



Case Study:

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



**COMMUNITIES BUILDING
YOUTH FUTURES (CBYF)**

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This case study represents
communities' actions and
opinions as of March 2024

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Cover Photo: Kenny Eliason



MEET ASHLEY

AGE 25

COMMUNITY Portage La Prairie, MB



Ashley Anderson (25) was born and raised in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba (affectionately termed ‘Portage’ by locals). Despite having deep connections to her city, Ashley was eager for the day she could leave her hometown.

“The week after high school graduation. I was like, I have to go, I’m so ready to go.. so I went to Brandon University, 150km away.”

Nestled in the heart of Manitoba, Portage lies halfway between the larger cities of Brandon and Winnipeg. With just over 13,000 residents who call it home, Portage is a city in technical terms; in Ashley’s eyes, Portage embodies the character of a small town.

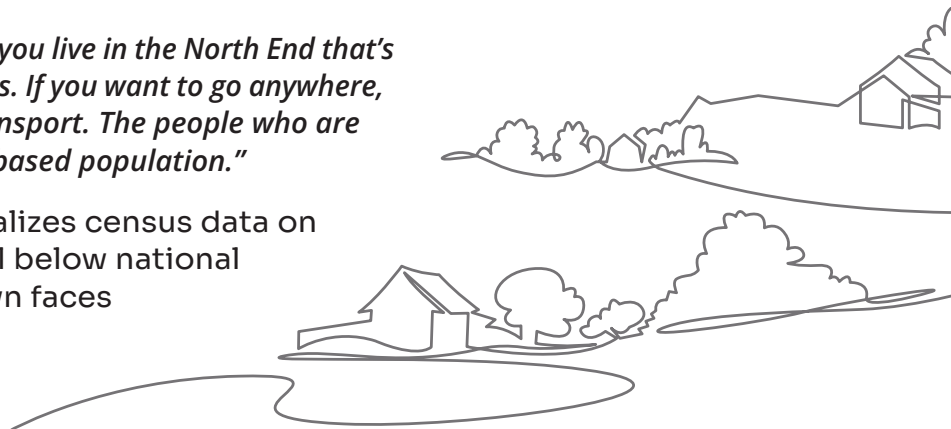
“[Portage] has small town vibes. A lot of the population comes from surrounding smaller towns or farming communities. So we get all of those conservative values mixed together in one small place.”

Ashley grew up acutely aware of the demographic disparities that characterize Portage. Bisected by train tracks, Portage is physically and symbolically divided, accentuating the contrast between the North and South ends.

“One of the main issues with Portage is, if you live in the North End that’s cut off by the tracks, there’s zero resources. If you want to go anywhere, you need a car, and there’s no public transport. The people who are living in the north are the more poverty based population.”

Ashley’s lived experience contextualizes census data on Portage. With a median income well below national and provincial benchmarks, the town faces a declining population, and only 16%

“Bisected by train tracks, Portage is physically and symbolically divided, accentuating the contrast between the North and South ends.”



MEET ASHLEY

hold post-secondary credentials. With Agriculture & Forestry dominating Portage's economy and job opportunities, this fosters the perception among youth, including Ashley, that greater opportunities exist elsewhere.

"Youth here think they need to leave Portage to build a career or get an education...they think there's something better out there, and they feel stuck when they can't leave. Portage has a reputation that precedes it of crime and violence, which per capita, it does have a pretty high crime rate. I remember going into a job interview and saying I'm from Portage, and they said 'oh that's tough, we won't hold that against you.'"

Portage, like other remote regions, offers limited resources for youth who require extra support to attend post-secondary. There are few venues providing connections often found on college campuses or in larger cities. With only 1 youth employment center and no career development programs for those who did not graduate high school, many young people in Portage feel left behind.

"The community I grew up in, it was pretty isolating and not super easy... I think when people can't access resources, it creates tension that builds."

Before CBYF came to Portage, there were no secular organizations exclusively dedicated to youth outreach and engagement. While some church groups offered youth programming, Ashley observed many of her peers felt uneasy accessing those spaces.

"There are a lot of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth that are going to run away from religious groups, so we face this problem where there's nothing for youth to do, and nowhere to go. That's what we hear all the time, why are youth committing crimes or doing graffiti? Well what else are they supposed to do?"

What are youth supposed to do? Instead of shaming and blaming youth for disengaging from school, it's time to explore innovative ways to support them. It's time to treat young people as partners, not subjects. It's time to involve our collective society in **building youth's futures**.

“...it was pretty isolating and not super easy... I think when people can't access resources, it creates tension that builds.” **Ashley**

MEET ASHLEY

MEET CBYF

HIGHLIGHTED DATA FROM 20 CBYF COMMUNITIES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2024

Tamarack Institute's Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) is a place-based network empowering youth like Ashley to become leaders, innovators, and decision-makers. CBYF is more than a program; it's a movement that places **youth at the center** of local community change. With a focus on small, rural, and remote areas, CBYF uses **the collective impact framework** to support youth, adult allies, and partners in collaboratively building a bright and prosperous future for themselves, their peers, and their community.

To nurture a pan-Canadian collective of changemakers, Tamarack fosters peer networks, annual gatherings, and accessible support structures through the CBYF network. These systems help communities connect both locally and nationally, cultivating ecosystems to support youth, sustain initiatives, and encourage sustainable interventions. Tamarack's support has been crucial to the success of CBYF, as it has accelerated collaboration, learning, and the exchange of new solutions and practices.

Data to highlight across the network of 20 CBYF communities

YOUTH REACHED

63,938 youth reached

2,567 youth joined a leadership table

2,025 youth hired to backbone staff team



TAMARACK'S COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS & SUPPORTS

1,000+ coaching calls & support sessions delivered

770 accessible tools, resources, and publications shared

130+ community of practice sessions hosted

5 national gatherings hosted, engaging the entire CBYF network

MEET ASHLEY

MEET CBYF HIGHLIGHTED DATA FROM 20 CBYF COMMUNITIES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2024

"I really appreciated the coaching and the mentors from Tamarack and having that support system." Ashley

"Tamarack has a whole accessible library of awesome tools. And if you don't know how to use it, you can take it to your coach and they'll always have a solution." Ashley

Meet the CBYF Network

CBYF was designed to mentor youth on the road to success, empowering them to define the meaning of success and pave their own way towards it. 20 distinct regions across Canada are engaging in this crucial work, by leveraging the assets and expertise of the whole community to support youth futures.

While each community's initiatives and strategies may differ based on their specific context and youth needs, the goal of CBYF is universal: **to improve education outcomes and help youth successfully transition from education to employment to adulthood, and beyond.**

Meet CBYF's cross cutting themes

By December 2020, through research and comprehensive community consultations, the CBYF network identified **six major themes** related to academic and

employment success for youth. These themes reveal the interconnected and often concealed factors that influence a youth's ability to engage fully in work and school.



