

Community Building Youth Futures

Research conducted by youth for youth



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Abstract

Communities Building Youth Futures Yukon is a project between 12 youth serving organizations that prioritizes collaborative efforts between youth-serving organizations and youth. The primary purpose of CBYF is to reduce barriers youth face when transitioning from high school into any career of their choice. CBYF is not a new organization but rather a collaborative project. The project uses a collective impact approach, which is an approach that at its core that seeks to connect and leverage existing support structures and programs to serve youth better. The project is a for-youth-by-youth project. CBYF Yukon hired six youth interns in November 2020 (first year of our project) to conduct peer-to-peer research, as well as to develop and implement projects. Our research goal was to capture the perspective of what is done well in the Yukon in terms of support for youth, and what barriers youth face to a successful transition from high school into the careers they choose. We used a mixed-method approach because we wanted to gain a broad reach (through online surveys), and we also wanted to gain in-depth responses through in-person interviews. The interns broke into three groups, and each group took a different approach to youth engagement. In total, we reached 80 youth (with minimal incentive). Youth deserve to feel safe and respected, and right now, they feel as though there is a lack of support for safety. This issue was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic because the youth that had previously been in youth shelters now had less access to these spaces. We hope to see more transitional homes, more opportunities for youth to access affordable housing and guidance for financial hardships. Education has been identified as an essential issue for youth and this project. We heard many mixed experiences from youth. We have found that the school system is failing youth because of lack of mental health support, career exposure, and life skill development issues with other students/staff and issues of discrimination. Without proper support, students will continue to become disengaged with school, extracurriculars, and their school community.

Mental Health and Wellness was also consistently communicated as an important issue in the Yukon. Declining mental health rates are impacting the lives of youth in the Yukon even more during COVID-19. Youth have asked for consistent and affordable mental health services for our communities. Youth want to be a part of the processes to fix these issues and create a better territory for all Yukon youth and citizens.

Recommendation 1: Youth want to be involved through either employment opportunities or meaningful consultation when it comes to any decisions that affect youth.

Recommendation 2: Youth want frontline program that will help them access affordable housing and guidance for financial hardships.

Recommendation 3: Youth want an established paid co-op program in the high school system where they would gain work experience and career exposure.

Recommendation 4: Youth want consistent and affordable counselling and mental health support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What is Communities Building Youth Futures

Community Building Youth Futures (CBYF) Yukon is currently a project partner with twelve youth-serving organizations and youth. The main purpose of the program is to reduce the barriers youth face when transitioning from high school into any career they choose. We are one of thirteen programs across Canada funded for five years by the Tamarack Institute (a non-profit community consulting group based in Ontario, Canada) and the Economic and Social Development program (Government of Canada). We have just entered the second year of a five-year project.

There are many youth organizations within the territory; CBYF is not a new organization but rather a collaborative project. CBYF intends to connect groups and leverage existing support structures and programs to better support youth. There are five founding organizations that make up an executive partnership including: BYTE – Empowering Youth, Yukon Child and Youth Advocate, the Boys and Girls Club, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and the Youth of Today Society. Another seven organizations have joined the partnership table including: Multi-Cultural Centre of Yukon, Transitional Support Services (Yukon Government), First Nation Health Programs, Recreation Parks Association of Yukon, Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Youth Achievement Centre (Yukon Government) (See Figure 1).

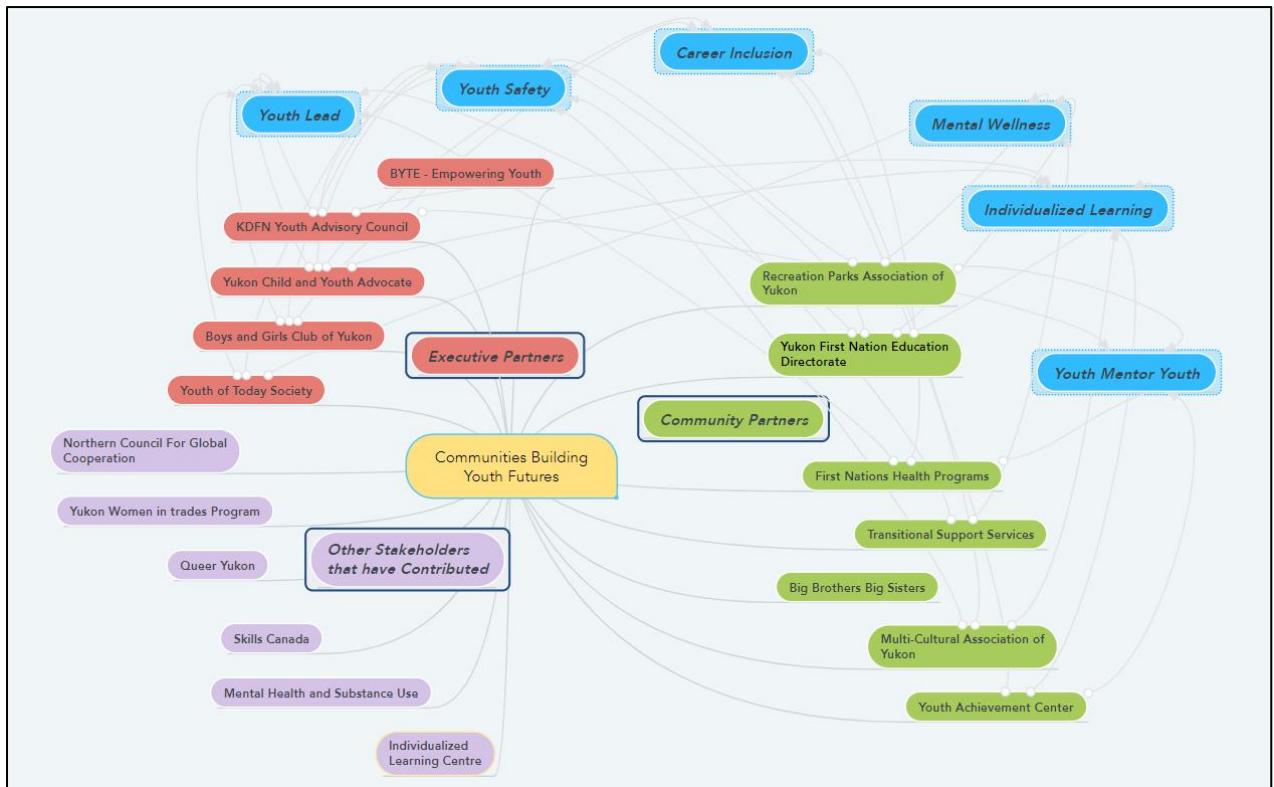


Figure 1: This figure illustrates the Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) partnership table structure (as of March 2021). Five organizations (in red) make up the executive partnership table, while another seven other organizations (in green) are part of the bigger community partnership table. Finally, there have been another six other organizations (in purple) that have made significant contribution to CBYF.

