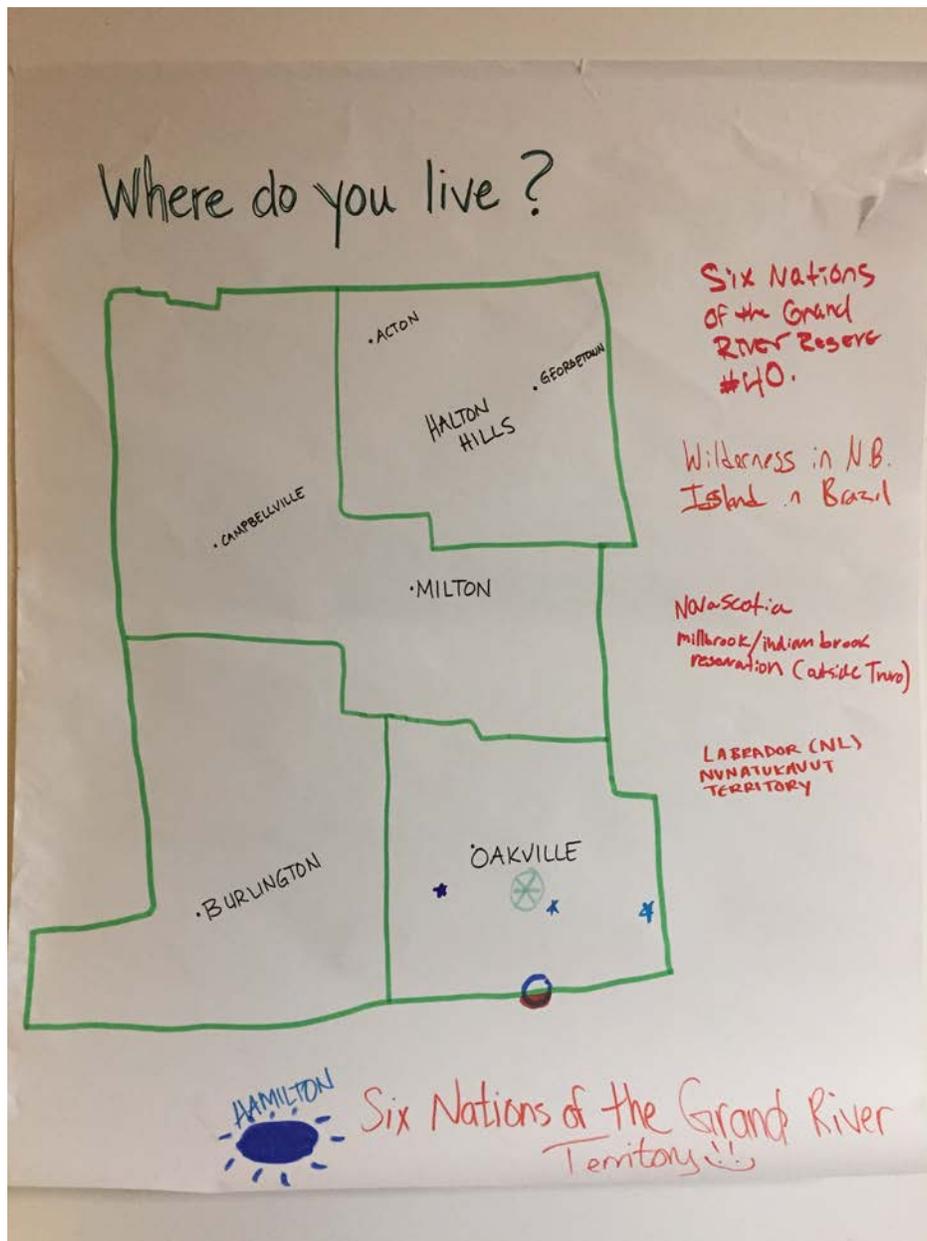
There were a number of challenges that we didn't anticipate in connecting with youth for the focus groups: age of consent and parental permission forms (necessary as a part of the ethics requirement); availability of youth at a busy time of year; cycle of organizations (May/June- programming is often wrapping up for the summer). As a result, we were only able to conduct a total of three focus groups between May and June 2017. Important to note in this process is that two of these focus groups represented groups of youth who are often chronically under-represented in data- Indigenous youth and LGBTQ+ youth. The other focus group that we were able to conduct was with high school age students who were engaged with an arts-based youth-serving organization.

From those focus groups, however, we did gather rich data. What the youth said reinforced what we heard from Program Administrators and from Frontline Workers. Youth may have used different words and phrased their needs differently, but in the end, we found that their needs had been accurately reflected by service providers (based on the small sample of youth that we talked to).

The research findings in this section are meant to enhance and add to the understanding of what youth in Halton region need. Because we talked to youth from two populations that particularly vulnerable and at risk, you will notice that these particular needs are 'front and centre' in these quotes and these findings.

Like the focus groups with youth, this section will read more like a conversation. We have chosen to frame it with the questions that we posed to the youth in the focus groups. You can find a full list of those questions in [Appendix 5](#).

We started off the Focus Groups by asking youth where they lived. All of the focus groups that we conducted included youth who were from different parts of Halton region. They covered the urban, the rural and the suburban. In the case of the group of Indigenous youth that we talked with, we gave them the option of identifying where they lived and what they called home. Below is an image of the map that we used.



The blue notations indicate where youth are currently living and the red is where youth call home.

Our next questions were assessment questions, to determine the kinds of resources that youth used in their neighbourhoods and what kinds of resources they accessed. Youth were invited to write their answers on sticky notes (one answer per sticky note) and facilitators gathered the sticky notes and attached them to flipchart paper at the front of the room. Once all of the responses had been gathered, there was a general discussion about the resources.

If we were youth who were new in your neighbourhood, where would you tell us to go? To have fun?

The answers to this question ranged from hiking trails to movie theatres to the mall. Locations like the library and cafes also figured into the kinds of places where youth went to have fun. For youth, it was also important to note who you were with when you had fun. Where you went to have fun was secondary to the people you had fun with.

If we needed help?

There were a wide range of resources that youth were aware of from mental health to legal resources that were available at their schools to the resources that were available in their communities. One particular issue of note that youth expressed was that although they might know that resources existed, they felt that they had gaps in their knowledge, particularly around **mental health resources**. One participant expressed:

“How do we recognize signs of mental health in ourselves and in others?- we are told to go and tell an adult but then it doesn’t go anywhere. I don’t know what to say- how do I fix it? How do I follow through? How do I help my friend if they are having a panic attack? How do I know when there needs to be an intervention?” (Youth participant)

For the purposes of this feedback, youth responses to **Are there things that you wished your neighbourhood had? And what would you add or take away if you were in charge**, have been combined. Below are the responses:

- Sexual health and violence resources
 - Sexual violence counselling- no wait lists- more access
 - A more accessible sexual health clinic
- Transit passes for high school and college students
 - Better transit
 - Less wait times
 - Transit going more places so we can get around more easily
- Better employment services
- More funding for art programs
 - Free art programs
 - Creative spaces to create art
 - Storytelling for all ages
 - Art/hang out spaces
- More safe spaces for youth
- More equity check-ins with institutions

*“Teachers say things that they don’t know about gender identity...they should not be allowed to do that.
“There are still many homophobic and transphobic teachers that should not be allowed to teach.”*
(Youth Focus Group Participant)

- More LGBTQ support*
- More resources for Indigenous youth*
 - More indigenous history centres, workshops for crafts, etc. i.e. Heritage Centre like the Glooskap Centre in Nova Scotia
<http://www.millbrookheritage.ca/>
 - Language centres to teach indigenous languages
 - “Little” indigenous area in the city
 - Cultural events (like pow wows)
- Mental health resources
 - Education
 - More community hubs for mental health

“ROCK? I love ROCK, but it is not getting here quick enough.” (Youth Focus Group Participant)

- More support for youth living in poverty
 - More support and funding for housing
- Options for youth development across the region
 - More youth in paid leadership
 - More places for us to get our voices heard
 - More chances for youth to speak their voices on things
 - More funding for youth programs
- Resources for refugees and immigrants

The following question was an Arts- based question. Youth were presented with the opportunity to respond to this question first with plasticine and mini-canvas. They were told that they didn’t need to participate if they didn’t want to and that in the end, if they didn’t want to share what they had created, they had that option

**Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years? How are you going to get there?
(What resources do you have? Internal and external) Are there any barriers or
challenges? (what are they? How will you overcome them?)**

This was a very successful exercise. Youth really appreciated the opportunity to participate and create. This led to good discussions about where they saw themselves going. Below are a few examples of the tableaux that the youth created. A full photo gallery can be found at www.haltonyouthneed.ca



“My dream is to become a nurse. I know I have the internal resource to get there in terms of drive, energy friends and family but I need to get the grades. I would tell everyone at my school that they need to take a ‘chill pill’- there is so much pressure to get high marks and to get into university. We need more guidance on university and college and apprenticeships and options. What are the possibilities? There is too much competition. We need to realize that marks aren’t everything”.



