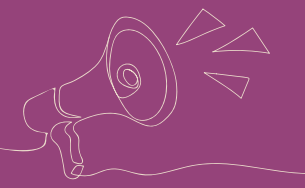


Communities Building
Youth Futures (CBYF)

Impact Report



**From the
Voices of Youth**



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*The opinions and interpretations in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Supported by Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement, Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) is a testament to the power of collective action, community collaboration, and youth leadership to support young people's transition from education to employment. As this comprehensive report delves into young people's reflections on the impacts of CBYF, it is crucial to recognize the ambitious scope and transformative intent that underpins this initiative. Funded by the Government of Canada's Supports for Student Learning Program and enabled by hundreds of partners and tens of thousands of individuals, CBYF supports youth in their education and employment journeys in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. This initiative is not merely about academic achievement; it embodies a holistic approach to youth engagement, aiming to facilitate seamless transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Through collaborative, community-driven solutions and a commitment to youth leadership, Tamarack Institute has laid the foundation for meaningful change, embracing the complexity of this challenge with strategic focus and unwavering dedication.

In 2023, CBYF, along with Evenings & Weekends Consulting, engaged youth and their allies in a Listening Campaign to hear how CBYF had directly impacted them. A nuanced understanding of the initiative's

influence emerged through group interviews, one-to-one interviews, surveys, and comprehensive community data analysis. Covering six priority themes—ranging from employment and mentorship to holistic health and wellbeing—this report examines how CBYF has catalyzed positive change. The insights gathered underscore the importance of targeted support, innovative solutions, youth engagement in shaping a brighter future for young people across the country.

The findings in this report emphasize CBYF's transformative power, not only in terms of individual growth and community development but also in fostering a culture of inclusivity, support, and collective ambition.

COMMUNITIES BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES

Tamarack Institute is a field catalyst with a bold vision: to build a connected force for change, to end poverty, and to build a sense of community in Canada and beyond. Since 2019, Tamarack Institute has been implementing Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) in 20 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. The primary goal of CBYF is for youth (aged 15 - 30) to be supported to successfully transition from high school to



post-secondary training and employment. Communities have used the collective impact framework to build collaborative, community-championed solutions with youth leadership and engagement at the forefront of shifting practices and sharing power.

In 2023, the Tamarack Institute initiated a Listening Campaign to hear from youth and key community partners about the impact of the Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) and Engaged Evenings & Weekends to lead it. The Listening

Campaign engaged **340 participants** across 19 out of 20 CBYF communities through group interviews with 113 youth, group interviews with 120 community partners, and a survey with 107 youth. Ten communities also shared locally produced reports to inform the Listening Campaign, incorporating feedback from **3,873 participants**, with surveys and meetings engaging 3,546 youth and 327 partners. The Listening Campaign and community data analysis aimed to understand how CBYF has helped support young people in their transitions into, during, and after high

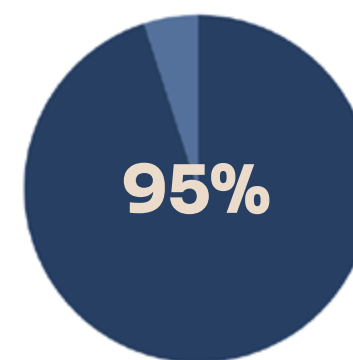
school and what positive changes youth in CBYF communities have observed in 6 priority themes:

- Employment and Mentorship
- Accessible Education
- Identity and Social Connections
- Service Navigation and Support
- Youth Engagement and Leadership
- Holistic Health and Wellbeing

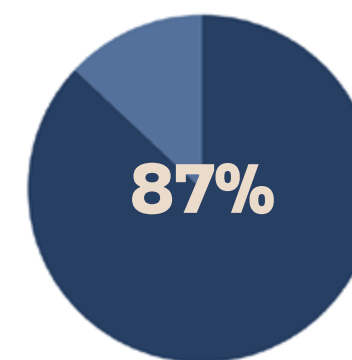
These core themes are interconnected and reinforced by one another to ensure holistic support for youth by providing opportunities for skill development, leadership, health and wellness, and cultural expression.