CBYF is based around youth (ages 14-30) and the input given by the youth. Our project hired six youth interns on a six-month contract to contribute ideas in partnership meetings, work on projects, and research what other young people are currently experiencing within our community. CBYF is designed to create and develop new models intended for Yukon youth. CBYF seeks to help young people become aware of different resources in their areas, including organizations, employment opportunities, programs, and safe spaces.

In November of 2020, CBYF hosted a two-day conference where thirty-four youth-serving organizations and youth had an opportunity to voice their input on what CBYF's should focus on. Through these meetings and subsequent refinement by the youth interns we were able to create a vision statement and list of six priority areas that we identified as important for the success of youth (Fig. 1).

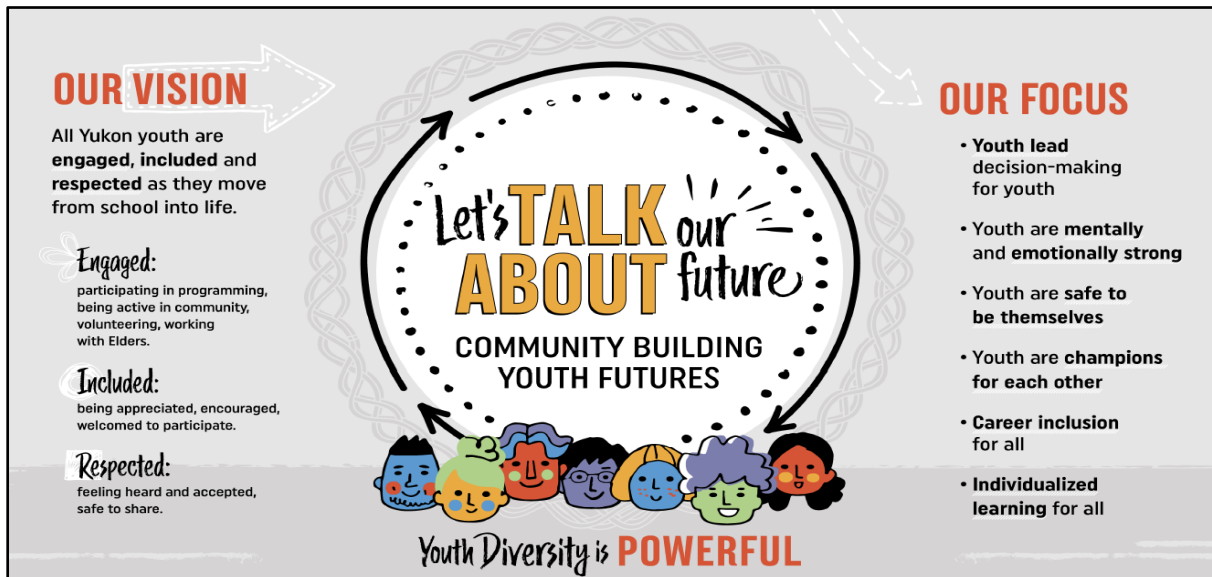


Figure 2 : CBYF plan on a page created by CBYF youth interns in December 2020. Vision Statement: “All Yukon youth are engaged, included, and respected as they move from school into life.” The list of priority areas included: Youth lead decision-making, Youth are mentally and emotionally strong, Youth are safe to be themselves, Youth are champions for each other, Career inclusion and Individualized learning for all. These priorities are our focus in hopes of creating change in ways that benefit all youth and help them overcome barriers that stop them from participating in School or activities.

1.2 Youth Internships

Six Youth Interns joined the project in November 2020. We began with in-person training on November 14th and 15th where we discussed the project and what our vision was for the start of the internship. We started by discussing the education system and some of the flaws we see in our schools. We then spoke about all the everyday life components of our lives that affect our success such as mental health, healthy relationships, housing, and access to food. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs there are four levels that need to be fulfilled before someone has self-actualization (Gawel, 1996). A person needs to have their physiological, safety, belongingness/love and esteem needs met before they can access their full potential. Making sure these needs are met is essential to see the full potential of Yukon youth. After our intern training, we met with our partnership table in a two-day meeting to discuss our goals and receive input from all the organizations to assess what our priorities would be vital to the project. The followup to these meetings was the creation of our plan (Fig. 2). Working

with Patti Balsillie (our facilitator from the November meeting) we created our list of priorities and the vision for our future endeavours. The plan on a page propelled our CBYF project forward and the interns began surveying and connecting with youth and youth networks to hear input from the community. The following were the goal and objectives for the youth intern research projects.

1.3 Goal and Objectives

The goal of the CBYF youth intern research was to capture the perspective of what is done well in Yukon in terms of support for youth, and what barriers youth face to a successful transition from high school into the careers they choose. The following objectives are defined:

Obj. 1: Develop a mixed method approach to engage with Yukon youth through both online Google form surveys and in-person interviews.

Obj. 2: Use social media, existing networks, and peers to capture as many responses as possible in a three-month timeframe.

Obj. 3: Synthesize findings from three youth-led research groups into one concise message with concrete recommendations to inform leaders and policy makers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Topics Reviewed

There are many factors that influence the success of youth as they transition from high school into their careers. Because it is difficult to disentangle the many factors that contribute to a broad topic like youth success, it is important to take a systems perspective. A systems perspective considers how cumulative factors interact, combine, and form feedbacks that contribute to the overall success of youth; this perspective is different than looking at these successes in a linear cause and effect way (Anderson and Johnson, 1997). Figure 3 illustrates how different factors influencing youth could be linked in a larger interacting system. We have attempted to review some of the major barriers to youth success in Yukon from this system perspective. This literature review is not exhaustive of everything youth related; and for the purpose of this report, we will focus on (1) youth safety, (2) mental health barriers, and the (3) benefits of youth leadership in policy and programming.