“My relationships with family and friends sustain me, they make me happy and will give me the resources that I need to keep moving forward. I want to move towards supporting others in their good mental health- to do that, I know I need to be aware of my own. I know that there is a lot I have to learn”.



“Crows have so much freedom. They can do what they want, go where they want. They also have so much wisdom. I want to be like the crow and to follow the wisdom of the crow as I go forward”.



“I want a family and stability, a partner and a child. In this image my partner and I are the trees that are holding up the house that our child will live in. Of course there is a dog, that’s what our child is riding- what household is complete without a dog? All this will be possible because of the resources that I have- my determination and my community”.

Recommendations and Fundable Solutions

This next section integrates our recommendations with future fundable solutions. The recommendations are based on our research findings, the different themes that consistently emerged in our conversations with program administrators, frontline workers and with the youth themselves. The fundable solutions are embedded at the end of each of the recommendations.

1. Infrastructure

a) Youth specific facilities

Youth in Halton region would greatly benefit from the creation of safe spaces for youth programming. Ideally these space would be located in residential areas, as youth require access to community programming within walking distance of their homes. Having the facility in residential areas would reduce travel expenses and provide youth with a safe space within their community.

“The advantage of having a unit within the community is to help children/families who might be stigmatized, help them with food supports and to avoid transportation barriers. Kids and parents are easier to engage with programming that is in the immediate community. Parents like that the children can go somewhere safe in the neighbourhood.”
(PA)

Neighbourhood safe spaces could be the ideal location for developmental programming and mentorship programming for youth. These spaces could make use of existing infrastructure available in neighbourhoods (such as in churches, mosques, libraries, community centers etc.). Alternatively, youth specific facilities could involve the use of portable units, which can be transported directly into the heart of a community. These units would then be transformed into operational youth facilities, using couches, seating, book areas, sports equipment and additional resources. This strategy has the potential to be implemented in a time effective manner, as it does not require the construction of permanent infrastructure. These facilities would ideally work in collaboration with surrounding schools, and would also provide transportation and employment services to youth who seek it.

“Almost like portable units, where we can get them shipped out into the community, this whole, pop-up location, where kids can go in, almost like one of those like trailers. Convert them into couches, seating, a book area, video games, pullout, you know, sports equipment, so, this way, you just roll into a community” (PA)

Youth in the Halton region have also recommended the creation of local neighborhood youth-dedicated spaces, which offers a variety of programs but focuses primarily on youths aged 11-14 years old. The program would ideally consist of three components: games/physical activity, discussion and community service.

While the Town of Oakville has specific Youth Drop-In Centres, many youth are unaware of these centres or unable to access them because of their locations. It is important to note that these are all located within the southern part of the region.

Fundable Solution 1: More youth-dedicated spaces that are within a walkable distance from the youths' homes and that offer a variety of programming.

b) Central Intake

The creation of a Central Intake system that connects the different mental health prevention and treatment services and resources to children, youth and their families across the region. This Central Intake system would be the front door to services and supports for children, youth and their families who need help with a mental health issues. Central Intake would have a helpline component, to answer your questions, guide families through the referral process or steer them to an agency or service in the community that could best meet their needs. It could also have an additional line for service providers to call to put their clients on waiting lists. This has the potential to reduce the amount of misuse and duplication of services in the area. For an example of how this might work, please see [Kinark Child and Family Services](#)¹

“Here’s another thing that would be great for Halton, a central intake, and I know that’s been talked about... but it seems to work well in other communities. I used to work out in Simcoe County and I know Hamilton and Niagara both have them too, and they’re beautiful because it’s that team of people who are deciding, what course of action? Where is this family going to go?” (FW)

“So if there was one central intake, then they could weed them through. I know in Simcoe County we had [Agency 1] and then we had [Agency 2], and if you were getting service from [Agency 1], you could not come to [Agency 2] unless it was a service that they couldn’t offer. So, if you were getting family counselling here and you didn’t like your worker, you had to talk to the manager and you had to sort that out and request another worker, rather than just going to New Path, or doing both.” (FW)

¹ Kinark Child and Family Services- <https://www.kinark.on.ca>

Fundable Solution 2: A Central Intake system to facilitate more effective delivery of mental health services and resources to families in the Halton region.

c) Youth Housing

There needs to be an increase in the number of independent living options available to youth in Halton region. Whether through the expansion of existing services such as Bridging the Gap or the creation new facilities, youth require more alternative housing options where they are able to escape harmful family situations and succeed in achieving their academic and personal goals. This is an issue that is bigger than we realize, often rendered invisible by the way that youth are coping with their instability, managing the precarious nature of their housing. This will help to address the issue of “couch surfing”².

Fundable Solution 3: Increase the number and range of housing supports available to youth living independently in Halton region.

d) Transportation

Youth need better access to transportation, so that they can gain better access to the resources in their communities. This would allow youth to become more comfortable and familiar in their surroundings, and would allow them to access services that their region has to offer. Accessible transportation was identified repeatedly as a barrier to accessing needed services.

“Getting access to the transportation network to access different areas of the community, to learn what exists in their region. It will expose young adults to the great things that exist in the area, and some of the businesses and history in Oakville. This would also give them confidence to ride the bus and go train, or learn how to safely bike through the region with access to bikes.”(FW)

There are examples of innovative approaches that have been used to meet transportation needs of vulnerable groups. ROCK offers taxi fare to vulnerable youth wishing to attend their LGBTQ+ drop in centres. Culture Link in Toronto offers a bike loan program to new immigrants (Culture

² “couch-surfing” is a colloquialism that is used to describe the precarious nature of living situations for many vulnerable populations. In this case, youth living temporarily in the homes of friends and acquaintances, but never in stable conditions

Link, 2017); In Edmonton, a free transit program was introduced in 2015 to increase vulnerable youths' access to services (Kent, 2015).

Currently Halton Region has two programs that address some transportation barriers for youth and other vulnerable populations. However, it is important to note that we did not discover these two programs through our research participants. This leads us to believe that these programs need to be more widely disseminated.

1. Subsidized Passes for Low Income Transit (SPLIT)³ in Burlington, Milton and Oakville (subsidizes the cost of the pass by 50% and can vary according to Municipality)
 - Ontario Works
 - ODSP
 - Private and Government Sponsored Refugees
2. Youth Taxi SCRIP⁴ Program
 - Available in Halton Hills to youth between the ages of 13-19
 - Youth must register
 - 40% discount on regular taxi fares

Fundable Solution 4: Fund initiatives that support better youth access to transportation across Halton region.

2. Funding

a) Create new funding models for agencies with proven track records

Youth-serving agencies across the region talked about the strain that the constant stress of funding put on them. So often, it takes away from their capacity to deliver much needed services. This recommendation addresses funding stability which would allow organizations with a proven track record to provide more consistent and effective services to youth. A more consistent funding model would allow staff members to focus more time and energy on delivering effective services, and would reduce the amount of stress, uncertainty associated from regularly reapplying for funding. Reporting is a necessary 'evil' and accountability is important but are there ways that funders can reward organizations with proven track records and reduce the administrative strain on those organizations, allowing more staff time to be dedicated to serving the needs of youth?

³ For more information about SPLIT: <http://halton.ca/cms/One.aspx?portalId=8310&pageId=66709#TransitSubsidy>

⁴ For more information about the SCRIP program: <http://www.haltonhills.ca/transit/youthTaxiScrip.php>

“Right now our program has funding and I think I’m really grateful for that and what it allows us to do in our work, but yeah I crave stability, I do. I, as a person do and I think in terms of programming it’s always a bit like even whenever you talk about we have a four-year grant and we’re in year three, people go oh so, and then I go, yes we’re almost done and then we have to figure out what we’re doing past that. So, I don’t know if it’s just we have to deal with that’s the reality of the world that we live in, but I feel weird that the work that we’re doing is that we’re working with such vulnerable folks and vulnerable youth and especially that it’s targeted prevention work and there isn’t a sustainable funding for it.” (FW)

Fundable Solution 5: Provide longer term funding options to organizations that have a proven track record of exemplary work.

b) Increase funding of existing agencies/program/services

There are many agencies/services in the Halton region that have a record of innovative and effective programming in relation to vulnerable youth. Additional funding would enable them to expand and spread their reach to all corners of Halton region. An increase in funding towards these established agencies would also allow them to properly resource and staff their pre-existing programs, which would result in an increase in both the quality, and capacity of provided services. It is also suggested that increased funding be allocated for preventive programs.