You can explore each community's priorities by diving into their **Plans on a Page**. These plans detail the community's vision for change, core strategies to

achieve their goals, intended outcomes, and research that informed the plan.

MEET CBYF HIGHLIGHTED DATA FROM 20 CBYF COMMUNITIES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2024

Spotlight on: Accessible Education CONNECTING YOUTH TO EDUCATION SUPPORTS & RESOURCES

In rural communities, secondary schools play a particularly vital role in shaping the identity, purpose, and engagement of young people. Students in these regions often rely more heavily on schools due to limited resources and services in remote areas, turning schools into essential community hubs that offer food security, role models, and extracurricular activities.

However, students in these areas may face unseen barriers that prevent them from attending school or meaningfully engaging in the classroom. When surveyed¹, 20% of students cited a lack of mental health support as a major barrier to success in traditional schooling. Another 10% expressed a desire for smaller class sizes with many flagging that larger class sizes, in addition to reducing one-on-one time with a teacher, exacerbated their social anxiety. Socioeconomic inequality was a factor too, with 10% mentioning the high cost of transportation to and from school.

Beyond these challenges, CBYF youth participants across Canada expressed a desire for more flexibility in schools from the curriculum to the teaching style when asked what made traditional schooling difficult for them or other youth in their community.

CBYF supports young people in re-engaging, or staying engaged, in their learning journey during a crucial period of development. **Section 5** explores exciting examples of youth-led initiatives working to increase and expand education support across Canada, while developing new supports where gaps exist.

"The lack of cultural representation in the curriculum and the disconnect between the education system and the lived experiences of the students."
Regina Youth Participant

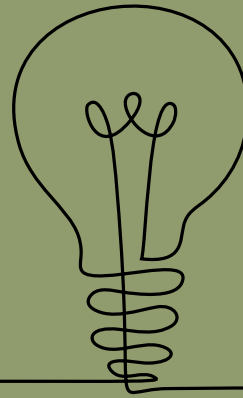
"The fact that oral tradition or hands-on learning wasn't accepted as equal education. It was also hard learning about historical things when in my culture we understand the world [through] our own worldview."
Kahnahwà:ke Youth Participant

"Traditional school was tough in the way that the school's set way of teaching didn't leave much room for what I was into or how I learned best. The classes followed a strict plan that didn't always match up with my interests, making it hard to always get excited about learning."
Chatham-Kent Youth Participant



¹ In 2023 The Tamarack Institute solicited responses from youth who had participated with CBYF in any capacity. Data referring to 'youth respondents' refers to the data collected from said survey.

ASHLEY MEETS CBYF



Weeks after graduating from Brandon University, Ashley discovered an interesting job opportunity had opened up in Portage. CBYF was hiring community connectors through Portage la Prairie Community Revitalization Corporation, the initiative's convening sponsor. Ashley applied, had a successful interview, but was ultimately told she did not get the job.

Four months later, she received an unexpected call informing her that the position had reopened. Without hesitation, Ashley packed up and returned to her hometown, determined to be a role model for her peers and become the mentor she needed back in high school.

"I remember saying in my interview that I want to be the person I needed when I was younger. My goal is to be a mentor, where I'm helping youth succeed in a way that I was unable to, and make a difference in the community I grew up in. I want to make [Portage] a better place for youth to live, and a place that they want to stay in, rather than leave immediately like I did."

Ashley received training from The Tamarack Institute on collective impact and how to apply the framework to social impact efforts. For the first time, Ashley began to see a future in Portage and she aims to play a pivotal role in making that transformation a reality.

"No one talks about [Portage] as a place to flourish, it's just a place to live, but not to thrive. But one of our goals is to make youth feel like this is a place they belong, a place where you can thrive."

After just six months, Ashley was promoted to the role of project coordinator. She now oversees all of CBYF's operations in Portage and serves as the primary link between CBYF, the local community,

“ My goal is to be a mentor, where I'm helping youth succeed in a way that I was unable to, and make a difference in the community I grew up in.” **Ashley**



and youth. In addition to coordinating projects, forging local partnerships, and leading her team, Ashley ensures the voices of Portage's youth are the loudest in the room.

By empowering a youth council to gather monthly and openly discuss the challenges young people face in Portage, Ashley makes certain that the council actively contributes to the identification of CBYF's priorities. Once a project gets underway, the council provides invaluable feedback, ensuring that a youth voice is ever-present.

"Part of improving education and addressing high level issues is the impact of youth actively coming together, making their voice heard, and supporting them to make a difference. Listen to youth, give them the microphone, and they will help you figure out what actually needs to be done."

In 2019, a group of local teachers approached CBYF to get the youth perspective on their innovative pilot project, The Roving Campus. The project's goal was to introduce an alternative classroom model to young people in Portage, particularly supporting those who faced challenges in traditional academic environments.

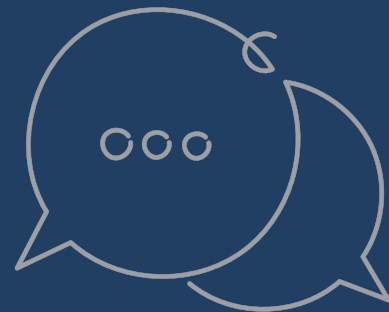
By the time Ashley joined CBYF, the Roving Campus had proven to be a resounding success, and was extended into a second school year. From Ashley's perspective, the program's achievements are significantly linked to CBYF's unwavering commitment to centering youth's voices, and allowing them to shape and design solutions for themselves, their peers, and the broader community.

"Letting people with lived experience create solutions is so important, and that's one of the main areas that we try and focus on through collective impact is we want everyone's voice represented. People weren't paying attention to the youth and weren't allowing youth a seat at the table to have their say in the systems that affect them. CBYF has created a space where it's safe for them to be able to say 'hey, this is how I feel, and this is what should change.'"

“ Listen to youth, give them the microphone, and they will help you figure out what actually needs to be done.” Ashley



MEET THE ROVING CAMPUS



The Roving Campus

TURNING THE COMMUNITY INTO A CLASSROOM

*"Providing accessible education lets youth choose what they're going to do. Now they can actually **plan** their lives, instead of just getting through them." Ashley*

THE BACKGROUND

In 2019, local teacher James Kostuchuk, approached the Portage school division with a unique proposition: **let's redefine the notion of a "classroom."** James and his colleagues recognized that many struggling students were treated as a monolith—leaving them isolated in crowded classrooms with minimal resources. Convinced that the "one size fits all" approach to education was leaving too many students behind, Kostuchuk and his colleagues created a transformative program through exploring a deceptively simple concept:

When barriers are removed, students will engage and actively participate in their education.