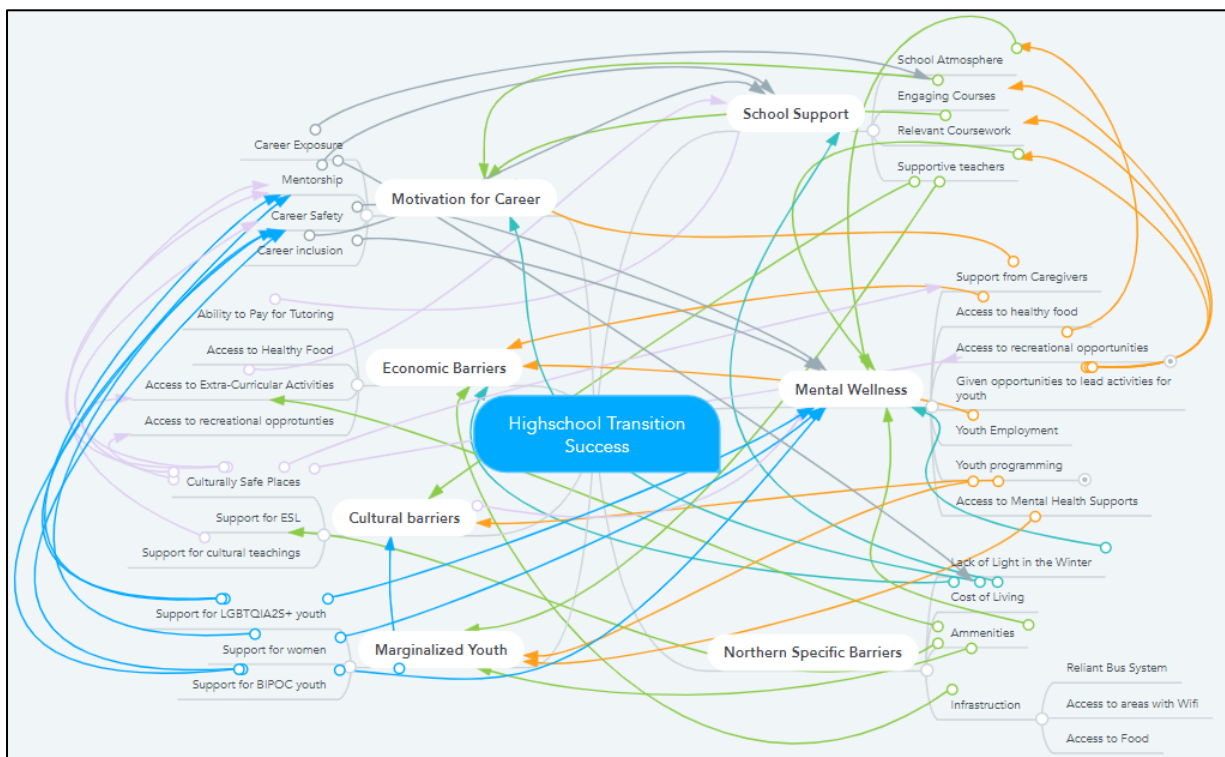


Figure 3: The figure illustrates variables that affect the success of a high school student as they transition into their careers. The variables are not exhaustive of all the factors that influence a student's ability to successfully transition through high-school and engage in a career of their choice. The intent of this figure is to illustrate the connectivity of these variables to each other, and that success of a youth in high school is not a linear path.

2.2 Youth Safety

Safety has a profound effect on intellectual and emotional development (Barrett, 2010), and yet, it is incredibly difficult to establish a one stop shop where all youth are safe. A safe place for one youth may not be a safe place for another youth (Barrett, 2010). Youth safety is a large topic and there is no way we will be able to do a comprehensive review on youth safety in this report; instead, we will touch upon youth safety as it relates to Yukon youth, and how community safety involves police reform.

2.2.1 Yukon Youth Safety

In 2014, Freeman et al., (2015) wrote the health and health-related behaviours report (HBSC) which included survey responses from Yukon youth in grades 6 – 10, asking them a variety of questions relating to health behaviours, community safety, and their school atmosphere. Some concerning trends emerged from this report indicating rural girls in grade 9-10 had high rates of unhealthy behaviours including: high rates of smoking (19.4% daily smoking), drug use (21.9% hallucinogenic use), and did not consider their community safe (35.7%) (Freeman et al., 2015). Girls in grade 9-10 who lived in Whitehorse also showed similar trends. Furthermore, all demographics surveyed showed poor eating habits, poor physical activity, and high levels of screen activity (Freeman et al., 2015).

Freeman et al., (2015) found that school climate had a large effect on the mental health outcomes for youth, indicating that if we focused efforts on improving school

outcomes, we could have a profound effect on health and safety outcomes in youth (Freeman et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Community Safety

The participation in social and recreational activities for youth is related to their perceived safety in their community (De Wet et al., 2018). For youth to join sports clubs or extracurricular activities which have shown to increase positive mental health outcomes, they need to first feel safe in those spaces. Prioritizing the creation of safe spaces, where youth feel respected as well as physical and emotionally safe to be themselves, is a good first step in transforming community perspective (Nichols and Braimoh, et al., 2018). The task of making a community safe is not exclusive to the work police and RCMP do, but they are a major influence (Nichols and Braimoh et al., 2018). However, marginalized youth often feel less trusting of police or RCMP, and therefore do not feel safe to be themselves, citing major needs for reform (Nichols and Briamoh et al., 2018). One way to reform policing can be done with help from community-based enforcement.

2.2.3 Police Reform

Community-based policing is a way to increase safety in rural and marginalized communities. Hiring local community members that establish trusting relationships between citizens and external partners (like the RCMP) are effective at transforming community safety (Groenewald and Peake, 2004). One local example is the community safety officers in the McIntyre subdivision, Yukon (KDFN, 2021). The McIntyre safety officers are local community members who do not carry weapons when they patrol their community; instead, they focus on establishing strong relationships with citizens through recreational activities, check-ins, and advocacy (KDFN, 2021). These local officers play a dual role in community safety. Firstly, they help de-escalate violent behaviours in community members before police

arrive, meaning police are less likely to have to use force, and when police do arrive these safety officers also help to de-escalate police, so all parties are calmer (Groenewald and Peake, 2004; KDFN, 2021).

2.3 Mental Health Introduction

Northern youth experience a disproportionate rate of depression, anxiety, and suicide (MacDonald et al., 2013). The highest suicide rates in Canada are recorded in Nunavut where they are fifteen times higher than in southern communities (MacDonald et al., 2013). There are many factors that influence a person's mental health and disentangling the cumulative impacts is difficult. Below is a brief description of a few of the major contributing influences we will review including geographical reasons, historical reasons, technological reasons, and other health reasons.

2.3.1 Geographical Reasons

The environment in the Canadian north is primarily dry boreal forest or tundra with long dark winters and bright summers (McGrath-Hanna et al., 2003). High proportions of Northern citizens experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which is a physiological response associated with vitamin D deficiency in winter months. Research has also shown that the extreme weather conditions in the winter coupled with high degrees of isolation in communities has significant negative effect on mental health in youth and adults (McGrath-Hanna et al., 2003).

Recent climate and environmental changes have had huge effects on the mental health of Northerners (McGrath-Hanna et al., 2003). The climate is warming between three and five times greater in the North than it is in southern latitudes. The disproportionate warming in the North has caused dramatic changes in local geography and ecology (Guyot et al., 2006). Indigenous community members in Yukon and the Northwest Territories (NWT) have been

forced to change the way they harvest traditional foods as result of changes in regional ecology. For example, changes in migratory patterns of birds have changed the way Indigenous groups are able to harvest these birds (Guyot et al., 2006). Permafrost slumping (or melt) is wreaking havoc on roadways and community infrastructure in Yukon, NWT, and Nunavut (Stevens et al., 2015). For all these reasons and more, environmental change is negatively affecting mental health of northern community members who are first-hand having to deal with repercussions of a changing climate (McGrath-Hanna et al., 2003).

2.3.2 Historical Reasons

Indigenous people were stripped of their culture through a multitude of colonial practices, but most recently through the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop (Miller, 2012). All of this is incredibly recent in Canadian history (less than thirty years ago) with the last residential school only closing in Punnichy, Saskatchewan in 1996 (Miller, 2012). This has had a profound effect on mental health of Indigenous people and youth in Canada. People who survived residential school have significantly higher rates of depression and suicide directly correlated to these systemic practices (Elias et al., 2012).