Fundable Solution 6: Increase funding and funding collaborations to properly staff exemplary programs and to fund preventive programs.

c) Coordinate funding cycles and application processes to lessen the burden on individual agencies through the funding application process

Throughout our interviews with service providers across the region, it was clear that they feel an increased administrative burden in respect to applying for funding. As funding trends have shifted over the past two decades from core funding to project based funding, many agencies depend on multiple funding sources to run their programs. This is a multi-level structural issue not relegated simply to regional funding agencies, however, it is also an area that bodies like the Halton Granters’ Roundtable can have a positive impact in a local context.

Ways to address this are coordinating funding cycles; pooling funds to jointly fund initiatives so that agencies are required to apply to fewer bodies; and standardizing application processes.

Fundable Solution 7: Halton Granters' Roundtable to streamline funding processes across member agencies.

3. Mental Health

a) One-stop shop for mental health

Families in Halton region would benefit from the creation of a “one-stop shop” facility for mental health services. The current mental health system can be very difficult for families to navigate, and determining appropriate services/care can be a challenge. With the creation of a one-stop mental health ‘shop’, families would be able to receive guidance and recommendations from professionals, who would help them to manage the different issues they are facing and provide access to the appropriate treatment and/or services.

“I really like the idea of “one-stop shop” for mental health. If I were a family, I would want to be able to go somewhere and say “Here’s my problem, what do you want me to do?” and then be able to help me.” (FW)

An example of such a “one stop shop” can be seen in the three youth clinics started by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, n.d), providing youth with a “range of services on a walk-in basis, including brief solution-focused therapy, peer support, system navigation, access to Internet-based tools, and onsite access to psychiatric services” (p. 1) in the community.

*please note: this is not the same as a Central Intake but rather a clinical setting, a physical space or spaces where youth can drop-in or be referred that provides treatment, preventative programming and referrals

Fundable Solution 8: Creation of a ‘one stop shop’ for mental health services

b) Early intervention & prevention

It is recommended that organizations in Halton region invest more significantly in programs that focus on early intervention and prevention. Past research and best practices have clearly shown that

early intervention is key to successful mental health treatment, yet many youth in Halton region are unable to benefit from early intervention due to long waitlists in existing mental health agencies.

“These kids who identified in kindergarten should not be sitting on a waitlist for 18 months or 12 months or 6 months even, because you know what? You could probably stop a whole lot of stuff from happening if you were just to do some intensive work with that family right when they first came in.” (FW)

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013) has proposed a comprehensive school based mental health strategy that encompasses mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention programs.

Fundable Solution 9: Create initiatives that focus on early mental health identification and intervention in schools.

4. Wrap around services

Wrap around services are a holistic and strengths-based ways to intervene with vulnerable youth and their families. Wraparound has been defined as an “intensive, individualized care planning and management process” (National Wrap Around Initiative, 2017, p.1). An example of such wrap around services is provided by [Shalem Mental Health Network](#). It is recommended that organizations in Halton region increase its use of wrap around services, in addition to improving the collaboration and coordination of its existing services. Youth in Halton region would greatly benefit from more efficient collaboration/coordination between existing community agencies. If more community partners came together to understand the needs of youth when they first seek treatment, they would be able to work together to treat clients more effectively by understanding what each organization can bring to the table. Doing this would also help minimize the current issues regarding the duplication of services and long waitlists. One way to increase the collaboration and coordination between services in the region would be through the use of review committees. These committees would contain members of various community organizations in Halton, who would regularly meet and work together to problem solve and assist students who seek treatment.

“I would love it if we could have psychiatric consultation to our school social workers because then we would be able to have a little bit more of that collaboration. Right? I know that we do have mental health nurses that work in collaboration with us but that’s another fragmented service, right? CCAC Mississauga, I feel like we all do great services, but we need to pull them together, so that we’re all kind of having a shared program. And, that includes private therapies too, right? Because some families will be going to private therapists, probation, their family physicians, Halton Multi-Cultural Centre all these different connections. So, access service more directly. How does a person and their family be able to do a little bit of coordinated care?” (FW)

Fundable Solution 10: Create more wrap around services for vulnerable youth and their families.

5. Accessible arts and crafts programming

Research participants recommended that more programs are needed to reach out and cater to the creative needs of young adults who cannot access expensive for arts and crafts programming. This type of programming should be accessible to youth of all ages, and provide youth with an outlet to be both creative and expressive, while nurturing them in a supportive environment. This type of programming is currently being carried out by ArtHouse but it is limited in scope and in the range of ages that can access the programming. Arts based programming, in addition to being creative and expressive, can also teach youth a variety of different skills (i.e. woodworking and jewelry making). Participants who develop these creative skills could also potentially become more self-sufficient by translating their newfound creative skills into income generating opportunities.

Fundable solution 11: Increase the number of initiatives that provide youth with free/subsidized arts-based programming.

6. Programs to support international/newcomer youth

a) Dual language staff that support the increasing diversity of Halton region

It is recommended that organizations, including the school boards hire more dual language service providers/social workers in order to better facilitate communication with newcomer/refugee youth and their families. Newcomer/International youth would greatly benefit from the addition of

qualified dual language service providers, who are effectively able pick up the content and subtle nuances that are communicated to them, while speaking in the students' first language. The hiring of dual language service providers would also reduce the current dependency on third party/middle person employees such as interpreters and cultural brokers.

Fundable Solution 12: Support organizations to hire dual language service providers

b) Implement the alternative education program for 18-21 year old newcomers

A group of participants have suggested a unique Alternative Education Program for 18 to 21 Year Old Newcomers (Please see [Appendix 4](#) for a visual overview of the program proposed by the research participants). This program would target young adult newcomer youth with low language levels, gaps in education (due to issues of forced migration), and/or education that is not recognized in Ontario. The has the potential to equip participants with the academic skills required to work towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, and/or admission into apprenticeship, college, and university program. The academic instruction would occur as participants simultaneously acquire their necessary language acquisition skills.

“An educational program for young adult newcomer youth with low levels of language acquisition, and/or gaps in education, or education that is not recognized in Ontario...that will equip them with the academic skills to work towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, or admission into apprenticeship programs or college and university programs, while acquiring English language skills.” (FW)

This proposed Alternative Education Program would provide newcomers with a wide range of academic instruction, from CLB instruction in levels 1 to 6, to math and science instruction from the elementary grades to Grade 10, as well as history, geography, computer skills training, study skills, test taking and co-op. Ideally, this program would also offer trades and apprenticeships courses, and all instruction would be face to face instruction. In addition to the academic instruction component, this proposed program recommends that a variety of social supports be offered, including child care, food vouchers, transportation and access to mental health services and settlement specialists. A team of volunteers is also recommended to support the participants of the program. These social supports will combine to ensure that participants of the program have the best chance possible for success. The program would also require funding for infrastructure, instructors, materials, food, transportation and childcare. In order for the program to run successfully, it is recommended that the program run on a timetable so that participants can become accustomed to a predicable routine. All instructors would be required to have the proper certification, whether through The Ontario College of Teachers, Teachers of English as a Second

Language – Canada, or as Skill Trade Certified trade instructors. Attendance monitoring would also be necessary, with recommendations calling for the use of the three strike policy that is currently being used in the LINC program. Finally, participants must also receive progress reports, and a transcript following the completion of the program. This is to ensure that participants are able to prove that they have spent time in the program learning valuable skills, and so they may be eligible to receive prior learning and/or maturity credits at adult high school, once they meet language requirements necessary to attend.

Fundable Solution 13: Create programs to support newcomer older newcomer youth with low language proficiency.

7. Programs to support Indigenous youth

The Indigenous population of Halton region is largely hidden from the general public eye. In order to better understand and meet the needs of Indigenous youth, it is recommended that Halton Region increase its discussion and outreach towards this population. However, it should be noted that needs assessments are very different for Indigenous communities, as extensive time must be spent building trusting relationships before responses to research can be expected. It is also important to recognize the diversity of Indigenous populations and complexity of Indigenous programming. As a means to increase self-identification amongst Indigenous youth, there needs to be value that comes from self-identifying. Indigenous youth also need reassurance that no negative repercussions will come as a result of self-identifying.

Because the Indigenous population is essentially hidden in the region, it will take a great deal of progress to get them to self-identify. There needs to be a value that will come with their self-identification, and an assurance that it will not create a detrimental situation for them. Safe spaces are crucial (FW)

Indigenous youth would largely benefit from the creation of Indigenous-specific hubs or public spaces where youth could come together to talk, learn, and take pride in their Indigenous culture. These hubs would ideally include a green space, garden and/or sweat lodge where Indigenous youth could be educated in a safe and secure environment. The creation of such a public space would ultimately give Indigenous youth a source of pride and ownership within their community. Participants shared that when working with the Indigenous population, it is important to assume that there are Indigenous youth in the area and then to scale up from there.