Only **16 percent** of Ashley's graduating class went to post-secondary, reflecting an underserved school system without the capacity to support vulnerable students. Large class sizes, overworked counselors, and sparse support services all compound to create an environment where youth are largely left to fend for themselves:

"When I was in high school I went to the career counselor to get help applying for university, and she said she didn't know how, so I had to figure it out myself. There was only one career counselor for over 300 students, she was clearly overwhelmed."

The Roving Campus recognizes that it is not a young person's fault if they don't go to school or never graduate. It is the result of students being forced into a strict mold that does not recognize the lives lived outside of school. Lives that may be marked by trauma, housing insecurity, and the **inability to get to school in the first place.**

“When barriers are removed, students will engage and actively participate in their education.”

MEET THE ROVING CAMPUS

The Roving Campus, supported by **CBYF's innovation fund**, is an alternative learning program for students struggling in traditional settings. By providing transportation, lunch, laptops, and one-on-one support, the flexible curriculum shifts the paradigm, bringing school to the students. With one message to @rovingcampus on Instagram, youth can get a free ride to school, in the same van that transforms community spaces into vibrant learning environments.

Instead of memorizing textbooks, students learn history by tasting a WWI inspired menu and touring a former military training camp. Civics? That credit is earned by delivering in-person speeches to the Mayor. Students can even gain professional certifications like CPR, carpentry & food handling, bolstering their CVs and easing the transition into adulthood.

Through coaching, capacity building, and youth expertise, **CBYF** uses the tools of collective impact to successfully expand the scope and reach of the Roving Campus.

"A teacher approached CBYF to be a part [of The Roving Campus], and to help design it with a youth perspective in mind. We were able to provide that input, and help youth get certifications so they can expand their future while they're still in the school system." Ashley

Portage La Prairie's innovative approach to education proves that young people, especially those struggling in traditional education settings, can excel in programs that prioritize well-being and hands-on learning over rigid adherence to standardized testing. The novel curriculum that considers the entire community its "classroom," fosters valuable partnerships that not only contribute to the initiative's sustainability, but offer students new avenues for employment. Students engaged in this immersive classroom gain more than knowledge; they cultivate a strong sense of belonging and confidence, fueled by the community's unwavering support for their success.

The Roving Campus is a collaborative, community-centered solution that is founded on and led by the authentic needs and experiences of youth.

100% of students who participated in round 1 and 2 of the initiative graduated high school. Prior to the Roving Campus, none of the participants were on track to graduate.

100% of students received professional accreditations that were added to their resumes.

90% of round 1 students were Indigenous or Métis.

MEET THE ROVING CAMPUS

"One student didn't feel comfortable riding in the van alone without a friend or another student. But with some support, they went from not attending school, to not being on track to graduate, to not being able to ride in the van alone, to graduating and working with CBYF to help us plan activities. Now they're running workshops by themselves, speaking to large groups of people, and creating impact in the collective that impacted them."
Ashley

Beyond grades and credits, The Roving Campus acknowledges the profound and positive effects of training and skill development on youth's journey into adulthood, by integrating certification opportunities seamlessly into the school day. The outcome was impressive, with **80%** securing summer employment, a notable change from their previous hesitancy to complete school or pursue ambitious careers.

By fostering engagement from the broader community, the Roving Campus breaks down educational silos, creating a connected ecosystem where schools can leverage resources and expertise from diverse partners and local organizations. This alignment enhances the quality of support, optimizes resource utilization, and provides a scalable blueprint for other communities to replicate, tailored to their local context.

"When you look at the Roving Campus, it hasn't just affected the education system in Portage. We've had the chance to talk about it and present on how successful it's been, and scale it in different ways in other communities, like Digby who we're working with. We're trying to address barriers for students across the country."
Ashley

ROVING CAMPUS PROJECT DATA

22,000 Steps taken
on first day of class



600 kilometers driving
students to school



400 meals provided



40 certification
programs started



35 provincial essential
standards developed



15 credits taught concurrently



11 local businesses supported



10 guest speakers featured



9 student-specific learning
plans created



4 students planning to attend
post-secondary schools



0 number of student
suspensions



MEET SOME OF

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



The Roving Campus was born out of a recognition that traditional schooling simply wasn't working for a crucial portion of the youth community. Instead of approaching this very real problem from a theoretical standpoint or adopting yet another top-down approach, the architects of the project tackled student issues by responding to their needs directly. It owes its long-term success to a simple practice: listening to those most affected.

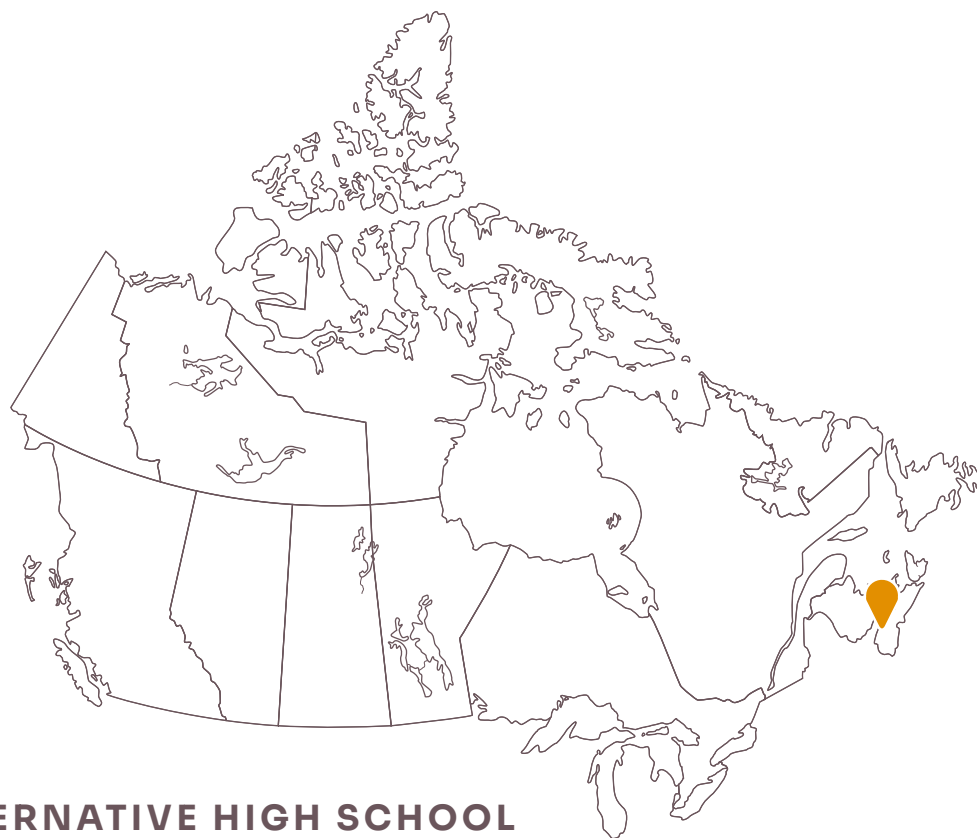
Across Canada, CBYF communities are leveraging the Collective Impact model to challenge conventional education models, promoting innovative practices that recognize and address the complex barriers inhibiting youth success in school. Although each community has adopted a unique approach tailored to the distinct needs of local youth, all projects are driven by the same foundational principle; **placing youth**

at the center of collective impact work is crucial for achieving positive outcomes that extend to both individual youth and the wider community.