Trauma is passed on from generations of people exposed to the residential school atrocities and the new generations in a process called intergenerational trauma (Smith, 2017). Northern territories have the highest percentages of Indigenous peoples, Yukon: 25%, NWT: 51%, and Nunavut: 84%, and therefore the territories have a high proportion of their population dealing with the effects from intergenerational trauma. Furthermore, many have argued that the disproportionate number of Indigenous children and youth in governmental care through foster care and group home placements is a continuation of the forced assimilation of residential schools (Blackstock, 2007; Richardson and Nelson, 2007).

2.3.3 Technological Reasons

Social media is often one of the most cited causes of mental distress and depression among youth. However, there is a large division in the literature on whether or not depression is caused by social media use. Abo-Jaoude et al. (2020) found that an increase in mental distress among Canadian youth correlated with the increase in smart phone and social media use. Research has found that social media can be addictive, and that social media use can influence people's mental health through a process known as the *comparison trap* (Webber, 2017). The *comparison trap* is when self-esteem and confidence of youth is negatively affected when youth continually compare their lives to the apparent successes of their friends based on social media posts (Webber, 2017).

More recently the Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted young people's schedules by exposing the lack of control society collectively has (Pfefferbaum and North, 2020). This epidemic has led to an increased emotional distress response in all Canadian citizens, having alarming implications for collective mental health and social functioning (Pfefferbaum and North, 2020).

2.3.4 Other Health Reasons

The HSBC report illuminated some concerning trends relating to sedentary behaviour and unhealthy eating patterns of youth in Yukon (Freeman et al., 2015). The researchers found a strong relationship between sedentary behaviours/unhealthy eating habits with poor mental health outcomes in Yukon youth (Freeman et al., 2015). This relationship should not be surprising since numerous studies have linked poor mental health with both sedentary behaviour and poor eating habits (Biddle and Asare, 2011; O'Neil et al., 2014). Lack of access to recreational activities, particularly in winter months, causes a significant decrease in physical activity in Yukon youth (Active Yukon, 2012). Indoor rock-climbing centres,

skihills, and competitive winter sports are important to fund and promote to increase access for recreational activity for youth in winter months. Physical inactivity in youth is extremely detrimental to both local and federal economies (Active Yukon, 2012). As such, investment in infrastructure that supports recreational gaps is supportive of a strong local economy.

2.4 Youth Leadership

2.4.1 Ladder of Participation

A seminal work and framework for youth participation is Hart's Ladder of Participation, which was originally published by Hart and UNICEF in 1992. The ladder of participation is a simple model that shows that at lower levels of participation youth are only involved superficially, meaning adults are tokenising and manipulating them. These lower levels are when there is not enough shared involvement in youth activities. We need to move up the ladder, where decisions that affect children and youth are not just informed by youth, but are initiated, designed, and evaluated by youth (Checkoway and Gutiérrez, 2006). Youth led research and evaluation is a creative way that has produced exceptional results by improving outcomes in communities and youth (London et al., 2003).

2.4.2 Building Youth Capacity

In our own research Yukon youth have said that they feel the school system has not adequately prepared them with lasting career skills like financial literacy and career exposure; leaving youth unsure on what their career path should be. Our research has also shown that the education system is also not giving youth enough opportunity to lead decision-making and take control of their own creative outputs while in school. In this way the school system is not engaging youth high up enough on the ladder of participation (Hart, 1992).

One outcome that would expose youth to new careers and develop their working career skills is co-operative education. Co-operative education is where educators work with organizations, governments, and businesses to provide short-term placements for students to learn career skills and build their capacity (Stern et al., 1997). Yukons Education system currently offers work placement/experience credits to high school students grades 10-12. They must perform 90 hours of work to receive full credit but the employer may not pay them for their work. Work experience/placements are non-paid positions students can access in different sectors of the workforce. Students can work with frontline workers (RCMP, EMS, and Fire Departments), government agencies, community organizations, or Trades organizations. Although this is a start to creating a cooperative education (Co-op) program it is missing some important details. Three things need to be met to make these placements successful: (1) students need to receive school credit (2) and students need to be paid fairly for these positions, and (3) students need to be aware of the opportunities (Stern et al., 1997). Part-time jobs outside the framework of school do not cause the same benefits in youth that exposure to these careers does when it a part of the high school curriculum (Stern et al., 1997).

Students that participate in co-op develop clear goals on how to advance their own career development while beginning to learn how to deal with their own finances (Hutchins and Akos, 2013). These programs expose youth to new social, political, and moral themes associated with working (Norton and Norena, 1998). Studies have shown that when students participate in co-operative education, they have significantly more career awareness, contributing to success in further education and work (Norton and Norena, 1998; Hutchins and Akos, 2013).

One of the issues that comes against co-op programs working effectively is schools not having enough resources to effectively establish partnerships with employers (Norton and

Norena, 1998). One way to circumvent this issue in Yukon is to learn from the STEP program. The Yukon STEP program gives post-secondary students a way to gain relevant job experience in their career field by subsidizing the wages of employees (Yukon Government, 2021). This subsidy means employers do not have to assume all the risk associated with hiring entry-level workers, which is a win-win scenario for youth and the employers. If the STEP program were implemented a bit earlier so that it included high-school co-op placements, we believe we would see a massive improvement in career exposure and skillset for youth as they transition out of high-school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Mixed Method Approach

We took a mixed method approach to youth engagement that included both Google form surveys and in-person interviews. This mixed method approach was used for several reasons. Firstly, we wanted to gain a wide reach (using online surveys), and we also wanted to gain thoughtful and in-depth responses through in-person interview. We broke up into three groups: Group 1: Vanessa and Kamryn, Group 2: Samreen and Yebin, and Group 3: Zarah. Each group took a slightly different approach to youth engagement. We feel having three approaches combined into one set of results was robust as the strength of one approach seemed to complement weaknesses in others. In total we reached 80 youth (with minimal incentive), and we feel this success is the result of outreach and engagement coming from youth, rather than adults or larger youth-serving organizations.

3.2 Group 1: Vanessa and Kamryn

Vanessa and Kamryn's goal was to reach youth aged 16-20, which is the age of high school transition. Their survey consisted of seven questions in long answer format. We chose to do long form answers so that youth had the opportunity to contribute in-depth and broad experiences with respect to support and their high school experience. Their interviews were conducted in a more informal way, where they asked a lot of the same questions as in their surveys, only they were flexible on how youth responded, allowing them to direct the conversation. Here are a few examples of the questions asked in their surveys (for the full list see Appendix A).

Example Questions

- *What do you think is the biggest priority we need to focus on in the Yukon and why?*

- *What is the best way to communicate with youth?*
- *What actions can we take to create a better Yukon for future generations?*

The survey was shared through immediate circles and connected networks using Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. They found most success on Snapchat and Facebook (50%/50% on each). They reached out to friends and family, the Tr'ondek Hwech'in youth centre in Dawson City, Yukon. In total they gained responses from 20 youth through Google forms, and another 10 youth through in-person interviews.