The Listening Campaign revealed the powerful impact of CBYF in setting the stage for young people to successfully navigate their transitions from youth to adulthood, as reflected in the following assessments in the youth survey:

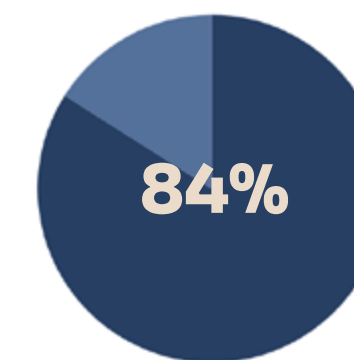
What was heard throughout the Listening Campaign from participants is that CBYF has a clear emphasis on creating leadership and development opportunities for youth and facilitating their active participation in decision-making processes through structures like the CBYF Leadership Tables & Backbone Teams and Youth Advisory Committees. CBYF also demonstrates a commitment to fostering employment and learning experiences for young people, as was seen by the various opportunities and leadership roles created in each community. Furthermore, the inclusion of a wide breadth of cross-sectoral community partners underscores the collaborative spirit that underpins CBYF, leveraging collective strengths from the wider community to enhance the program's reach and collective impact.



Positive Experience
80% of youth had a very positive experience and 15% had a somewhat positive experience

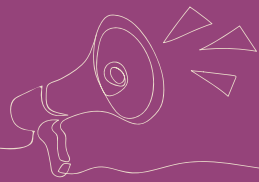


Community Pride
50% of youth greatly enhanced their appreciation of their community and 37% boosted their positive view.



Future Aspirations
49% of youth experienced a positive impact on their aspirations for future studies or career, and 35% experienced a very positive impact.

Source: Tamarack Listening Campaign Survey (2023)



ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

The challenges faced by youth in traditional educational environments are multifaceted, encompassing both systemic issues within the education system and personal difficulties encountered by students. For example, a CBYF youth survey respondent shared that “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.” Structural barriers such as inflexible educational practices, inaccessibility, systemic racism and ableism, and a lack of safety and support systems within schools contribute to an environment that often does not meet the needs of diverse student populations. Interpersonal challenges, including mental health struggles, social pressures, and the need to accommodate different learning styles and cultural backgrounds, further complicate the educational experience for many students. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach to center student needs that includes:

- Reforming educational practices to be more inclusive and adaptable
- Enhancing support systems within schools
- Creating environments that foster safety and are respectful of cultural diversity and individual learning needs

By acknowledging and actively working to overcome these barriers, educational institutions can create more equitable and supportive spaces that enable students to thrive.

CBYF's audacious goal is supporting youth in their journey to high school graduation and then on to postsecondary education or meaningful employment or entrepreneurship. Youth across all CBYF communities felt supported and empowered in pursuing high school graduation and higher education due to the alternative and accessible programming offered through community partners. Youth spoke highly about the following types of supports that make a difference in their educational experience:

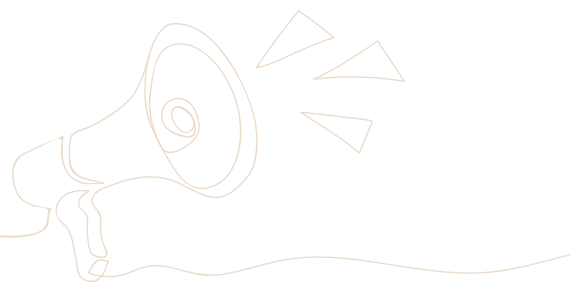
- Access to smaller class sizes
- Guided support through tutoring programs and extracurricular activities
- Friendly and inclusive teachers and mentors
- Workshops that are focused on guiding educational paths and practical skills like financial literacy
- Diverse credit pathways through apprenticeships, cooperative education, and flexible scheduling
- Wraparound services such as meal programs, transportation assistance, and mental health support
- Access to cultural education and resources that center the diverse perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities

These types of support offer alternatives to conventional educational methods and help meet the diverse needs of students by creating inclusive and accessible learning environments that are grounded in community connection.