The myriad impacts on accessible education are truly overwhelming—we've chosen just a few projects to highlight the amazing work being done.

Photo: Javier Trueba





Digby

DIGBY ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Background

One of the greatest challenges in Digby, Nova Scotia centers around the fact that one third of the population who are 15+ do not possess a high school diploma. The reasons for this coalesce around a number of factors including high transportation costs, food insecurity, and a sense of cultural disconnection. While many support programs existed in schools to try to address some of these issues, schooling alone was not able to break down barriers faced by

Digby's most vulnerable youth. Part of the issue is simply practical—in large classrooms teachers simply cannot devote the requisite amount of time to students who require more focused attention. In addition, students over 21 lose access to many integral supports as they've "aged out" of the system, despite the fact that they may be only a couple of credits shy of graduation.

Digby, Nova Scotia

Photo: Luc James Nguyen



The Solution

Taking inspiration from the successes in Portage La Prairie, CBYF Digby set to modify an already existing Alternative High School model for students who have exhausted all the support available to them within the school system. Admission to the Alternative High School is heavily focused on 'non-attenders,' and seeks to address the root causes for absenteeism. Students are still very much a part of the Digby High community, but the way their courses are delivered and the physical location of the classroom differs. In most

cases, these are students who did not have positive relationships with adults in their lives so building trust and creating an environment in which students feel comfortable is paramount. A small class size helps teachers get to know each student individually and, correspondingly, genuinely understand their needs. By sharing knowledge about what works and what doesn't, both The Roving Campus and Digby Alternative High School save precious time and resources while strengthening the efficacy of their initiatives.

Approach

YOUTH-LED

Students were involved at every step of the process to co-design their learning, providing feedback along the way, and even had a hand in co-creating their ideal learning environment. Students helped select furniture and decor, transforming the institutional space into one that they felt was welcoming and

supportive. Consulting with families and encouraging a strong connection with their culture replaced the more adversarial relationship students had with school. Students are encouraged to be independent but are never left unsupported.

STRENGTH-BASED LEARNING

With two teachers, a child and youth care practitioner, and a social worker on staff, coupled with a maximum class size of 15 students, Digby Alternative is able to readily identify students' interests and strengths to tailor-make an education plan that works. This can manifest as hands-on, participatory learning such as taking part in a Nourish Your Roots program, an initiative that seeks to educate youth on local foodways and

food preparation methods, exploring digital animation, or visiting the Natural History Museum. Deepening students' connections to diverse cultural backgrounds by inviting representatives from the Mi'kmaq community to present to the class or allowing students to receive a class credit for creating a mural of 8 African Adrinka symbols demonstrates a commitment to, and a respect for, a diversity of experience in an educational setting.

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

Part of addressing barriers through employing non-traditional, holistic strategies involves facing hard truths. Unfortunately, some students come to school hungry which significantly impacts their ability to learn. At the Alternative High School, breakfast and lunch are provided. Over long weekends, gift cards for groceries are available should food security be an issue. Bus tickets and gas cards are provided so students can get to and from

school without transportation becoming an added stressor. Finally, students who are coming from poverty stricken homes may have different challenges surrounding a sense of belonging at school or heightened anxiety, meaning additional mental health support is necessary. Taken together, these measures make a huge difference in youth's ability to not only show up but to be **truly present** in school.

Impact

The transformative capacity of Digby Alternative High School is readily apparent as the program has already seen **one student graduate with another five on-track to graduate next year**. Prior to attending the Alternative High School, these students self-reported that they were not able to imagine graduation for themselves. Another

student was nominated for and won the Lieutenant Governor's Respectful Citizenship award. Students had access to resume building workshops, attended a career fair, heard presentations from the Nova Scotia Community College and the Native Council, and, as the year came to a close, **five students were able to find summer employment**.

Key Takeaways

The Alternative Highschool got off the ground in large part due to the partnership and financial support of CBYF Digby. Having seen such dramatic successes over the course of a year, the decision was made to allocate more funding to the program through the provincial education system, transforming the Alternative High School from an experiment to **a sustainable educational project**. Bringing students to the table and keeping them engaged is a challenge for any educator. Recognizing and addressing the issues that our most vulnerable students face requires innovative approaches rooted in compassion and **a belief that every student can succeed**.

Digby, Nova Scotia

Photo: Luc James Nguyen





Kahnawà:ke

HAO' TEWAKHÓN:NI PROJECT

Background

"Onkwehón:we² Food Systems throughout Turtle Island have always been and continue to be foundational to Onkwehón:we worldviews, social interactions with all living kin, and community health. However, the process of colonization and federations of the settler states now known as "Canada" and "The United States," have greatly impacted all Onkwehón:we peoples' abilities and capacities to maintain their ancestral food systems."

The quote above comes from Katsistohkwí:io Jacco's graduate thesis and outlines how food is deeply interconnected with cultural revitalization and identity. Prior to participating in this project, many students at Karonhianónhnha school were under the impression that boiled dinner, chicken and dumplings, and meat pie were traditional foods when in fact those dishes are a product of colonialism.



² **Onkwehón:we** is a Kanien'kéha word that roughly translates to "the original people that come from the land" (Translation Katsistohkwí:io Jacco's)

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



Solution

Hao' Tewakhón:ni is a pilot-project that seeks to connect students with traditional food practices through hands-on, in-school learning. When youth are exposed to cultural activities on a regular basis and have positive

role models to guide and teach them, these practices become normalized behavior that they are more likely to practice in their everyday lives.

Approach

COLLABORATIVE WORK

Although the project was initiated by Katsistohkwí:io Jacco, the intention was always to work alongside community members with existing expertise. Staff from the Kahnawà:ke Education Center, Karonhianónhnha school,

and the Kahnawà:ke Schools Diabetes Prevention Program formed a committee made up entirely of Kanien'kehá:ka people from Kahnawà:ke who are passionate about traditional food revitalization.