3.3 Group 2: Samreen and Yebin

Their goal was to reach a broad range of youth aged 16-20 through online surveys and in-person interviews. They created two distinct online surveys. One of the surveys was designed to reach a general audience of Yukon youth, while the other was targeted for immigrant youth in the territory. Their survey for immigrant youth was circulated around the Multicultural Centre of Yukon.

In each survey format the survey questions were mostly multiple choice (with a few long answer questions). This choice was done so the survey would be quick and accessible to youth, to reach more participants. We used social media apps Instagram and Snapchat to connect with youth. Here are a few example questions from our survey (for the full list see Appendix B).

Example Questions Basic CBYF Survey

- *Do you participate in extracurricular activities outside of school?*
- *Do you feel your housing situation positively supports your learning?*
- *What do you think is missing in Yukon regarding helping youth?*

Example Questions Multicultural Survey

- *Why do you come to the multicultural centre?*
- *Are there any barriers or challenges that you are facing because of being an immigrant youth or the child of an immigrant caregiver?*

The second method they used to conduct research was through in-person interviews. Interns were asked to speak with willing youth to discuss the main objectives and priorities of the CBYF project (see introduction). In-person interviews were done mainly at schools, workplaces, and coffee shops. The interviews were conducted in a flexible and informal way to gain broad perspectives from participants. For example, one interviewee expressed how hard it was to adjust to life in Yukon because of the low diversity here; this in turn led them to create the Multicultural Survey. In total they had 30 youth fill out surveys and 10 interviews with youth. In total most of our engagement was done through Snapchat (~50%), followed by in-person (~30%), and finally Instagram (~20%).

3.4 Group 3: Zarah

Zarah's approach to youth engagement was to create a more structured set of eleven questions to conduct in-depth interviews with youth. Their target audience was largely youth above 20 years of age. Their questions were long answer questions that focused on existing and mental health, missing supports in Yukon, and their transition through high school. Zarah used Tim Horton gift cards (\$10 each) to incentivize engagement which allowed them to meet with 6 youth one on one. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. Here are some example questions asked (See Appendix C for the full set of questions).

Example Questions

- *After you have graduated do you think there is enough things for youth 19+ to do?*
- *Do you think school workers are helping youth with all their needs? If not, what can they do better at?*

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

4.1 Emerging Themes

All three research groups gained results on a range of topics from youth aged 16-25. Approximately 60% of all participants identified as female, 40% identified as males, and we had no one respond as non-binary. Most of our participants have part-time employment working between 10-20 hours a week. The three groups of youth interns were able to connect with youth from many different walks of life. For this report, we have separated our results into seven larger themes, including:

- *How to Communicate with Youth*
- *Education*
- *Mental Health and Wellness*
- *Youth Leadership*
- *Youth Safety,*
- *19+ Youth*
- *Support Request from Yukon Government*

4.2 How to Communicate with Youth

Through this research most of our outreach was done through social media messaging, particularly Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook. Vanessa and Kamryn communicated to their peers through social media, mainly Snapchat (Kamryn) and Facebook (Vanessa). Social media gave them the chance to reach out to peers they were not able to contact or connect with in person. Samreen and Yebin reached some peers through social media but they gained a lot of connections through connecting with people face to face at school and the Multicultural Centre.

They used spaces they were comfortable in to do outreach and gain insight from peers that also share these spaces. Zarah connected with peers within her social circle and offered an incentive. They used the things they had in common to build trust making the participants more comfortable to open up and share valuable experiences or information. Participants expressed the ways they like to be communicated with through social media, workshops, and gatherings. Youth seem to be more engaged when they are working on things that interest them and feel they are gaining equal rewards. Youth are less likely to communicate and participate at a higher level if they do not feel respected or valued; tokenism makes spaces less inviting.

4.2 Education

Samreen and Yebin found that a large proportion of youth (74.1%) said they felt their housing situation positively supports their learning. However, that means a quarter of the participants do not have supportive housing situations. In addition, 48.1% of students said they did not feel supported at school.

Zarah found that most of the participants had negative experiences at school, in which school staff would talk down to them. Zarah's participants wished that they were taught real world skills, trades, and leadership training alongside traditional curriculum. When privately asked one of the youth said their school experience could have been improved by better support and the need to stop giving students a "Free Pass" because it does not benefit them in any way.

In one in-person interview, a youth shared stories of discrimination of specific students to attend distance learning (DL) courses through Aurora Virtual School (AVS). The AVS classes are offered through the schools in the communities to offer a variety of courses to students. The student Vanessa spoke to was denied access to DL courses based on the cost requirement for AVS courses. The youth felt forced to reach out to their self-governing First Nation to request support and advocacy in order to be given access to the DL course.

Kamryn and Vanessa also heard issues on the lack of resources for students transitioning out of high school and into post-secondary. The school in Dawson City, which serves approximately 230 students, only has a single person on their staff designated to assist students in planning for after graduation. Students are often left to themselves and their family supports to assist and guide them in the application process for programs and jobs. However, not everyone has a supportive family (as we have seen in our data) and therefore are left without any support transitioning. After high school, students can seek guidance from Yukon University staff on which programs are best suited for them and the funding they can apply to receive. Although Yukon University has declared university status, they are still in the process of growing and expanding into an institution with diverse career options. Institutions outside of the Yukon still seem to offer a more efficient way, giving students the same level of education in shorter amounts of time. Kamryn and Vanessa's received lots of input to improve the school system including students asking for more one-one support within schools, a meaningful integration of Yukon First Nations culture and history in the curriculum, adjusted school hours to allow students to enjoy more daylight hours (i.e earlier or later start that would allow youth to enjoy sunshine),and engaging immersive education.

“[We want] in-depth education about Yukon First Nations” - Youth Voice

“To be honest, I want to see more First Nation teachers at school. It would be more beneficial and worthwhile to have an Indigenous person teach about First Nation history and culture.” – Youth Voice

“Teachers are not even teaching anymore. They hand out [Powerpoints] and links to videos which means we have to teach ourselves. This type of learning may work for some but not for all. Teachers need to support students' individual needs.” -Youth Voice

4. 3 Mental Health and Wellness

All research groups identified that youth have identified mental health and wellness as a top priority for youth in Yukon. There seems to be heightened mental health issues in the

Yukon, including increased anxiety, depression, and drug/alcohol addiction. Samreen and Yebin found that the average mental health score for 29 youth they surveyed was quite poor at 5.2 out of 10 (Fig. 4).