Need visible, positive public spaces for Indigenous persons “Field of Dreams.” A hub where Indigenous youth can come together to talk. Such hubs need to be visually recognizable as Indigenous specific, and where they can feel proud of who they are. It is important to make an assumption that many indigenous people do exist in Halton and then scale up. This hub needs to be a local building with green space. Where “we can do education” “where we feel welcome and safe”. Maybe have a sweat lodge, garden. Space needs to be welcoming, Indigenous persons need a sense of ownership and safety. (Aboriginal Group Meeting, FW)

Fundable Solution 14: Create initiatives that provide culturally safe spaces for Indigenous youth

8. Programs to support LGBTQ+ youth

Many of the participants noted that organizations like ROCK have innovative and relevant educational and supportive programming to meet the diverse needs of the LGBTQ+ population. However the reach of programs like ROCK are limited due to shortage of staff, and the geographical dispersion of families requiring such support. Additional funding to extend the reach of programs that support LGBTQ+ youth and focus on public awareness to create safe spaces is recommended. This was something that was really clear in both our conversations with service providers and with the youth themselves. Although there is a growing awareness and are an increased number of resources available for LGBTQ+ youth, many more are needed, with an additional focus on mental health and medical resources.

In the youth focus group, they were really clear that schools and other institutions as well as the general public needed better education about LGBTQ+ issues. They felt that people were often not equipped to work with them in a way that was honouring of their identities and experiences.

“Teachers say things that they don’t know about gender identity...they should not be allowed to do that. “There are still many homophobic and transphobic teachers that should not be allowed to teach.” (Youth Focus Group Participant)

Fundable Solution 15: Programs and initiatives that support LGBTQ+ youth and focus on public awareness to create safe spaces.

Appendix 1: Youth-Serving Agency Profiles

Although there are many important organizations that are working in the Halton region with the specific mission of working with and supporting the needs of youth, the scope of our research only allowed us to connect with a sampling of these organizations. The profiles included below represent the range of organizations that serve youth in the region and the kinds of services and programs that they offer for youth and often in collaboration with youth.

The only two organizations that we interacted with through the Phase 1 interview process that are not represented in these profiles are the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board. The reason that we chose not to profile these two organizations was because they are massive organizations that we only saw one small part of through our research and could not create an adequate profile of these organizations. However, we do want to draw attention to the fact that throughout our interviews, it is clear that both the school boards are central to the lives and experiences of youth in Halton region. Schools and experiences within the school system came up over and over again in interviews with service providers and with youth. As much as other organizations play key roles in supporting youth, it is clear that the education system have a profound role in shaping youth identity and experience.

The youth-serving agencies profiled in the section below are as follows:

ArtHouse
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton
Bridging the Gap- Childrens' Aid Society
Halton Youth Justice Program- Halton Region Police Services
Kerr Street Mission
ROCK (Reach Out Centre for Kids)
YMCA of Oakville
Youth Centres of Oakville

ArtHouse

Organization: ArtHouse

Head Office Address: 115 George Street - Suite 522, Oakville, Ontario L6J 0A2

Website: <http://www.arthouseonline.org/>

Mission of the Organization: Building better communities through the Arts

Structure of the organization:

ArtHouse is a Halton-based charitable organization that offers free arts programs to children and youth age 7-17 and seniors, most particularly to individuals and families who may not have the

discretionary resources to access fee-related activities. Since 2009, ArtHouse has provided more than 300 programs to over 5,400 participants at 30 locations throughout Burlington, Milton and Oakville.

“Front of the Line” Applicants

In order to prioritize young people who have little or no access to the arts because of the cost or for those where no special arts programs are being provided, ArtHouse relies on connections made with families through their strong network of community partners including Big Brothers Big Sisters, Food For Life, a number of junior and high schools, Halton Community Housing Corporation, Children's Aid Foundation of Halton, Home Suite Hope, Kerr Street Mission, YMCA of Oakville and YMCA of Burlington, ROCK, Nelson Youth Centre, Halton Multicultural Council and Community Development Halton. Their goal is to continue to grow our base of participants through these special partnerships, and welcome them as our FRONT OF THE LINE Applicants.

Embedded Arts Programming

ArtHouse is consistently looking for places to connect their arts programming. They look for needs within the community and then look for ways in which they can meet those needs. This has meant developing partnerships with community organizations and with the school boards to offer arts programming for youth in the spaces and places where they are already connected.

TAKE FIVE Leadership Program

ArtHouse is in its ninth year of operations and as it has seen its original youth (ages 7-12), age out of programming, the TAKE FIVE Leadership Program was created to provide opportunities for these youth to develop leadership skills and contribute to ArtHouse programming. In addition to providing opportunities for youth ages 13-17 to volunteer, ArtHouse has created responsive programming for the youth volunteers. They have asked them what they want and what they need. The result has been sessions that incorporate elements of maintaining good mental health and address topics such as how to network, resume building, how to taxes, etc.

References

ArtHouse Website (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.arthouseonline.org/>

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton

Organization: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton

Head Office Address:

Oakville Office: 464 Morden Road, Oakville, ON L6K 3W4

Milton Office: 605 Santa Maria Blvd, Milton, ON L9T 6J5

Website: www.bbshalton.ca

Mission and Vision of the Organization:

Vision

A community where all children and youth reach their full potential through mentoring relationships

Mission

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton is committed to expanding the reach of quality, inclusive mentoring services to children and youth in the community

Structure of the organization:

Big Brothers, Big Sisters has 18 staff and 800 volunteers and has existed as an organization for the past 105 years. Big Brothers Big Sisters offers a wide range of mentoring opportunities to meet the varied needs of volunteers, children and families. Serving as role models, the mentors teach by example the importance of giving and giving back, of staying in school, and for having respect for family, peers and community. They engage with child and youth in a variety of different programs- but always with a mentoring focus:

In School Programs

These are 14 week programs that are offered in partnership with the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board. This programming includes a wide range of programs that meet with needs of many vulnerable children and youth. Children are identified by their teachers for inclusion in the following programs: The Homework Club; Go Girls! Group Mentoring; GLOW Group Mentoring; Game On! Group Mentoring; Group Recreation Programs and Adventure Canada Club (full descriptions of these programs can be found at <http://www.bbshalton.ca/en/Home/mentoringprograms/default.aspx>)

In School Mentoring

The In School Mentoring program provides girls and boys with a role model and a friend to talk to and share the experiences of growing up with, within school grounds. For one hour a week, mentors meet with their mentee and engage in activities such as board games, crafts or just hang out in the playground. The In School Mentoring program requires a weekly visit of 1 hour for the duration of the school year. Matches do not meet over the summer break or during other school holidays.

The program strives to do the following:

- provide a role model and a friend for girls and boys.
- promote the importance of staying in school and healthy relationships with family and peers.
- instill trust and self-confidence in order to make healthy decisions.
- encourage leadership skills and independent thinking.
- and above all, make a difference while having fun.

Traditional Mentoring Relationships

Big Brothers Mentoring

The Big Brothers Mentoring program provides boys and young men with a role model and a friend to talk to and share the experiences of growing up with. Through regular outings, a relationship is developed between the mentor and the mentee, that is built on trust and common interests, and is supported by experienced case-workers. The result is a life-changing experience for both the mentor and the mentee. The Big Brothers Mentoring program usually requires two regularly scheduled

outings a month of several hours each and a minimum of 1 year commitment.

The program strives to do the following:

- provide a role model and a friend for boys and young men.
- promote the importance of staying in school and healthy relationships with family and peers.
- instill trust and self-confidence in order to make healthy decisions.
- encourage leadership skills and independent thinking.
- and above all, make a difference while having fun.

Big Sisters Mentoring

The Big Sisters Mentoring program provides girls and young women with a role model and a friend to talk to and share the experiences of growing up with. Through regular outings, a relationship is developed between the mentor and the mentee that is built on trust and common interests, and is supported by our experienced case-workers. The result is a life-changing experience for both the mentor and the mentee. The Big Sisters Mentoring program usually requires two regularly scheduled outings a month of several hours each and a minimum of 1 year commitment.

The program strives to do the following:

- provide a role model and a friend for girls and young women.
- promote the importance of staying in school and healthy relationships with family and peers.
- instill trust and self-confidence in order to make healthy decisions.
- encourage leadership skills and independent thinking.
- and above all, make a difference while having fun.