YOUTH LED

Two Indigenous women, Katsistohkwí:io and Otiokwinon McComber, both under the age of thirty were hired to help run, design, and develop the project and were aided by a youth

facilitator and project assistant for short periods. Young Kanien'kehá:ka speakers were involved at every level, which fostered a sense of trust and credibility among participants.

LAND-BASED LEARNING

The project's major goal was to pass along significant knowledge of Tiohnhéhkwen³ by learning place-based and nation-specific practices around food. Because a global food system has long been imposed on Indigenous people, making deliberate choices about food is an active form of resistance to colonization and assimilation while contributing to the broader goals of food sovereignty, community connection, holistic health, and educational outcomes.

³ **Tiohnhéhkwen** is a Kanien'kéha word that translates to nourishment that sustains the people physically, mentally, and spiritually. The three foods that are linked to the word Tiohnhéhkwen are Onénhste, Osahè:ta tanón Onon'onsè:ra, also known as Corn, Beans and Squash. (Translation Katsistohkwí:io Jacco's)



215 youth reached



15 teaching assistants under the age of 30 learning alongside students



2 employment opportunities created for young women



Impact

Hands-on learning proved to be extremely successful in engaging Indigenous youth. The Program Facilitator noted that students who had behavioral issues in the classroom setting were transformed into some of the most involved and attentive students in the program. Students experienced an entire year and cycle of harvesting, preserving, cooking and eating the food that they grew. Traditional foods reached the wider community as families and several other schools had access to recipes, seeds, and some of the foods prepared within the school.

New community networks were established with the Buckskin Babes, a Montreal-based

urban Indigenous group, and with individual community members who donated to the project.

The program was extended for at least another year at Karonhianónhnha school with the possibility of integrating it into regular school programming long-term.

“Certain students who had behavioral issues in class, did not have behavioral issues in the cooking and greenhouse classes. In fact, these students were actually some of the most involved and attentive participants.” **Program Facilitator**

Key Takeaways

Creating school programming that is tailor-made by and for the specific community it seeks to educate is directly counter to the homogenizing efforts of colonial education. Place-based, hands-on learning authentically engages Indigenous youth and provides a meaningful opportunity for youth to shape what, how, and where they learn. A key-sector of the community is now equipped

with the knowledge, skills, and tools to practice, teach, and pass down these important practices. At the same time, due to the documentation efforts of Katsistohkwí:io, there is absolutely the potential to scale this project both within Kahnawà:ke and in other Indigenous communities.



Chilliwack

ATTENDANCE AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Background

Chilliwack's highschool graduation rate was lagging behind the provincial average by 5%; however, this does not accurately capture challenges youth face within specific neighborhoods or schools. For instance, CBYF Chilliwack worked extensively with Kwiyeqel Alternative School where the graduation rate was only 41%. Regular and consistent attendance at school is tied to success in further education and life. When students

are repeatedly absent, they can miss out on key building blocks of knowledge which can lead to gaps in understanding and skills, and ultimately, to frustration and disengagement. Absent students also miss out on important opportunities to build social-emotional skills through interacting regularly with peers at school. Students with low attendance records are less likely to attend the corresponding support programs that they need.

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



The Solution

The goal was to boost attendance by mobilizing resources and fostering a dialogue with parents and students about the various factors affecting a student's ability to attend school. Each CORE classroom had set attendance targets, and corresponding prizes were established for reaching these goals. Once a goal is reached, the classroom proudly showcases a letter from the Principal and Vice Principal for everyone to see—building accountability and teamwork.

The team found that relocating community-based support programs like Math Club & Homework Club into schools led to a significant surge in attendance at school and across programming, creating a positive feedback loop. By consolidating supports and programs within schools, CBYF Chilliwack aims to enhance overall graduation rates.

Approach

ITERATIVE

CBYF arrived at their attendance model after trying out an Attendance Incentive Program at Kwiyeqel Alternative School in the spring of 2022. The first instance of the program was considered a success as 92% of participants graduated; however, only 13 students participated and as the program was voluntary,

there may have been confirmation bias at play. When implementing the program at AD Rundle Middle School (ADR), the attendance program was expanded to the entire school population which, according to principal Salvina Sharp, created a positive stir among students and their families.

PEER-TO-PEER

By working with entire classrooms, students help each other improve their class attendance. Rather than a top-down approach, it is up to the whole student body to reach common goals. Math Club saw attendance numbers soar when gift cards were distributed for attendance but also when Youth Ambassadors performed outreach to typically

hard to reach students. Youth Ambassadors were chosen not because of their current academic trajectory but rather for their past struggles. The idea was that such a student's relationship to school would be strengthened and they would be more successful bringing in their peers—which was exactly what happened.

Chilliwack, British Columbia

Photo: Sunni Chen

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



MEET YOUTH WHERE THEY'RE AT

A key component of accessible education is creating environments that youth want to show up at. In order to transform at-risk students' relationship to school, creative recreational programming must be created. At Mt Slesse Middle School, CBYF connected with Colin Wilms, an inclusion teacher who

was trying to set up a skateboarding elective for a group of students who were disruptive and destructive. According to Colin, since the program was implemented, there has been a significant decrease in negative behaviors and attendance has doubled among participants.

Results



527 students participated at AD Rundle Middle School



All 21 CORE classrooms hit Level 1 (60% class attendance over any 5 days) as of March 2023



428% increase in attendance to after school recreational programming

Impact

"Before ADR Drop-In my program would only have 3-7 youth. Working at ADR we are having up to 37 youth! Being at ADR I feel like I'm impacting the lives of these youth and my community."
Nishayala Isaak, youth worker

Incentives have proven extremely successful in improving attendance at school and at extra-curricular educational programs.

'Incentives' should here be understood broadly—creating programs that youth want to partake in can be understood as 'incentivizing' the entire school space. Direct cash incentives (gift cards etc) were actually less successful than incentivizing activities for entire groups.

Key Takeaways

CBYF Chilliwack's attendance and support programs clearly demonstrate the value of collective change. When institutional actors, such as school principals, administrators, and teachers, collaborate with community

workers and youth volunteers, huge changes in group level behavior is seen. Incentives proved extremely successful to bring youth to the table, pointing to the interconnectivity of myriad issues facing youth.



Yellowknife YK PREP CONNECT

Background

In 2021, despite the re-opening of classrooms, Covid-19 restrictions kept vital recreational spaces closed. Even before the pandemic, the city struggled to provide spaces for youth to access resources, academic support, and connect safely with peers outside school. The scarcity of these spaces, combined with limited educational support options beyond the classroom, led youth to seek help on platforms like YouTube and the Khan Academy, which lack a relational and individualized approach. In response, CBYF partnered with teachers and school boards, identifying key barriers affecting youth's educational goals: limited internet access, a scarcity of home computers, and a lack of free tutoring support available beyond the classroom.