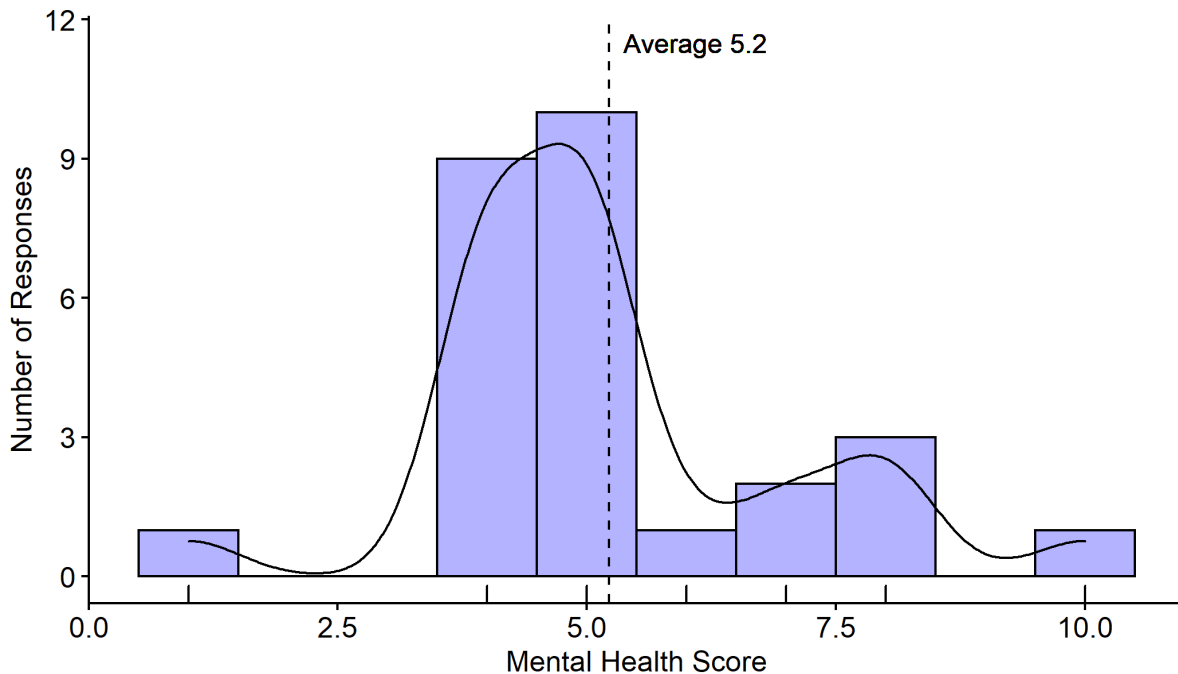


Figure 4: Histogram rating mental health of 29 youth survey responses. Youth were asked to rate their mental health from 1-10, with 10 indicating strong mental health and 1 indicating poor mental health. A density line is laid over top of the histogram. The average Mental health rating was 5.2.

Youth have said that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused these mental health issues to become even worse. Youth would like to see more mental health supports put in place, including weekly check-ins at school, counselling, and psychiatrists. It would be great to have more mental health workshops (e.g. Safetalk by Living Works and Headstrong by Canadian Mental health Association) and free programs (sports and recreational opportunities, beading, and camps).

“...With covid, mental health is greatly at risk. There are tons of youth seriously struggling with more depression and anxiety than before and we need resources to help

them. There is an immensely long wait time to even see a therapist. Our youth are really struggling right now.” -Youth participant

The youth Zarah connected with expressed needs for culturally relevant workshops, as well as continued support and learning opportunities within the community after youth have graduated high school. One youth Zarah worked with expressed a need for both preventative and emergency counselling. Youth would like Yukon Governments counselling services to do a better job at communicating to youth through appropriate outreach. Youth have said navigating the Yukon Government bureaucracy is incredibly difficult.

Based on 29 survey responses, we found that when youth were asked who they could rely on when they needed emotional support most responded with their caregivers followed by unspecified (Fig.5). It is concerning to see that a large portion (18%) said that they had no one to reach out for support instead of saying at the very least school.

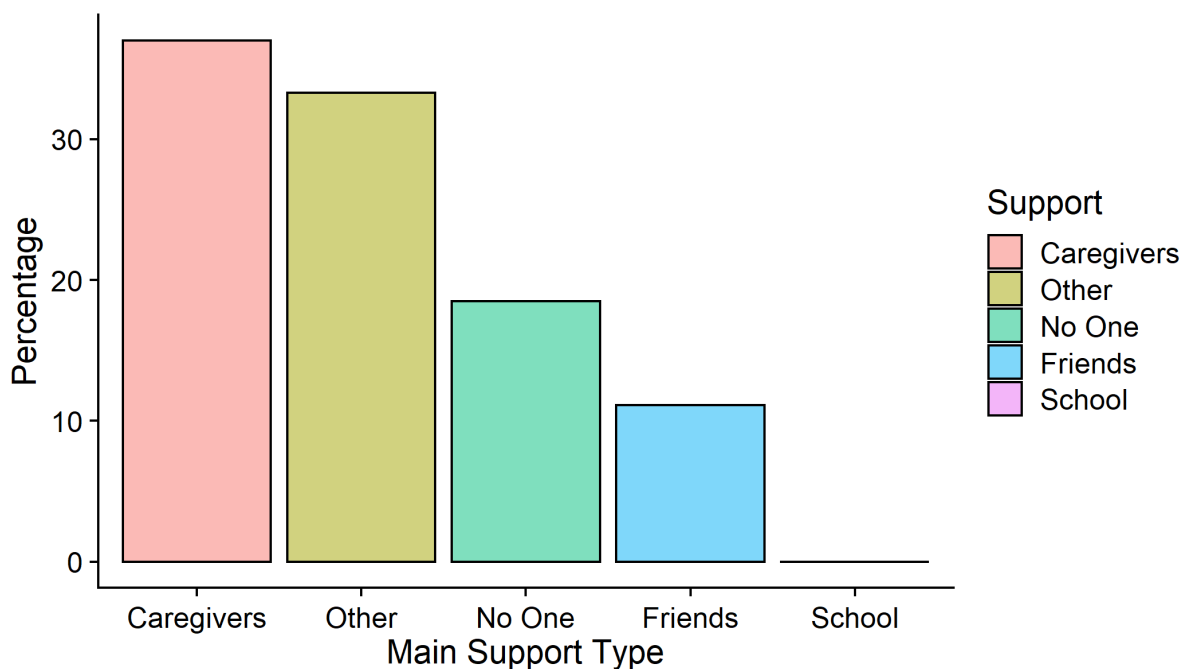


Figure 5: Histogram of support youth are accessing when they need it. Answers are based on survey responses from 29 youth who were asked the question “Do you know someone that could help you when needed?”

4.4 Youth Leadership

Youth expressed a desire to be a part of the larger discussions that impact them. One of the priorities of the CBYF project is to make sure youth can lead, whether that be workshops, discussion groups, youth serving projects, or in government initiatives. In every research group participants overwhelmingly expressed that they do not feel like they are involved in important conversations within their communities. Youth aged 16-18 asked to be involved in event planning, given opportunity to lead small events, create activities, and to be given leadership roles in youth groups.

“Bring a large group of youth, have them interact with each other and try to engage in conversations with people they’ve never met.”