During the group interviews, youth and community partners from 12 communities shared how they have been influencing the school system to support more accessible education. In Digby and Portage la Prairie, youth and community partners highlighted how the creation of innovative and alternative educational programs like the Roving Campus and the Digby Alternative High School helped address

diverse learning needs and contribute to higher graduation rates. In Moncton and Saint-Léonard, youth valued how training programs on technical skills such as podcasting and digital manufacturing offered learning opportunities that are not offered in the school curriculum. During the group interviews, community partners also shared how CBYF responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on schooling. In Laval and Yellowknife, dedicated support for the challenges of online education, such as technological barriers and isolation, was a key area of focus to enhance accessible learning. For example, the Jeunes Branchés project in Laval trained youth to act as mentors with their peers to make online education more motivating and adaptable.

Another significant theme in the group interviews was the power of cultural reclamation and language revitalization in Indigenous communities to overcome harmful colonial legacies in the education system. For example, in the Listening Campaign survey, a youth shared, “there is not a lot in the curriculum that teaches about Inuit, even though we are a distinct Indigenous group whose homeland is in the north... I wish that I was able to connect with Inuit mentors in my community and across the country.” In Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, a community partner shared how tailored educational support and cultural learning opportunities supported youth in acquiring credits for high school, with targeted support for eight individuals to graduate in the initiative's final year. Similarly, Indigenous youth in Sudbury attending the Alternative Education Program at the N'Swakamok Native Friendship Centre reported feeling supported and empowered, highlighting the positive impact of cultural learnings from Indigenous teachers within the program. In Kahnawà:ke, community

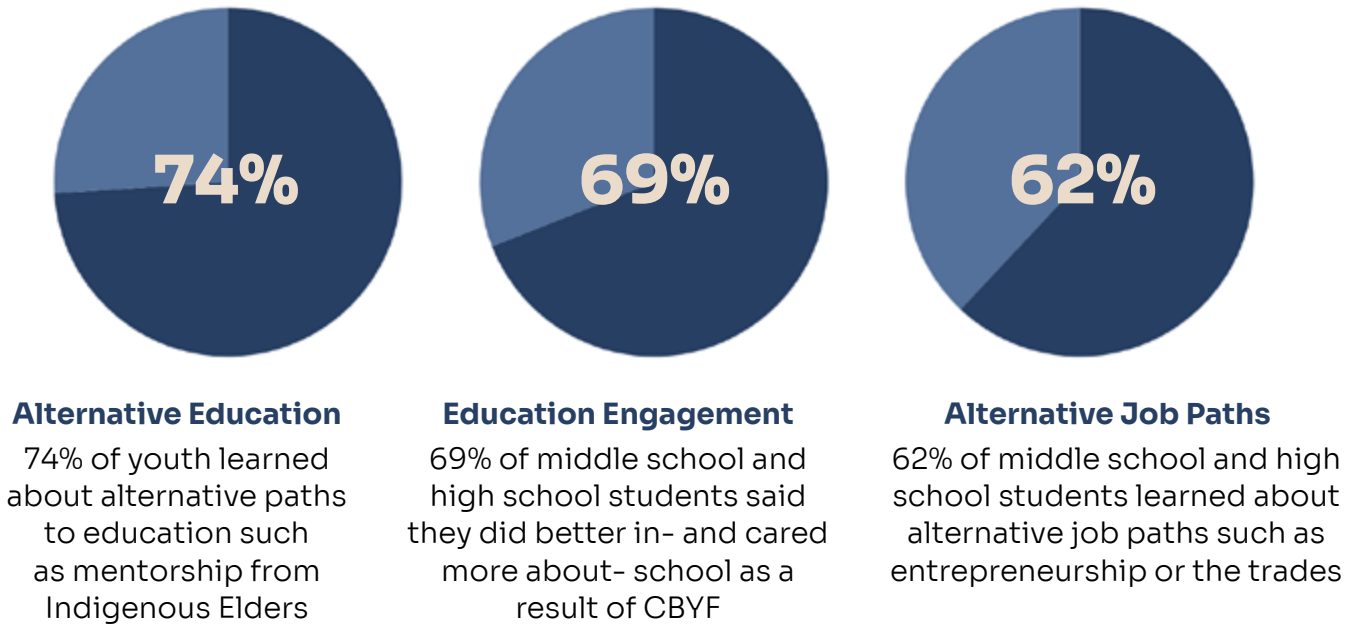


partners shared that the initiative partnered with a local high school where 36 students signed up to discuss holistic wellness, cultural identity, and future success through diverse pathways after graduation, including hearing from local female iron workers and a DJ to help them envision alternative careers.