References

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton Website (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.bbshalton.ca/en/Home/default.aspx>

Bridging the Gap- Halton Children's' Aid Society

Organization Name: Bridging the Gap

Head Office Address: 1445 Norjohn Court, Units 1 & 2, Burlington, ON L7L 0E6

Website: www.bridgingthegaphalton.ca

Mission Statement:

Bridging the Gap strives to provide readily and easily accessible support for youth between the ages of 16-24 residing in the Halton region who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Bridging the Gap is committed to fostering a youth directed, strength based approach to assisting youth in achieving their goals. Bridging the Gap fosters partnerships with service providers in the Halton region to maintain a positive, reputable, and constructive approach in our service to youth.

(*Welcome to BTG Halton*, n.d., para. 2)

Structure of the Organization:

There are five employees working for Bridging the Gap, four in transitional housing and one in service navigation in North Halton (Acton and Georgetown). The Program Administrator at the Halton Children's Aid Society manages these employees and oversees the program. Bridging the Gap was initially provided by the Transitions for Youth agency, but following its closure in 2008, a call went out for Bridging the Gap to join another agency. Employees of the Halton Children's Aid Society were familiar with the program and its grant process, so they successfully applied to continue operating the program. As a result, the Halton Children's Aid Society now manages Bridging the Gap. The Bridging the Gap head office is located in Burlington, and the organization also operates two Bridge House locations in Milton and Burlington respectively.

Programs and Services for youth:

Host Home Program

The Host Home Program is a program where community members in the Halton region provide youth aged 16 - 24 with a private sleeping area/room for up to four months. Providers must also provide youth with a grab and go breakfast, a warm nutritional supper, and access to laundry and washroom facilities on a daily basis. Providers are reimbursed with a per diem for hosting youth in their home. Youth are expected to make arrangements for their lunch daily at no cost to the providers. Youth who apply to participate in the Host Home program are prescreened for current addiction or mental health crisis, and will be referred to a more appropriate shelter program if required. Bridging the Gap tends to use the Host Home Program primarily for youths aged 16 – 17 years old.

The Bridge House Program

The Bridge House Program provides two 2-3-bedroom homes for older youth in region between the ages of 16-24 years of age who can live there for up to a two year period. There is one Bridge House located in Milton, and a second located in Burlington. Potential residents of the Bridge House program must complete an application and interview process in order to determine their ability to live cooperatively with peers under minimal supervision. Youth are not permitted to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol while on site, and youth who are experiencing active substance abuse/addiction will be referred to a more appropriate program as necessary. The Bridge House program also provides off site staff support during the two-year period, in order to assist youth in learning essential life skills and achieving their personal goals. Residents of the program are responsible for a \$350 monthly rent, which includes utilities, cable, Internet and furnishings. Residents must purchase their own food and basic needs. Rent may be paid from Ontario Works, OSAP or employment earnings. The homes come equipped with laundry services and access to computers. It is mandatory that all residents be involved in a 30 hour a week participation plan, which can be a combination of school, work, volunteering and/or counselling.

Case Management Services

The third aspect of the Bridging the Gap program is Case Management Services. Case Management Services pertains to youth who contact the program or are referred to the program, and the program aids them in finding housing in the form of room rentals or a rental situation to live independently. The program helps youth aged 16 – 24 access emergency shelter, supportive and independent housing, financial assistance, food and basic needs, education programs and employment options. Most of the participants of this program are older kids, are in school, and have lived independently and/or have some independence skills already developed. As such, the program acts as an enhancement piece for participants during its year to two-year period.

References

Welcome to BTG Halton. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.bridgingthegaphalton.ca/index.html>

Halton Youth Justice Program

Name of the organization: Halton Regional Police Service

Head office address: 1151 Bronte Rd. Oakville, ON L6M 3L1	District Oakville: 20 Division 95 Oak Walk Drive Oakville, ON L6H 0G6	
District Halton Hills:		
District Georgetown (11 Division) 217 Guelph Street Georgetown, ON L7G 4A8	District Acton (10 Division) Queen Street Substation 315 Queen Street Acton, ON L7J 1R1	
District Milton: 12 Division 490 Childs Drive Milton, ON L9T 5G2		District Burlington: 30 Division 3800 Constable Henshaw Blvd. Burlington, ON L7M 3Y2

Website: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/community/youth/index.php>

Mission of the organization: One vision, one mission, one team.

Halton Youth Justice Program/ Pre-Charge Diversion

The Halton Regional Police Service has created this program to promote a healthy community by providing effective intervention with at-risk youth. The program deals with youth conflict with the law by holding youth accountable for their actions but also offering opportunities for them to work on the underlying issues that contribute to criminal behaviour. The youth that meet the criteria enter into a contract with a specified behavioural condition such as a curfew, regular school attendance or drug and alcohol education. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

The diversion program created by the Halton Regional Police Service outlines that offences committed by youth must be a first time offences in order for them to be eligible for the diversion program. In addition, youth must be between the ages of 12-17, there must be sufficient evidence, they must accept responsibility for their actions and show some level of remorse as well as be willing to participate in the program. The types of offences that are considered for the diversion program are, shoplifting, vandalism, property damage, fraud, taking a motor vehicle without consent, assault, and possession of a controlled substance. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Wrap-around Service Provision/Programming

The Halton Youth Justice Program is an excellent example of a program that offers wrap-around service provision. Youth are identified through the school system and then are supported through parents/guardians and through various services and community members. The term “crime fits the punishment” is an apt term when discussing this program as this is the approach that goes into the rehabilitation process of the youth involved in the program (i.e. if there has been property damage, the youth is ‘sentenced’ to a term of community service, working to improve the community in some way. The level of accountability in this program is high and as a result the success rate is high.

In addition to the Halton Youth Justice Program, there are a number of other programs within the Halton Regional Police that are focussed on youth:

Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST)

The Halton Regional Police Service provide to those aged 16 and over who are experiencing a mental health crisis with support and outreach. The program offers health care workers and HRPS offices that are trained in mental health and crisis intervention. The Canadian Mental Health Association as well as the Ontario Ministry of Health fund this program. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Building Respect, Attitudes and Values with Others (B.R.A.V.O)

The Halton Regional Police Services reviewed their Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program, which led to the creation of B.R.A.V.O. This new program is created in partnership with Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic School Board. B.R.A.V.O is taught to elementary school children starting from grade 6 and consists of eight lessons. The lessons are followed by activities and a celebration. The purpose of the program is to build on topics that are covered under the D.A.R.E program such as substance abuse, decision-making, and peer relations. B.R.A.V.O adds new topics such as bullying, cyber bullying, internet safety, social media, and youth and the law. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

PEACE Youth Leadership Program:

The Halton Regional Police Service runs its Police Ethnic and Cultural Education Youth Leadership Program in order to promote a better understanding and cultural awareness in Halton region high school students. Local students are selected to participate in an 11-week program at the Halton Regional Police Headquarters. The program offers in class sessions as well as realistic scenarios that are designed to improve the students’ cultural understanding, their communication and leadership skills as well as a better understanding of many aspects of policing. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Give Respect- Get Respect

The Halton Regional Police service has partnered with the Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic District School Board to help spread the message of respect and healthy relationships. Students in grade six to twelve are encouraged to develop art-based public service messages that promote positive relationships at home, school and in the community. These messages may surround the areas of equity and diversity, personal well-being and self-esteem, healthy relationships and bullying prevention, and building positive spaces and belonging at school and in the community. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Ontario Safe Schools Education Officers' Community Committee

This is a committee formed in 2005 that focuses on the need for officers that can deliver safety and educational programs to schools in Ontario. The committee is comprised of other services within the GTA such as the O.P.P and RCMP. Moreover, the committee also has several civilian members that have expertise in child psychology and education that help with pointing out strengths and weaknesses that police officers may not have training in. The committee works on providing lesson plans for officers to be able to properly educate schools within Ontario about safety, internet safety, bullying, substance abuse and relationships. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Teen Random Acts of Community Kindness (T.R.A.C.K)

T.R.A.C.K is a volunteer program for youth ages between 13-18 that work with police in order to make a difference in the community. The program makes teens work alongside volunteer police officers to help promote life skills, self esteem, leadership, diversity, kindness, respect, trust and responsibility. The program offers meaningful acts of kindness that can have positive affects on youth within the community while providing support to their own communities. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

Youth In Policing Initiative (Y.I.P.I)

In partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Halton Regional Police Service is offering a paid employment program for those attending secondary school. The program aims to give six youth the opportunity to develop job skills while also creating police and community relationships. The program includes hands on demonstrations from various police units to learn about the roles that officers and civilians play within the Halton Regional Police Service. Furthermore, the students develop important employment skills through various roles within the community and the police service. (Halton Regional Police Service, 2015).