Yellowknife, NWT

Photo: Ian Keefe





Solution

YK Prep Connect stands as Yellowknife's first-of-its-kind one-stop-shop, providing free tutoring, mentoring by community volunteers, and unrestricted access to internet and technology in a barrier-free space. Open two days a week from 2-8 PM, any youth aged 15-29 can access the space, connecting with mentors in various fields like music, cooking, life skills, and digital design, alongside support for specific school subjects. Volunteer tutors, many of whom are youth, not only contribute to the

community but also develop leadership skills and establish meaningful connections with their peers.

"YK Prep Connect was a real opportunity to build relationships. The CBYF project overall is all about communities building youth futures and I feel the project has done that. Tutoring has helped open doors for me and opportunities to build stronger communities." **Youth Tutor**

Approach

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Access to laptops is crucial for youth's education and job prospects. With two-thirds of future jobs expected to demand digital literacy skills and the pandemic accelerating Canada's digital transformation, providing permanent and unrestricted laptop bundles empowers youth to fully engage in remote learning, access online resources, and pursue a broader spectrum of employment opportunities.

"As a mother of 2 daycare aged children, having a laptop will make my goals of pursuing a social work or a nursing degree is so much more attainable. As daycare expenses are most of my annual income, this is assisting me in a huge way to further my education. I am grateful for this opportunity." **Youth Participant**

MEANINGFUL MENTORS

Offering free mentorship established a comprehensive support framework that extended beyond academics. Through enlisting mentors with specialized skills, youth gained access to knowledge in previously unexplored fields, broadening their horizons and uncovering potential career paths. Many received personalized advice on how to navigate post-secondary, including how to write effective CVs and application letters. YK Prep Connect nurtured ongoing, secure

relationships between mentors and youth, providing a substantial alternative to brief, one-off interactions typically offered in other low-barrier settings.

"YK Prep Connect changed my life because it allowed me to become a mentor. It allowed me to have someone who could come to me for advice and help. It taught me to be a little bit of a leader as well." **Youth Participant**

CBYF'S IMPACT ON ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION



Results:



28 free laptops were provided to youth, **with 98%** expressing that it significantly impacted their ability to succeed in school



100% of youth who accessed the space reported they felt better prepared and resourced to apply for jobs



100% of youth who accessed the space said they received immediate support that positively impacted their performance in school

"Finishing high school was challenging but I have my diploma and that is thanks to YK Prep Connect. I wanted to climb to the top and see what it looked like and I did. I'd like to help other people because if you help others, you will receive something good in your lifetime." **YK Prep Connect Participant**

Key Takeaways

YK Prep Connect, beyond offering successful academic and employment support, significantly impacted youth participants by increasing their social networks and exposure to new employment pathways.

"New people have introduced me to paths I never considered before. It opened unexpected doors for me." **Youth Participant**

Through dependable mentor connections, technology access, and a secure learning environment, YK Prep Connect became an essential hub for youth to access in-person connections, addressing the many heightened mental health challenges youth faced post-Covid-19.

Yellowknife, NWT
Photo: Ken Cheung



IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Spotlight on the impact of youth-led innovation

1,002

Youth engaged in designing, delivering, and evaluating innovative programs, initiatives, and services targeted at increasing employment and education outcomes for their peers.

AS A RESULT OF YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES;

61



Direct partnerships established with high schools, school boards, and post-secondary institutions. **These partnerships led to:**

- **Educators receiving free, youth-led & designed workshops** on creating safe spaces for students.
- **The distribution of free, user-friendly toolkits and resources** designed by youth on best practices for engaging and retaining young people as students and employees.
- **A reduced burden** on school administrators, counselors, and teachers supporting underserved, at-risk, and neurodivergent youth through targeted programming and outreach.

1,493



Youth empowered through direct employment and compensation for leading CBYF initiatives, or as a backbone staff member.

55+



Youth achieved professional accreditation training and upskilling credentials.

50+



Youth achieved graduation and post-secondary enrollment through earned educational credits.

450



Free rides granted to youth to support their school and work commitments.

210



Free laptops distributed to support youth's employment and educational objectives.

350



Youth benefited from direct support in the form of meal vouchers, grocery credits, and food baskets.

CBYF'S IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Beyond serving Portage's youth and contributing to the success of the Roving Campus, Ashley's engagement with CBYF revealed her potential as a young person, a leader, and an innovator—to herself and to the community. After just 6 months Ashley was promoted to Lead Coordinator, where she oversees all of CBYF Portage's strategic plans and operations.

"My role [in CBYF] has guided me into an area that I'm really passionate about. It's aligned with my younger self who wanted to leave Portage, that punk rock attitude I had about wanting to destroy the system, but now I want to change the system. Before, I didn't have the knowledge or experience to know this is what I wanted, but now that I'm with CBYF I'm like, this is it." Ashley

For Ashley, operating under the collective impact model significantly contributed to her personal development, and allowed her to develop the skills and experience required to shape and serve her hometown.

The Roving Campus left a distinct mark on Portage by connecting and uplifting diverse partners dedicated to supporting student success—gaining accolades along the way for **innovative education approaches** and a **creative teaching philosophy**. In her role, Ashley developed relationships with students from the Roving Campus who exhibited remarkable personal growth spanning beyond academic performance. Ashley described how youth gained confidence, a revitalized vision for their future, and a heightened desire to participate more actively in CBYF.

“ CBYF helped me get accepted to schools because it provided rich volunteer experience. It has given me so many opportunities as a youth in the community that we don't often get.” **Youth Participant, Sudbury**

“ CBYF helped me further establish the skills I needed for my degree, and created more confidence in my own leadership skills.”
Youth Participant, Alberni

“ CBYF was a unique opportunity to develop personal skills. It helped me practice time management, and how to balance life in high school. It's a great opportunity to develop lifelong skills.” **Youth Participant, Moncton**

“ I gained so much education and experience through CBYF. Years of little seeds being planted, like leadership and interpersonal skills are now blooming within my roles at work.”
Leadership Table Member, Regina

CBYF'S IMPACTS ON YOUTH

"One youth we worked with, a student of the Roving Campus, didn't feel comfortable riding in the van alone. But through the program and CBYF's advocacy, they went from not attending school, to not being on track to graduate, to not being able to ride in the van alone, to graduating and working with CBYF to help us plan activities. Now they're running workshops by themselves, speaking to large groups of people, and supporting a collective that helped them out initially." Ashley

Across Canada, CBYF's radical community collaborations and youth-for-youth programming **reached 39K+ young people**. In late 2023, Tamarack launched a listening campaign to assess how CBYF projects impacted these participants and supported them on the path to high school graduation. Through surveys and relational meetings, youth had the chance to share their experience and contribute ideas for future cohorts.