Survey results from the CBYF Listening Campaign were more varied in the area of accessible education. 74% of the youth surveyed learned about alternative ways to get educated, like cultural teaching methods. When focusing on middle school and high school students, 69% of youth reported in the survey that CBYF helped them do better and care more about school and 62% learned about alternative job paths, like trades or starting a business.

More than half of middle school and high school students surveyed were more interested in going to college or university (54%) and just under half (46%) were more interested in high school and felt connected to schools or jobs in the area. Of the high school students surveyed, 41% reported that they were more focused on finishing high school thanks to being part of CBYF and were able to tackle problems that made graduating more challenging.

By continuing to adapt educational strategies to meet the specific needs of each community and integrating broader systemic changes, CBYF can ensure that youth have the tools and opportunities to thrive in an increasingly complex local, national, and global landscape.



Source: Tamarack Listening Campaign Survey (2023)

QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“Through the help of [CBYF] I tried out different activities outside of classes and looked for things I could learn on my own that really interested me. **Taking charge of my own learning helped me feel more sure of myself and what I could achieve**”

“Many people find traditional schooling difficult due to the learning environment, which often creates distress and distraction for the individual. CBYF offers tutoring to those who may be struggling with these issues and **provides a safe, quiet, non-judgemental space for learning**”

“I graduated from [the Individual Learning Centre in Yukon] because I could not handle "traditional school"... Being at a smaller school where I was able to get the support I needed with a more calming environment and one on one work greatly benefited me”

“[CBYF] helped me with confidence in myself which has helped me in school and **I've realized that I want to work with the community as a mental health professional**”

“I have learned lots through [CBYF], listening to different perspectives. It has broadened my own awareness, and I feel more educated in an experiential way”

“I work at an after-school hangout for skateboarding. **Getting paid to do documentaries and work with kids is a blessing.** They provided money for my education and 50 skateboards for kids”

“I believe in order to make change; we need to continue to teach and provide accessible resources & continue to encourage the power of youth”

“Working with CBYF as a youth intern for the past year has inspired me to not only finish my post secondary which I had taken a break from for my mental health, but to possibly **further my education in the field of working with the community further**”

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

Digby: The creation of an Alternative High School addressed barriers to education like food insecurity and transportation. Students who were unlikely to graduate before the initiative found education success through CBYF, demonstrating the initiative's tangible impact on education accessibility.

Laval: The Jeunes Branchés project offered technological support to motivate young people participating in virtual education. Youth acted as mentors with their peers on the project to make online education more accessible and adaptable by knowing how to use digital learning tools effectively and staying engaged in their studies.

Moncton: The initiative of running a podcast by youth ambassadors to provide information and learning opportunities was shared as a significant contribution to accessible education because it offers a hands-on approach to engaging and informing youth.

Regina: The initiative has re-engaged students who were disengaged or at risk of dropping out, supporting their sense of value and a sense of belonging outside traditional educational settings. Projects like the Discover Your Path Workshop Series, which helped 100% of surveyed participants learn about untapped resources and supports, as well as partnerships with Cornwall Alternative School, speak to CBYF's success in making education more accessible and relevant.

Yukon: The creation of the Peer Support Circle (PSC) and the development of training aimed at fostering a sense of belonging for youth within educational systems illustrate strides in making education more accessible and inclusive. The focus on "educating the educators" through workshops addresses the importance of teacher engagement in creating supportive learning environments.