References

- Halton Regional Police Service. (2015). *B.R.A.V.O.* Retrieved from: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/community/bravo/index.php>
- Halton Regional Police Service. (2015). *Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/services/coast/index.php>
- Halton Regional Police Service. (2015). *Court Diversion*. Retrieved from: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/about/courtsrecords/courtdiversion.php>
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- Halton Regional Police Service. (2015). *Youth*. Retrieved from: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/community/youth/index.php>
- Halton Regional Police Service. (2015). *Youth In Policing Initiative (Y.I.P.I)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.haltonpolice.ca/community/youth/yipi.php>
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Kerr Street Mission

Organization: Kerr Street Mission

Head Office Address: 485 Kerr Street, Oakville, ON, L6K 3C6

Webpage: <http://kerrstreet.com/>

Overview:

Kerr Street Mission is an organization that strives to help low income and at-risk families and youths, churches and other centers committed to serving the families and youth in need within the Town of Oakville.

Mission:

The mission of this organization is to help the community of Oakville care for low-income and at-risk families and youth; by coming alongside families in distress and help them get to a healthier more sustainable situation; by developing youth so they don't end up in poverty.

Structure of the organization:

The staff structure of Kerr Street Mission consists of 16 paid employees and hundreds of volunteers

Youth Drop-In Centre

Youth aged 11-17 years can drop-in to the centre to 'hang-out' every day after school. There are staff around but there is no real programming unless it is initiated by the youth. Sometimes there are group activities, sometimes youth connect with staff but sometimes it is just a safe space for youth to hang out and spend individual time.

Club 31

This is the more formalized part of the youth drop-in centre. Club 31 offers homework help for students transitioning from middle to high school. Kerr Street Mission has embedded a staff person at a local elementary school to build relationships with teachers and to act as a resource person in order to support the youth more effectively. This connection has been really successful.

LEAD

LEAD – a program designed to guide youths in leadership, encouragement and development. One of the challenges that Kerr Street Mission has observed in the last number of years is that as youth age, they often become less engaged with programming. LEAD provides youth with an opportunity to begin to take leadership in various capacities increasing their level of engagement. Through LEAD, they also have an opportunity to shape the youth programming at Kerr Street Mission. In addition to providing youth with great opportunities for growth and development, this is part of the growth and sustainability strategy for youth programming at Kerr Street Mission.

References

Kerr Street Mission. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://kerrstreet.com/>

ROCK (Reach Out Centre for Kids)

Organization Name: ROCK (Reach Out Centre for Kids)

Head Office Address: 471 Pearl St, Burlington, Ontario L6H 2Y7, Canada

Website: www.rockonline.ca

Mission: Working together to promote and achieve optimal mental health in kids and families

Locations:

Burlington Office: 471 Pearl St., Burlington

Oakville Office: 504 Iroquois Shore Road, Oakville

Milton Office: 400 Bronte St. South, Suite 101, Milton

Georgetown Walk-in: Hillsview Active Living Centre – 318 Guelph St. East, Unit 9

Acton Walk-in: Hillsview Active Living Centre – 415 Queen Street East

Aberdeen House: 2262 Lakeshore Rd. West, Oakville

My Place: 1242 Sable Drive, Burlington

Foundation: 471 Pearl St., Burlington

Centre of Learning: 504 Iroquois Shore Road, Unit 12A, Oakville

Youth Aiding Youth (YAY): 471 Pearl St., Burlington

Ontario Early Years Centers (OEYCs): 710 Cumberland Ave. and 645 Plains Road East, Burlington

Our Community Cares (OCC): 356 Burloak Drive, Burlington and 702 Surrey Lane, Burlington

Positive Space Network (PSN): 504 Iroquois Shore Road, Unit 12A, Oakville

ROCK Intake Services: 471 Pearl St., Burlington

Clinical Services Provided

Walk-In Therapy Clinic: Quick access to therapeutic intervention enabling family members to see trained therapists or counsellors at their chosen moments of need.

Family/Brief Therapy: a therapist works with the family to help deal with problems affecting them and their child. A team approach may be used.

Individual Therapy

Intergenerational Trauma Treatment: a three-stage program for caregivers and families of children who have experienced trauma. Program is designed to help caregivers understand, cope with, and resolve the impact of trauma on their child and family.

Group Therapy: a therapist works with groups of children or caregivers with similar needs to help them deal with specific challenges.

Intensive Child and Family Service/Parenting: an in-home and/or community counselling and support program for children, youth and their families where there is risk of family breakdown,

harm, or loss of school placement.

Crisis Response: provides immediate outreach for children and youth, their caregivers, and community members. It is connected to the Monday-Sunday 24 hour answering service. Callers will then be connected with a crisis counsellor as soon as possible.

Behavioural Consultation and Intervention: available to both parents and child care staff when there is a concern regarding the child's behaviour

Court Assessment

Psychological and Diagnostic Assessment: psychological assessments/consultations are considered for children and youth when there is a concern about learning, developmental, cognitive and/or social emotional functioning. Process may consist of interviews with parents and other professions, observation, and individual testing

Residential Services: Aberdeen House and My Place: Provides housing for at-risk families.

Preventive Programming

Positive Space Network (PSN)

Through education, visibility, awareness, and supportive programming, the Positive Space Network envisions a future in which diverse LGBTQ+ youth, individuals, and families live in a welcoming and supportive community. This is a five-year project. ROCK is currently in its 4th year. The Positive Space Network (PSN) was awarded a 4-year Youth Opportunities Fund grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2014. We work in the Halton Region, providing LGBTQ+ youth and trans specific programming. This is a network for LGBTQ+ youth (up to age 24). There are 2 staff people working with this project. It is on a weekly basis- there are 35-45 youth who attend on a weekly basis in Oakville. (PSN, 2017)

Trans-specific programming - ConnecTions

This program is a drop-in program and is for children who are 12 and under, for teens or youth in their early 20's with additional programming for families and/or caregivers. The program runs in three separate rooms for separate age appropriate or peer support programming. It meets the specific need that was outlined when they first started doing the programs that families, caregivers, as well as children and youth needed a specific place to talk about gender, gender identify, to talk about barriers related to that. It aims to create an exclusively trans positive space, and a focus of gender non-conformity and trans identity. The program runs monthly, on the first Wednesday of the month in Oakville out of the Oak Park Neighborhood Centre.

There are also similar drop-in programs in Acton and George Town. In Acton, the program runs every third Wednesday of the month, from 5 to 8pm, and in George Town, twice a month 4:30-7:30.

The YAC - Youth Action Committee

The YAC is a group of youth ages 14 year olds and 24 year olds working in the same space. They weekend orientation and training. They get leadership training opportunities, they learn about the intersectionality of race and colonialism, as well as learning about history that's impacted their own community. They get leadership opportunities in the community, but mostly, very early they start preparation for pride.

Youth Aiding Youth (YAY)

Youth Aiding Youth (YAY) is a community based program operating in the Region of Halton, sponsored by Reach Out Centre for Kids. The goal is to match volunteers, aged 16-24, on a one to one basis with younger children, aged 6-12. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for special relationships between these children and volunteers which will promote healthy growth and development, while providing the child with a 'special friend' and role model. This program is for kids who need additional support- i.e. social anxiety- ADD/ADHD, bullied, struggling at home or even a child who has come out of clinical service. Commitment for mentors is 3- hours/ week for 9 months. Mentors are actively recruited by ROCK from high schools. Over 100 volunteers involved in this project and 1 staff person. This is a prevention/early intervention program that serves young children who are identified as being "at risk" of developing mental health issues. The overall goals of the program are to help build on the children's self-esteem and social skills through a variety of programs including: Summer camp program (social skills groups- targeting both boys and girls separately) for \$150 (YAY, 2017).

Our Community Cares (OCC)

This is embedded houses in two housing communities in Burlington (one subsidized housing community- and the other a low income/high density community). It provides one free unit. Its existence is to support the kids. For various reasons, kids can't be the #1 priority- often parents have their own issues. The advantage of having a unit within the community is to help children/families who might be stigmatized, help them with food supports and to avoid transportation barriers. Kids and parents are easier to engage with programming that is in the immediate community. In each of the communities, there is a townhouse unit that is converted into a community house where programming and services are provided for both parents and kids. The idea is to provide a positive space and warm environment for the kids. There is a wide variety of life skills and recreational programming. There is a small budget- \$300/month- Longo's Foundation helps out with food support for the families and Food for Life helps out as well. There are 4 staff people and many volunteers. (OCC, 2017)

Halton Family for Families

Halton Families for Families has created a community where children, youth and families feel supported and have a strong sense of belonging. The idea is to connect parents with other parents in the same boat. It creates a place for families who have been impacted by a child or youth's mental health challenges to share their experiences, network with other families, and have a positive impact on services and programs in the community. Families are provided with opportunities to come out as a family unit at the Family Night Social held once a month. Family members are encouraged to become involved in advocacy in different ways (i.e. input to the Ministry). There are 50 volunteers and 1 staff person. (ROCK, 2017).