This is what they had to say:⁴

UNLOCKED POTENTIAL: SKILLS-BUILDING AND EXPERIENCE

Across Canada, youth shared that CBYF offered opportunities to participate in **zero cost, accessible, and low-barrier activities**. Joining podcasting workshops, snorkeling courses, first aid certifications, web design hackathons, facilitation training, and STEM innovation accelerators empowered youth to explore new interests in a supportive, low-stakes environment.

⁴ All quotes presented here are the result of dozens of consultation sessions with youth as well as survey responses. Quotes are intentionally left anonymous to preserve youth's privacy.

“ CBYF helped me learn soft skills in communication and how to work effectively on a computer. I was put in environments where I could be a role model for youth and help them find out what they're passionate about.” **Backbone Staff Member, Yellowknife**

“ When I started at CBYF I was a youth volunteer. My experience allowed me to learn so much and it helped me apply for a Bachelors of Social Work and now I'm in my final year about to graduate in May. This program helped me get my dream degree.” **Youth Participant, Cornerbrook**

“ CBYF showed me I should work in the north because our people need it. I am pursuing a Bachelors of Arts in anthropology, and want to support my community and help our people around topics like recreation, substance abuse, addiction, and recovery.” **Backbone Team Member, Yellowknife**

CBYF'S IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Research focused on improving youth outcomes suggests young people who engage in extracurriculars are more likely to take civic and political action later in life, particularly those who join student councils, school clubs, and service organizations. Many youth involved in CBYF expressed a renewed commitment to activism & community service, motivating some to establish their own collectives or groups devoted to issues they care about.

"I now run my own social justice club at school thanks to the experience I gained from CBYF."
Leadership Table Member, Portage

"Before I joined CBYF, I didn't involve myself with clubs, but now I realize the impact it can have. I've just been elected class president!"
Youth Action Team Member, Alberni-Clayoquot

CBYF mobilized a whole community approach to create barrier-free activities & learning environments for young people across Canada. Youth, equipped with new knowledge and qualifications now have the forward momentum and confidence to excel in other areas of their lives, with the added support from a group of like-minded peers.

Renewed Aspirations and New Horizons

Beyond gaining transferable skills and exposure to new interest areas, youth within the CBYF network reported that access to diverse networks, meaningful conversations, and work experience **sparked their desire to pursue a novel, and a specific educational goal.**

Many youth echoed the aspiration to study social work, outreach, and community organizing, crediting CBYF for igniting their passion

“ My involvement in CBYF has shaped my education. I’m currently pursuing a career in youth counseling. Hearing from youth has helped me because I really connected with them, and was able to help.” **Leadership Table Member, Alberni-Clayoquot Region**

“ I was pursuing general studies when I first became a part of CBYF, this project has allowed me to explore areas of interest and has helped me not only apply for my dream degree but get into the program and still continues to help me whenever I need support and I’m glad to say that in May of 2024 I will have completed my degree!” **Leadership Table Member, Cornerbrook**

“ My perspective of the future has changed- I’ve dreamed of a career to offer my service and create a positive impact. I see myself in a field where I can support mental health and help others feel a sense of belonging. I want to learn how to support safe spaces where people can build connections like the ones I’ve experienced.”
Youth Participant, Regina

CBYF'S IMPACTS ON YOUTH

for service and fostering an interest to influence change at the institutional level.

"Due to covid I never got to finish my schooling and I had lost motivation to go back and finish it, however since working with CBYF it has given me the determination to go ahead and finish my school and possible further education to follow on the path of working within the community." **Youth Participant, Cornerbrook**

"CBYF influenced my future. In 2020, I hadn't graduated and the question of what I wanted to do weighed on me. Now I'm passionate about working on public policy, especially at the community level. When I finish this degree I want to work in policy and this was informed by events, volunteer opportunities and leadership spaces I was exposed to." **Leadership Table Member, Cornerbrook**

By treating youth as partners, peers, and collaborators, **CBYF created service opportunities that reflected their values and interests.** Drawing inspiration from these experiences, many youth shared they are now driven towards a future where they can serve others, and extend similar benefits and growth opportunities to their peers and future generations.

Empowering young people to discover what drives them, CBYF cultivates supportive spaces for self-discovery to bloom. If youth can meaningfully connect the dots between their interests, higher education, and the power they hold as an individual, they are far more likely to set goals, tackle obstacles, and integrate education into their future plans.

“ CBYF made me a better member of the community. When I graduate, I want to continue to learn about communication and outreach. To help people. I got to work on these skills when I talked to different organizations. It helped me decide on post-secondary options, and that I want to work in social work, helping youth.”

Youth Participant, Regina

“ Through volunteering with CBYF I learned that my strength is being able to help people, specifically youth. I come from a family of helping others. Now I have validation, and know this is something that I want to go into.” **Leadership Table Member, Grand Prairie**

MEET

CBYF'S IMPACTS ON YOUTH FUTURES

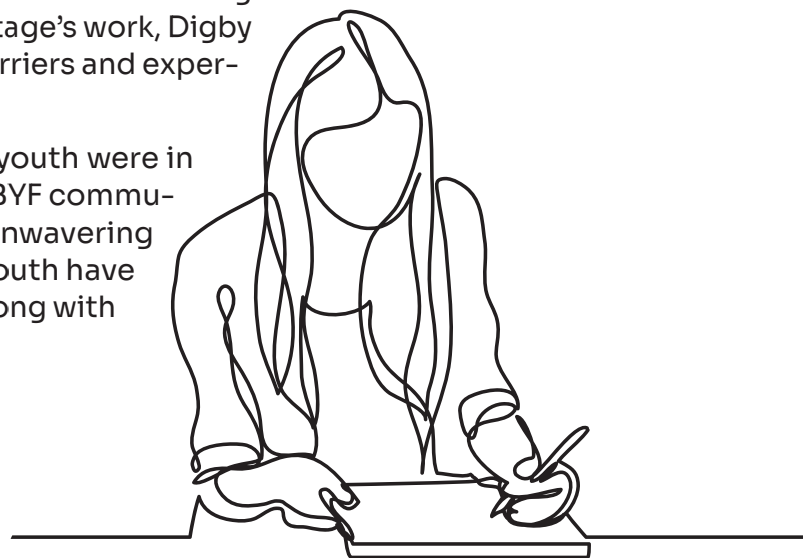
"CBYF made me feel like I had a future." Youth Participant, Digby

"Youth are the future. Collective impact can boost that crucial youth voice, and create sustainability, equity, and resilience. We need to listen to what the youth are saying and let them take the lead, because they're clear on what they need to create change." Ashley

Each CBYF community is unique; what "accessible education" means for each is entirely different. In Kahnawà:ke and Prince Albert, a greater emphasis was placed on making school a place where historical trauma can be addressed and cultural roots celebrated. In Chilliwack, youth were in dire need of more community; safe spaces where positive relationships with teachers and mentors were cultivated. Cornerbrook was battling the apathy that set in during and after the COVID-19 pandemic through one-on-one tutoring. Likewise in Yellowknife, creative approaches were tried and tested to bring excitement back into schooling. Inspired by Portage's work, Digby sought to address significant transportation barriers and experimented with alternative teaching methods.