EMPLOYMENT & MENTORSHIP

CBYF used a community-based approach to reduce barriers and support youth in the transition from education to employment. This is vital in communities where structural challenges such as lack of housing and job insecurity remain as significant barriers to youth staying in community. For example, in Portage La Prairie, 19% of youth surveyed said they are unemployed and actively looking for work¹. Less than one-third of youth mentioned they feel they can achieve a long-term career in the community without leaving. In every community's group interview, youth reported that CBYF helped them discover new career pathways and opportunities that they had not previously considered. For example, many youth experienced opportunities to advance their careers in the trades or pursue passions like social work, community development, public policy, and legal work. Youth in the group interviews spoke about the paid work opportunities CBYF created, providing practical experiences for resume building and future career goals. In the data provided by the communities, many youth who accessed employment and mentorship support through CBYF voiced a shared commitment to contributing positively to communities and continuing to support youth in the future. This underscores the lasting impact of CBYF by fostering youth leaders poised to make a

meaningful difference in their fields and communities.

During the group interviews with youth and community partners, we heard from 15 communities who highlighted their strengths in supporting Employment and Mentorship. In communities such as Alberni-Clayoquot, Chatham-Kent, Moncton, and Corner Brook, youth spoke about how CBYF collaborated with local employment centers, skilled trades programs, and job fairs, and successfully adapted to COVID-19-related employment challenges. These efforts supported youth as they graduated high school and transitioned to employment or training. Young people reported that CBYF helped them:

- Build transferable skills that prepared them for job readiness
- Access training for future employment
- Improve their confidence in job applications
- Access mentorship and become peer mentors
- Start their own initiatives, such as founding their own businesses

¹CBYF Portage La Prairie (2022). Employment Survey.

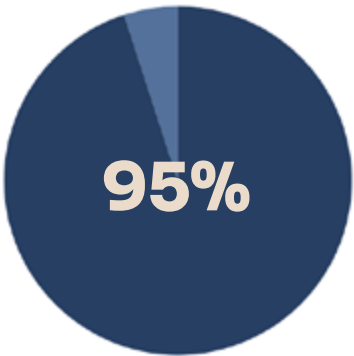
In Chippewas of the Thames First Nations (COTTfN), community partners shared that the community has been advancing youth-led strategies around economic justice and sustainable development that are grounded in Anishinaabe cultural revitalization and governance. In Digby and Sudbury, partnerships with educational institutions and the provision of practical skills training have contributed to future employment opportunities for youth. For example, the Sudbury employment training program offered in partnership with Collège Boréal offers a six-week experiential placement with an optional peer mentorship component, with 85% of surveyed training participants rating the program a 4 and higher on a 5-point scale and 69% getting a job or returning to school after the placement.² In the group interviews, youth shared that CBYF's focus on mentorship programs, particularly in Grande Prairie and Yellowknife, has been instrumental in supporting young peoples' employment journeys.

The survey results below from the Listening Campaign reinforce the positive impact of CBYF's focus on employment and

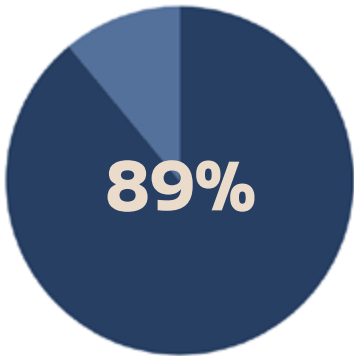
mentorship. These results demonstrate the impact of CBYF. Youth reported that CBYF:

- Guided them to explore career options (95%)
- Increased their confidence when applying for jobs (89%)
- Connected them with mentors or community leaders who helped them find their passions and related careers (79%)

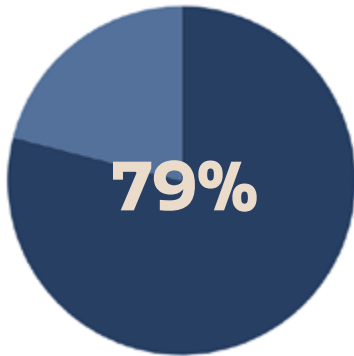
The importance of mentorship was highlighted in many communities. For instance, 46% of youth at the Regina Youth Summit expressed interest in accessing mentorship opportunities.³ Additionally, practical job-related training, including resume writing and tax filing, was provided to 65% of youth in the Listening Campaign survey, further highlighting the initiative's commitment to equipping youth with essential skills for the workforce.