The New Mentality- Youth Initiative

The New Mentality Halton is a youth led initiative which focuses on 3 main goals: *To reduce the stigma associated with mental health in the Halton Community. To advocate for better services and acceptance of differences. To foster adult-youth partnerships.* The initiative is part of a provincial project that encourages young people to take action across Ontario and initiate their unique projects. It is a forum for youth to share their stories about their experiences of mental health. Each November there is an annual conference bringing youth together to discuss issues, share their stories, tools, resources and ideas. There is nothing more powerful for youth than to hear the stories of other youth who are struggling with and overcoming experiences with mental health. There are 1 staff person and many volunteers. (ROCK, 2017)

Reach Out Program for Schools (ROPS)

The 'Reach Out Program For Schools' is a community based mental health program that provides counselling and family support services to students within a flexible framework to best suit the students and families. Characteristics of the Reach Out Program include that counselors can meet where appropriate and scheduling that best meets the needs of the family and student. Also, students who are eligible for this service do **not** need to attend ROCK's walk-in clinic. Referrals for ROPS must come from the School Social Worker. (ROCK, 2017)

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YMCA of Oakville

Organization Name: YMCA of Oakville

Head Office Address: 410 Rebecca Street, Oakville, ON L6K 1K7

Website: www.ymcaof oakville.org

Mission Statement:

The YMCA of Oakville is a charity that strengthens community in spirit, mind and body. (*Our mission*, n.d., para. 1)

Structure of the Organization:

The YMCA of Oakville offers programs at more than 50 locations across Oakville, including the Peter Gilgan Family YMCA Health, Fitness and Aquatics Facility. They also offer various before and after school programs, summer day camps, and community programs at many sites across the City of Oakville. As of December 2014, there are 180 employees of the Oakville Family YMCA. (*Oakville top 100*, n.d., para. 1) Of these staff members, 30-40 are frontline staff that are working directly with youth.

Programs and Services for youth:

The YMCA of Oakville offers programs and services directly to the community, and have partnered with both the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board in order to effectively deliver these programs and services to youths. In terms of community supports, YMCA of Oakville offers many free programs to families in priority neighborhoods. These programs are offered directly in the participant's communities at locations such as feeder schools and community centres. There are a number of different programs offered through the YMCA of Oakville, for youths of all ages, which includes programs designed for children, young adults and/or older youths.

Creating Safe Spaces for Youth to Connect

The YMCA of Oakville also offers a variety of Youth Activities such as The Board Game Club, Friday Night Youth Nights at the Y, and Friday Nights Out (YMCA Community Van trips). The Community Van trips takes 10 - 13 year old youths to participate in a variety of fun activities in the community such as go-karting and movie outings. These youth activities allow kids in Oakville to connect to a positive group of friends and mentors in a safe setting, and are funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation with the help of reliable private donors. In the event that a participant is unable to pay for programs that require payment, the YMCA will do everything in its power to help subsidize costs, in order to ensure that no one is turned away from their programs.

Building Youth Leaders

YMCA of Oakville offers a wide variety of Youth Leadership Programs, which provide youth with a safe place to develop teamwork, communication, and creativity skills. Participants will also gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the community of Oakville. The Youth Leadership Programs offered by YMCA of Oakville cover a wide range of topics, and can aid youth in developing a variety of new skills. Program age ranges vary on a program-by-program basis. Youth Leadership Programs offered by the YMCA of Oakville include Just the Guys, Together As Girls (TAG), Youth Leaders, Newcomer Youth Leaders, Life 101, Speaking for Peace, Halton Sport Leadership and the Youth Exchange Program.

The Just the Guys and Together as Girls programs are mentorship programs that explore topics of interests pertaining to males and females respectively, while also encouraging the development of new friendships. There is also the Newcomer Youth Leadership Development program, which is a 10-week course that aims to build confidence, leadership skills, and friendships for youths who are 14-18 years old. The Speaking for Peace program is designed for youths who are 12 – 15 years old, and is a four-week workshop that helps individuals speak and share with others while strengthening communication skills. More extensive programs include The Youth Exchange Program, which provides youth with the unique opportunity of participating in a cross-cultural exchange by travelling to other YMCA facilities across the country. As well as the Halton Sport Leadership program, which has participants give back to their community through meaningful employment, by obtaining certifications required to seek part-time jobs in recreation, coaching, community sport officiating and/or lifeguarding and swim instruction.

Finally, the YMCA of Oakville also supports the Young Leaders Initiative, which has been in active since January of 2015. The Young Leaders Initiative is comprised of YMCA Volunteers ages 17 – 30, who have been working together with the YMCA to advise and develop programming for youth in Oakville. This initiative was started as a way to ensure that the youth programming offered by YMCA of Oakville is by youth for youth. YMCA of Oakville is also willing to take a backseat on projects by acting as a delivery agent for the programs of other charities. They are willing and able to do this because of their large capacity and resources, which affords them the capability of delivering countless effective programs and services to the community.

YMCA of Oakville successfully runs eight separate Youth Leadership Programs for the youth in the surrounding area. Of these eight programs, YMCA of Oakville is able to offer five of these programs free of charge with other select programs having their fees included in the price of a YMCA membership. In addition to their leadership programs, YMCA of Oakville also offers three

separate Youth Activity programs on a weekly basis, and the Young Leaders Initiative, which works towards developing programming that is inspired by youth for youth.

Providing Employment Opportunities

The YMCA of Oakville also provides part-time employment to many youth in the City of Oakville, and offers Youth Leadership Programs that aim to provide youth with the skills and certification necessary to land part-time employment. For example, the Halton Sports Leadership Program provides its participants with the opportunity and training to pursue soccer officiating, aquatics instruction, or basketball instruction for future part-time community employment. Of the participants of the Halton Sports Leadership Program who were unemployed at the time of participation, 60% were able to find employment with the City of Oakville or through the YMCA of Oakville. YMCA of Oakville also runs a significant subsidy to ensure that no one is ever turned away from the organization.

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Town of Oakville Youth Centres

Organization: Town of Oakville Youth Centres

Head Office Address: 2302 Bridge Road - QEPCCC

Website: www.oakville.ca/culturerec/programs-youth.html

Overview:

The Town of Oakville Youth Centers are drop-in centers offered to all kids aged 13 to 19 that provides various programs and services for the youth that attend.

Mission of the organization:

The Town of Oakville Youth Centres strive to provide a fun and safe environment that youths feel comfortable coming to. The Youth Centre staff act as role models and trusting adults for the youths to talk to and as a result the centers hope to prevent the youths in Oakville from becoming at risk youths.

Structure of the organization:

Locations

Queen Elizabeth Park (QEPCCC): 2302 Bridge Rd, Oakville, ON L6L 3L5

Bronte Center: 2296 Lakeshore Rd W, Oakville, ON L6L 1H3

Nottingham Center: 1131 Nottingham Gate, Oakville, ON L6M 1K5

Staff Roles

Program supervisor - The program supervisor oversees the youth services at all centres.

Rec assistant - The rec assistant is similar to the program supervisor however they also help with the program and service delivery as well.

Centre managers - There is one manager for each youth center, they run the day-to-day operations.

Youth workers – Part time youth workers (youth workers are not social workers) help out at the individual centers.

Volunteers - The volunteers are typically high school students who help with the special events run by the youth centres.

Creating Safe Spaces for Youth to Connect

The youth centers provide free after school drop-in services and programs where kids aged 13 to 19 can come to learn, socialize and hangout. The programs are unstructured; while the youth centers have specific activities planned for the youths, majority of the time kids can come to the centres and do what they please while under adult supervision. These services include; homework help, guest speakers, cooking lessons, arts and crafts, resume writing and job search preparation. Youth are able to sign up for recording/DJ-ing lessons at the QEPCCC location as there is a recording booth at the center. There are pick-up basketball games that youths can sign up for at the QEPCCC location. Youths can participate in video game tournaments for the chance to win small prizes. There are also seasonal services such as summer fitness memberships where students get access to the fitness classes, squash and racquetball courts, drop-in swimming, skating, rock climbing and other programs at various Town of Oakville fitness centers.

References

Town of Oakville. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.oakville.ca/culturerec/programs-youth.html>

Appendix 2: Phase 1 Interview Questions

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Please note that this is a semi-structured interview. The questions below are meant to guide the interview and thus will not be followed as a script.