Despite these differences, across the country youth were in need of more support in one way or another. CBYF communities rose to this challenge and, due to their unwavering commitment to youth-led collective impact, youth have drastically shifted their outlook on the future, along with a reevaluation of the role education plays in it.

“Across the country youth were in need of more support in one way or another. CBYF communities rose to this challenge[...].”



CBYF'S IMPACT ON YOUTH FUTURES

"Participation in the project helped to bridge the gap between my educational and lived experiences. Knowledge mobilization and translation skills in particular". **Digby, Youth Participant, Leadership Table**

"After I finish this degree, I'm planning to attend law school, and then work in public policy. This plan did not exist before CBYF and would not exist without it." **Cornerbrook, Youth Participant, Committee Member**

"My participation in the project only fueled my desire to pursue post-secondary education even more." **Regina, Youth Participant, Committee Member**

"[CBYF] showed me that I should be doing work in the north because our people need it. I am pursuing a Bachelors of Arts in anthropology, and want to support my community and help our people around topics like recreation, substance abuse, addiction, and recovery." **Yellowknife, They Youth Participant, Backbone Team**

"The people I met through this project have been SOOOO wonderful and have helped me explore my options for post secondary!" **Sudbury, Youth Participant, Leadership Table**

Creating truly accessible education, or working towards any kind of systemic change, is a long process; but, by embracing innovative approaches that are committed to breaking down barriers, CBYF is making inroads with youth to close the achievement gap.

“ [B]y embracing innovative approaches that are committed to breaking down barriers, CBYF is making inroads with youth to close the achievement gap.”



CBYF'S IMPACT ON YOUTH FUTURES

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT



Communities

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Alberni-Clayoquot | 9. Moncton | 16. Whitehorse, Yukon |
| 2. Chatham-Kent | 10. Oxford County | 17. Yellowknife |
| 3. Chilliwack | 11. Portage La Prairie | 18. Chippewas of the Thames |
| 4. Corner Brook | 12. Prince Edward County | 19. Prince Albert |
| 5. Digby | 13. Regina | 20. Nunavut |
| 6. Grande Prairie | 14. Saint-Léonard | |
| 7. Kahnawà:ke | 15. Sudbury | |
| 8. Laval | | |

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

Evidence of systems-level impact generated by CBYF include:

GREATER ALIGNMENT BETWEEN EXISTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- **Chatham-Kent** presented to 500 teachers on how to connect youth to opportunities in the trades, and held a meeting with school board representatives who were interested in bringing this information into classrooms.
- **Laval** created connection, alignment, and a common vision amongst local service providers for how to best serve youth. Now the community organizes a bi-yearly event that connects over 150+ orgs, united around youth engagement.
- **Port Alberni** partnered with WorkBC to develop employment counseling workshops to secondary students offered. Workshops were open to all community members, and could be used as optional credits for students approaching graduation.
- **Yellowknife** created a Community Youth Network, made up of 20 members representing both the private and public sectors. The collective is dedicated to breaking down cross-sector silos, and connecting youth to diverse programs and supports.

CHANGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL AND/OR PUBLIC POLICY

- **Digby** held a meeting with the Director of Community Transportation for Nova Scotia's Public Works to share youth-focused data, and a report on the state of rural transportation.
- **Sudbury** provided \$5,000 to youth to create a local tech hub, supporting those without access to technology. The youth team presented a report on their research and project proposal to the City of Greater Sudbury and Ontario Telemedicine Network, to engage the municipality and expand access to the service.
- **Yukon** organized a high-impact meeting with 11 Yukon Government deputy ministers, pitching and showcasing the work of CBYF. The ministers committed to exploring methods of integrating youth-led decision making into political processes.

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

- **Chippewas of the Thames First Nation** met with elected Band Council members to discuss creating a new stand alone youth department. The developing department will be youth-led, and focused on engaging the youth perspective to support the growth and resilience of the community.

CHANGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

- **Prince Albert** partnered with local high schools to offer alternative credit options for students to explore local cultural history, and supported teachers to facilitate reconciliation-related projects.
- **Yukon** youth delivered Mental Health & Wellness Kits to high schools through partnering with the Department of Education, and led a training program to educators on how to create inclusive and welcoming spaces.
- **Alberni-Clayoquot** youth spoke at a gathering of 100+ health workers on the needs and priorities of their peers in the region. Their advocacy resulted in Island Health reinstating a nurse previously withdrawn from the public school, a direct result of the youth's persuasive presentation.
- **Oxford County** offered free mental health workshops for community members who work with young people, including coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, and librarians, including how to engage and serve youth who have experienced trauma.
- **Corner Brook** increased the capacity and reach of local youth service providers by providing 7 free trainings for staff teams. Workshops focused on youth-engagement best practices, and how to retain youth as volunteers and employees.



IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

NEW FUNDING FLOWS

- **Portage** secured a \$250,000 grant from the Rideau Foundation to maintain and expand the Roving Campus.
- **Digby** was awarded \$40,000 from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation to support the Black Youth Changemakers program.
- **Chilliwack secured an additional \$20,000** from RBC for the expansion of ASH.
- **The City of Grande Prairie** became CBYF's new fiscal sponsor, and provides an additional \$3,000 in funding.
- **The Alberni-Clayoquot Region** leveraged CBYF capacity-building to support their successful grant application for a **regional Foundry**.
- **Prince Albert** received \$20,000 in funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) to provide access to physical activity for underfunded communities.

All of the projects explored benefitted from the knowledge sharing that The Tamarack Institute facilitated, allowing communities to go beyond the constituencies with whom they regularly work to reframe their efforts and magnify their reach. Kania and Kramer (2011) write, "...collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the process toward shared objectives"⁵.

Relationship building takes time because brokering real trust is no small task. However, trust between youth and youth serving organizations is the bedrock of real change; although we may only be beginning to see the roots of change, statements from youth, like those above, are an inspiring reason to keep pushing to increase equitable access to high-quality programming.

5 Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011, Winter). Collective impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact



COMMUNITIES BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES

tamarackcommunity.ca
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