Guided to Career Options
95% of youth shared that CBYF guided them in exploring career options



Confident Applying to Jobs
89% of youth shared that CBYF made them feel more confident when applying for jobs



Mentorship
79% of youth were connected with mentors or community leaders

QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“Prior to my involvement with CBYF, I was unsure what I would pursue after completing high school. My participation with CBYF allowed me the opportunity to see the concrete differences that community organizations make on individual’s everyday lives. As a result, **I’m now committed to a future where I plan to study public policy to create wide scale legislative change that matches the objectives of the CBYF project**”

“**[CBYF] influenced the change of 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”

“I’ve had 5 different jobs since engaging with CBYF that are directly related to the program. It helped me develop a sense of pride with [my] community and my ancestry. **My work experience began due to CBYF which helped launch my career**”

“I want to use entrepreneurship to support affordable housing, community belonging, and healing from generational trauma”

“**Being part of the project opened my eyes; there’s a lot more career paths to consider now.** Now I’m experiencing the creative field and I’m inspired by that”

“**I attended one of the job fairs and it helped me with my resume and interview tips to properly go about my job seeking process.** At the time, I was working at [a grocery chain]. I got lucky and got a job as an Administrative Assistant [for a] political party and coaching during a day program”

“I received support from the CBYF leadership table to help me find a job and encouraged me that I was on the right track. **When I landed it, I was so excited and the team was just as excited for me**”

“My job goals involve working with youth in many ways. **Having ‘CBYF Member’ on my resume will help me when applying for positions** which involve working with young people”

²Future North (2023). Collège Boréal Employment Services Assessment
³CBYF Regina (2023). CBYF Journey for Upfront Evaluation Framework.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

Chatham-Kent: The formation of practical skills in the trades, basic skills in the workplace, and meaningful bonds among participants, facilitated by programs like Skill Shift, Ignite, and Not Just a Handyman, extend beyond professional development to include personal support systems, where youth feel they can rely on their peers while navigating challenging times while also gaining experience that makes them attractive to employers.

Corner Brook: The shift to a holistic understanding of employment readiness during COVID-19, recognizing that securing a job is just one aspect of stabilizing a young person's life and instead focusing on needs such as housing, food, technology, and support, has led to impactful changes in Corner Brook's approach to employment programs. For example, their collaboration with the YMCA Employment Program and the Newfoundland Labrador Youth Force initiative demonstrates impactful changes in providing wrap-around support to employment opportunities.

Oxford County: Direct supports such as grants for education and employment is highlighted, offering tangible aids like funding for transportation or laptops. This theme indicates CBYF's role in facilitating access to resources necessary for educational attainment and employment readiness.

Yellowknife: The Farmers Market Youth Entrepreneur Program is a prime example of impactful change, providing youth with entrepreneurial experience and financial opportunities they might not have had otherwise. This initiative directly supports CBYF's goal of fostering employment opportunities and mentorship for youth.

HOLISTIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

The realities of poverty, inequitable access to mental health and harm reduction resources, and discrimination such as racism, ableism, and homophobia, have profound impacts on the lives of young people in CBYF communities. For example, in Portage la Prairie, 91% of surveyed youth know someone who struggles with mental health, but only 11% of youth agree that the community has enough mental health supports.⁴ When the basic needs of youth cannot be met - such as food, housing, and healthcare - their ability to build long-term goals and focus on education and employment are compromised. During the Listening Campaign, youth shared that CBYF has impacted their holistic health and wellbeing by:

- Creating safer spaces for mental health conversations
- Addressing physical health through fitness programs
- Integrating cultural practices into wellbeing strategies

For example, in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, 79% of youth surveyed stated that they feel safe and protected as a result of CBYF.⁵ This high percentage suggests that CBYF has provided a strong foundation for addressing holistic health, which is essential for fostering overall well-being and effective engagement in community and personal development activities.

During the Listening Campaign, youth and community partners from 16 communities highlighted local stories related to holistic health and wellbeing. In Portage La Prairie, youth shared how the Youth Mental Health Summit helped provide a platform for open discussions on mental health challenges in a non-judgmental forum. The "take a break room" at Regina's Youth Summit was equipped with therapeutic activities, and the Brave Room project at two local schools in Corner Brook created opportunities for safer spaces for youth to decompress and access supports. Initiatives that focus on cultural identity and connection, as seen in projects like the "no shame in my sober game" in COTTFN, reflect an understanding of the significance of cultural and identity

⁴CBYF Portage la Prairie (2022). Portage Youth On: Mental Health.