- Tell me a little about where you work.** What are your responsibilities at your organization? What kinds of programming or services do you offer? How many staff do you have? What is your funding structure like? How long have you worked there?
- Tell me a little bit about the youth that you work with? What is the range of their needs?**
- Are there challenges that you face in serving in/at risk youth in Halton region?** What are those challenges? Are there particular strategies that you or your agency employs to connect with or serve in/at risk youth more effectively? [i.e. funding challenges; gaps in services]
- When you think about the programming and services that you offer and the services that are available in the community for in/at risk youth, what are the gaps that you can identify in services? What duplication in services do you see?**
- Can you think of a case study (a concrete example) of a youth that you have worked with or are currently working with, that would exemplify the challenges of working with in/at risk youth?**
- Recommendations:** If you had the power (you had unlimited resources) to create any kind of program/service that you wanted to, based on the needs of the youth that you are working with, what kind of program would you create? [What do you think is missing? What kind of program or service would have the biggest impact?]
- Is there something stopping you from doing this kind of programming now? [Is there something that could change in an existing process or program to make it possible?] [*How could we improve the current system?*]
- Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close?** (Probe: Is there anything else I should have asked you but didn't? Is there anything you would like to add to what we have already talked about?)

CLOSING

These points will be addressed as part of the closing.

We would like to tell you again how much we appreciate your willingness to talk with us, to share with us through your experiences.

We would also like to invite you to check in with us if you have any questions for us or about the interview. We can talk after the interview, or you can contact us through the information provided on the Letter of Information and Consent.

If you think of anything else that you would like to add or if you have any concerns about something that we have discussed today, please let us know.

Thanks again for taking time and sharing your stories and experiences with us.

QUESTIONS FOR FRONT LINE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Please note that this is a semi-structured interview. The questions below are meant to guide the interview and thus will not be followed as a script.

- Tell me a little about where you work.** What are your responsibilities at your organization? What kinds of programming or services do you offer? How are you funded? How long have you worked there?
- Tell me a little bit about the youth that you work with? What is the range of their needs?**
- Are there challenges that you face in serving in/at risk youth in Halton region?** What are those challenges? Are there particular strategies that you or your agency employs to connect with or serve in/at risk youth more effectively? [i.e. funding challenges; gaps in services]
- When you think about the programming and services that you offer and the services that are available in the community for in/at risk youth, what are the gaps that you can identify in services? What duplication in services do you see?**
- Can you think of a case study (a concrete example) of a youth that you have worked with or are currently working with, that would exemplify the challenges of working with in/at risk youth?**
- Recommendations:** If you had the power (you had unlimited resources) to create any kind of program/service that you wanted to, based on the needs of the youth that you are working with, what kind of program would you create? [What do you think is missing? What kind of program or service would have the biggest impact?]
- Is there something stopping you from doing this kind of programming now? [Is there something that could change in an existing process or program to make it possible?] [*How could we improve the current system?*]
- Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close?** (Probe: Is there anything else I should have asked you but didn't? Is there anything you would like to add to what we have already talked about?)

CLOSING

These points will be addressed as part of the closing.

We would like to tell you again how much we appreciate your willingness to talk with us, to share with us through your experiences.

We would also like to invite you to check in with us if you have any questions for us or about the interview. We can talk after the interview, or you can contact us through the information provided on the Letter of Information and Consent.

If you think of anything else that you would like to add or if you have any concerns about something that we have discussed today, please let us know.

Thanks again for taking time and sharing your stories and experiences with us.

Appendix 3: Phase 1 Survey Questions

Halton In/At Risk Youth Research Project: Indigenous Youth

1. Tell us a bit about the work you do with Indigenous youth in the Halton region

A rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are two small downward-pointing arrow icons. Below the main input area, there is a horizontal scroll bar with a left-pointing arrow, a right-pointing arrow, and a central slider.

2. What is the age range of the youth you work with? (select all that apply)

4-11

12-16

17- 21

22- 24

25-30

3. What do you feel are the needs of the Indigenous youth that you work with?

A rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are two small downward-pointing arrow icons. Below the main input area, there is a horizontal scroll bar with a left-pointing arrow, a right-pointing arrow, and a central slider.

4. What are the main challenges you face in working with Indigenous youth in the Halton region?

A rectangular text input field with a light gray border. On the right side, there are two small downward-pointing arrow icons. Below the main input area, there is a horizontal scroll bar with a left-pointing arrow, a right-pointing arrow, and a central slider.

5. When you think about the programming and services that you offer and the services that are available in the community for youth, what are the gaps that you can identify in services for Indigenous youth?

6. Please use the box below to share any other thoughts you might have about services for Indigenous youth in the Halton region.

Halton In/At Risk Youth Research Project: A School Board

1. Which region of Halton do you work in?

- Oakville
- Milton
- Burlington
- Halton Hills (Georgetown and Acton)

2. What is your role in the School Board?

- I am a Social Worker
- I am a Child and Youth Worker

Other (please specify)

3. What are the ages of the youth you work with (Select all that apply)

- 4- 11 years
- 12-14

15-19

Other (please specify)

4. How would you describe the work that you do? (check all that apply)

Targeted prevention

Intervention

Other

Please elaborate on your choice above

5. Based on your work with youth within the School Board, what are the needs/gaps in programming/service that you have observed within the School Board and/or the Halton region Community (please check all that apply)

Food security

Transportation

Access to mental health resources

Access to educational resources to support learning challenges

Access to safe community spaces

Other (please specify)

6. If you had to choose one of the needs listed above as a primary need/gap for youth in the region, which one would you select, and why?



7. What are the main challenges you face in working with youth in the Halton region?



8. When you think about the programming and services that you offer and the services that are available in the community for in/at risk youth, what are the gaps that you can identify in services for youth?



9. Can you think of a case when the system really worked to support a youth in/at risk? What was at work? Was there a particular program or service involved?



10. What would you like to say to funders about the kinds of programs/services that you think should be funded to improve the lives of the children/youth that you are working with in the School Board? Why do you think this type of program or service would have a positive impact?



11. Please use the box below to share any other thoughts you might have about services for youth in the Halton region.

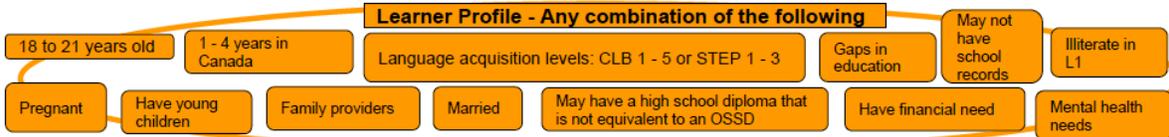
A rectangular text input field with a thin black border. On the right side, there is a vertical scrollbar with a small grey arrow pointing up and another pointing down. At the bottom, there is a horizontal scrollbar with a grey track and a small grey arrow pointing left and another pointing right.

Appendix 4: Proposal for Newcomer Youth

Research Project Proposal: Alternative Education Program for 18 - 21 Year Old Newcomers

Purpose: To create an educational program for young adult newcomer youth with low levels of language acquisition and/or gaps in education, or education that is not recognized in Ontario, that will equip them with the academic skills to work towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, or admission in apprenticeship programs, and college or university programs while acquiring English language skills.

Rationale: Newcomer youth between the ages of 18 - 21 with low levels of language acquisition and/or gaps in education, or education that is not recognized are unable to access adult education programs because the required language acquisition level is CLB 6 or STEP 4. As a result their ability to acquire academic skills is halted until they have acquired the desired level of language acquisition. While eligible to attend day schools, they are often placed in Grade 9 courses with students much younger than them, or essential level courses (if offered by the school) which restricts their ability to access college / university education later on. In the Language Instruction for Newcomers program (LINC) they are grouped with much older adults. This gap in services puts these learners on a path towards continuous low income and an inability to fulfil their true potential.



The proposed program will provide

Structure	Academic Skills Instruction	Social Supports	Funding for
Direct instruction Timetable TESL certified language instructors OCT certified math, science & computer instructors preferred Skilled trades certified trades instructors Attendance monitoring Progress reports Transcript upon program exit Recognition by adult high schools for PLAR/maturity credits	CLB 1 - 6 Math: elementary to Grade 10 Computer skills Trades / pre-apprenticeship Science: elementary to Grade 10 History Geography Study skills & Test taking Co-op	Childcare Food on site Food vouchers Transportation Social services in first language Settlement specialists Volunteers	Instructors Materials Transportation Food Instructional setting Childcare *Social Workers in L1*

Appendix 5: Phase 2 Focus Group Questions

Halton Region Youth Research Project

Phase 2: Questions for Youth Focus Groups

1. If we were youth who were new in your neighbourhood, where would you tell us to go?
 - a. To have fun?
 - b. If we needed help?
2. Are there things that you wished your neighbourhood had?
 - a. For recreation?
 - b. Other resources?
3. If you were in charge, what kind of changes would you make in your neighbourhood? In Halton region?
 - a. What would you add?
 - b. What would you take away?

Arts- based

4. Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
 - a. How are you going to get there? (What resources do you have? Internal and external)
 - b. Are there there any barriers or challenges? (what are they? How will you overcome them?)

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