-Yukon Youth

4.5 Safety/Diversity

Youth from our research have identified youth safety and diversity as major priorities for youth in the Yukon. Youth that we all interviewed said they do not receive mutual respect because they are younger or because they are a minority within their community. Youth we spoke with noted that they still experience discrimination because of their racial profile, sexual orientation, gender, and their disability. Yukon youth want to see a more inclusive environment and support within the Yukon. Based on our research we recommend territorial wide adult education on ageism in schools, the private sector, and in government, so future generations do not fall into the same mindset as we grow into adults. Youth have asked for the creation of more safe spaces that allow youth to express themselves.

“There are a lot of environmental opportunities for young people, but very little opportunities for youth to be involved in advancing racial and gender equity in the Yukon”

-Youth Voice

4.6 Youth 19+

Zarah spoke to youth that were above the age of 19 and who expressed a need for drug/alcohol free spaces to spend time and socialize with peers. Zarah heard requests for free programs/training for people their age to engage them in both cultural and programs that develop career skills, including sewing/beading groups, trades/work placement training, and cooking groups. These youth expressed they feel they missed out on opportunities for their age groups because there was a lack of advertising and poor communication. These youth also expressed that they have been affected by the Yukon housing crisis. They are having a hard time finding affordable housing. These youth have expressed the need for students leaving high school to have support in finding housing and employment.

“I think there should be more things for 19+ youth to do besides going to the bars, things like places for the youth to go and hang out without any worries.”

-Youth Voice

4.7 Yukon/Government

Kamryn and Vanessa asked youth how the government should best be spending its money when it comes to youth support. The main request from the government was for frontline programming, followed by inclusive decision making, mental health support, education reform, career exposure, cultural programming, and finally communication (See Fig. 6)

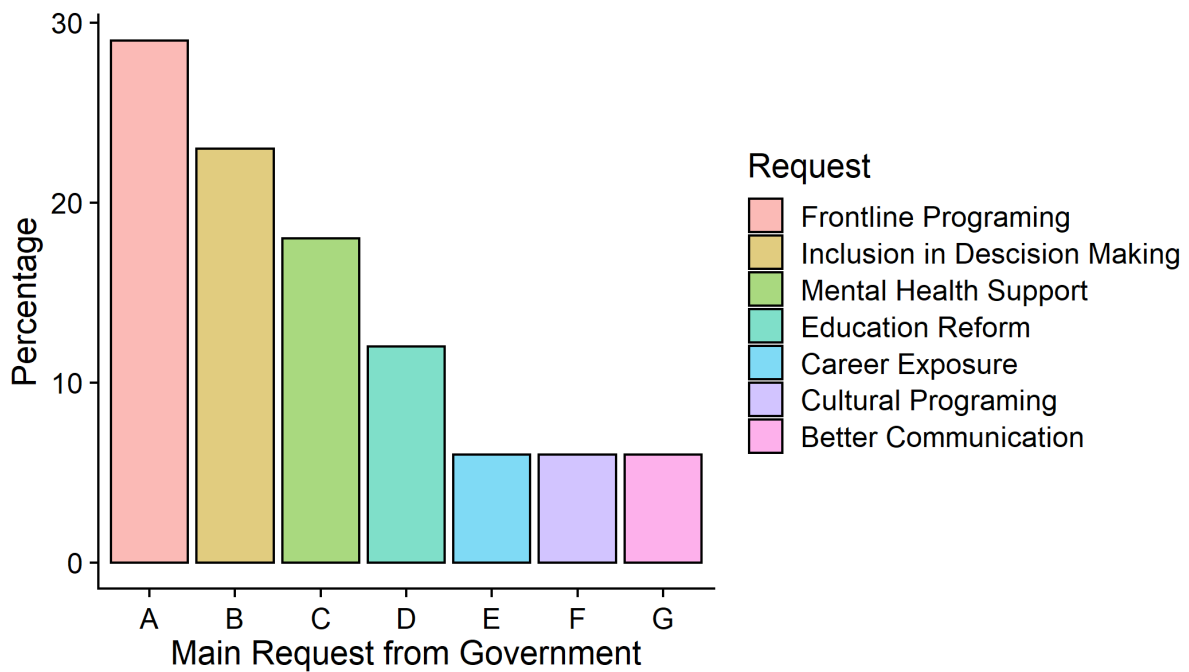


Figure 6: Histogram displaying how 19 youth responded to the question “How can the government improve to support young adults/Youth?”. The answer was originally in long - answer format, however, seven main requests emerged A-G: A is Frontline Programming, B is inclusion in decision making, C is mental health support, D is mental health support, E is career exposure, F is cultural programming, and G is better communication.

“They can listen to what the youth have to say and what is important for them to succeed... also more job opportunities for young adults.” – Youth Voice

*“Financial support regarding therapists and counsellors for youth at risk”
-Youth Voice*

Kamryn and Vanessa asked what priorities the youth have for the Yukon. They received many different responses, several about youth decision making, mental health, respect, and connections/relationship youth form. We grouped them in eight different types of responses. The biggest priority is that Youth lead the Decision Making, followed by Youth having Strong Mental Health, Youth are Respected, Mentorship/Connection, Develop Life Skills, Quality Education, Frontline Programming, and Climate Change (Figure 7).

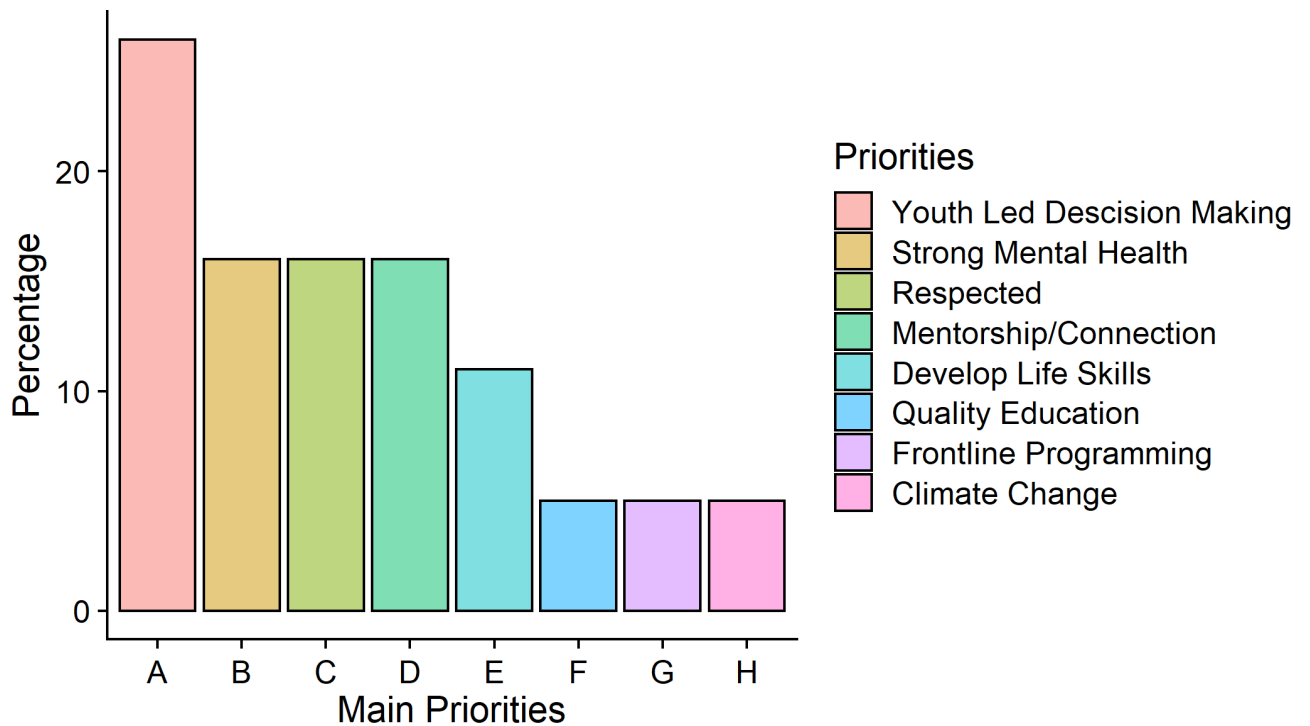


Figure 7: Histogram displaying how 19 youth responded to the question “What do you think is the biggest priority we need to focus on in the Yukon and why?” The answer was originally in long-answer format, however, eight main priorities emerged A-G: A is youth the decision making, B is strong mental health, C is to be respected, C is mentorship and connection, E is opportunity for life skills, F is quality education, G is frontline programming, and H is a strong climate change response.

“I believe that it is very important for youth to be engaged, included, and respected, especially today where so many young people can be experiencing the opposite on a daily basis.”

-Youth Voice

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In our research we have all collectively found that Yukon youth priorities are focused on **community safety, educational reform, mental health, and wellness**, and involving youth leadership in each priority area. Youth have consistently told us that they want to feel heard and respected by their adult leaders. Youth have said they have a desire to share their input and experiences to create a better community for all future generations.

Community Safety

Safety is essential for youth to be able to reach their full potential. Youth deserve to feel safe and respected, and right now they feel as though there is a lack of support for Safety. This issue was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic because the youth that had previously been in youth shelters now had less access to these distanced spaces. After COVID-19 we hope to see more transition homes that are accessible for youth as they transition to different stages in their lives. Along with the creation of a more positive environment facilitated by youth experiences. We hope to see more opportunities that support youth to be able to access affordable housing and guidance for financial hardships.

Educational Reform

Education has been identified as an important issue for youth and this project. We heard mixed experiences between youth and their school experiences. We have found that the school system is failing youth, because of lack of mental health support, career exposure, and life skill development issues with other students/staff and issues of discrimination. Some students had their Individual Education plans (IEP's) removed which has negatively affected their ability to access other services, like counselling, within the education system. Without

proper support, students will continue to become disengaged with school, extracurriculars, and their school community.

In hopes of addressing some of the educational issues previously mentioned the next steps could be developing school programs to help boost academic performance. These topics could include classes on a variety of culture including local indigenous ones. It is imperative that youth to have access to traditional teachings, on the land education, and Indigenous language courses. Youth have expressed the need for more career exposure, which includes skills in trades, life skills (like financial literacy), and having a co-op work program for youth to learn career skills.

Most of the participants said there is the lack of guidance counsellors at their schools, which are essential supports for students as they transition into post-secondary. The next steps we would like to see is for CBYF to collaborate and suggest innovative ideas for youth to lead in schools. It would be great if Yukon University helped Yukon students go through their high school transition by providing workshops, mentorship, and information on how to access student funding. These are some ways we can make the education system feel safer and more rewarding for students and staff.

Mental Health

Mental Health and wellness are important issues to youth in the Yukon. Declining mental health rates are significantly impacting the lives of youth in the Yukon even more during COVID-19. Youth have asked for consistent and affordable mental health services for our communities. Youth are not asking for a handout; they are asking for the government and youth serving agencies to more efficiently use resources allocated for youth. Youth want to be a part of this process.

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Appendix A

Questions asked In Samreen and Yebin's Online Survey

Basic CBYF Survey:

1. What youth organizations have you used or know of? If you do not know, please
2. reply with N/A.
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Do you have any learning disabilities?
5. What is your age group?
6. What gender do you identify as?
7. How many hours do you work a week?
8. Are you currently attending school or a learning centre (ex: ILC)?
9. Do you participate in extracurricular activities outside of school or being at
10. home?
11. Do you feel that your housing situation positively supports your learning?
12. Do you feel that your school provides good support for you?
13. What do you think is missing in the Yukon in regards to helping the youth?
14. Do you have access to the internet and technology?
15. Do you have any plans for the next part of your life?
16. How would you rate your mental health from a scale of 1 to 10? 1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest.
17. Do you know someone that could help you when needed?
18. Did you fill out the multicultural centre survey?
19. Is there anything you would like to add?

Multicultural Survey (Given in addition to the Basic CBYF survey):

1. What supports do you know of at the multicultural center?
2. Are you associated with any other youth organizations?
3. Why do you come to the multicultural center?
4. Are there any barriers or challenges that you are facing because of being an immigrant?
5. youth or the child of an immigrant parent?
6. Would every go to any other youth organizations?

Appendix B

Online Survey Questions asked by Kamryn and Vanessa

Background on the Project: Communities Building Youth Futures is a project where we need the voices of youth to inform how to improve or advocate for the youth voice – our issues, our visions, our challenges, and our ideas. A Youth Strategy will be presented to Yukon’s youth organizations to help it make change. We need your experiences to make sure we have the right understanding.

The vision for this outreach project is: All Yukon youth are ***engaged, included, and respected*** as they move from school into life.

Our focus is on creating a Yukon for youth that is ***Youth Lead, Safe, Mentally and Emotionally Strong as well as includes Career Inclusion, Individualized Learning, and Youth Champions.***

1. What do you think of that vision?
2. Is there anything you would add or change?
3. What do you think is the biggest priority we need to focus on in the Yukon and why?
4. CBYF Survey What is the best way to communicate with youth?
5. How can the government improve to support young adults/Youth? What actions can we take to create a better Yukon for future generations?
6. Questions/Comments?

Appendix C

In-person Interview Questions asked by Zarah

This survey is to find out what is missing for Yukon youth.

Q: What do you think is missing for the Yukon youth such as activities, job opportunities, and housing management? (short or long answer)

Q: Is there something the Yukon should do better with these things that are missing and what?

Q: How was your experience at school?

Q: What could have the school system done better to help you?

Q: Do you think school workers are helping youth with all their needs? if not what can they do better at?

Q: After you have graduated do you think there's enough things for youth 19+ to do?

Q: What kind of activities do you think there should be for youth 19+?

Q: Do you think there are enough choices for college classes if not what else could they add?

Q: Is there enough help for mental health?

Q: What do you think the Yukon can do better at mental awareness?

Q: Your own comments on what is missing for Yukon youth?