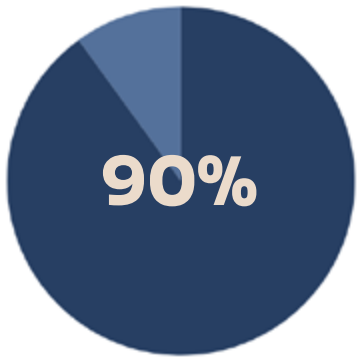
⁵Sisco & Associates Consulting Services (2023). COTTFN Youth Well-Being Report.

affirmation in the overall well-being of youth. Land-based efforts, particularly notable in communities such as COTTEN and Kahnawà:ke, emphasize the role of Indigenous practices in supporting mental and emotional health. In the Yukon and Alberni-Clayoquot, the focus on intergenerational healing around the impact of residential schools has been integral to youth well-being and cultural support as was heard in the group interviews.

Survey results further validate the positive impact of CBYF on holistic health and wellbeing, with over 90% of youth reporting improved mental health, 65% claiming better physical health, and 78% having a strengthened connection to their

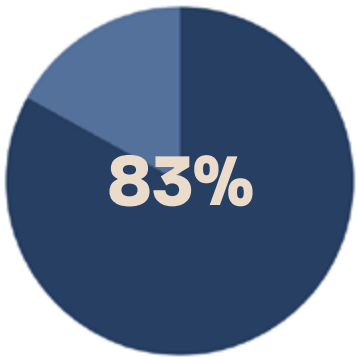
culture and social life. Moreover, 84% of youth surveyed reported overcoming life's challenges and seeing a clear path for their future. 71% of youth surveyed said that through CBYF they were able to balance various life aspects like school, jobs, and friends and feel more connected with their culture and social life. 78% of youth spoke to CBYF's comprehensive approach to supporting youth development.

CBYF has been impactful in ensuring that safe, non-judgmental forums for discussing mental health challenges are more widely available, and that holistic approaches to wellbeing that include physical health and cultural integration are systematically incorporated.



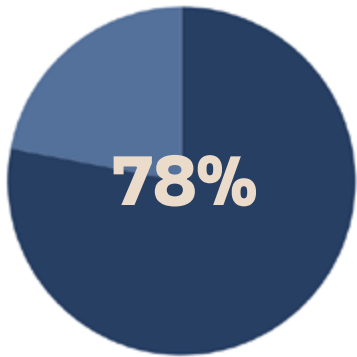
Mental Wellness

90% of youth shared that participating in CBYF make them feel better mentally



Overcoming Challenges

83% of youth shared CBYF helped them overcome challenges and see a clear path for their future



Cultural & Social Connections

78% of youth feel more connected with their culture and social life because of CBYF

Source: Tamarack Listening Campaign Survey (2023)

QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“ Our approach to CBYF allowed us to advocate and help navigate the much-needed mental health support, work on creating safe spaces, provide harm reduction education and resources, and **let youth feel like they belong in their community** ”

“ We need a detox centre in town that’s culturally safe and you can hear this from youth. **Using youth voices when you’re trying to solve these problems is important, they’re the generation that’s going to continue these things** ”

“ The programs [CBYF] offers greatly helped my mental health along with opening my eye up to a lot of hurt I didn’t know was impacting my life so much. I’m working on healing those hurts ”

“ [CBYF] has shown me that if I need something I can just ask and advocate for myself ”

“ [During the pandemic], we did a session on grief and the grief of not necessarily losing a loved one, but the grief of students who are graduating who wouldn't be able to walk across the stage and get their physical diploma with all their friends and go to prom. We also had a session on anxiety and worry, because it was a really scary time for a lot of people when all of a sudden, everything had changed. We were able to partner with mental health and addiction services to run those sessions with youth and offer to connect with them afterwards ”

“ Through CBYF, youth have safe spaces to talk openly about their identity and mental health and can come to meaningful insights about themselves. Youth can heal and connect with others facing similar challenges ”

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

Portage La Prairie: The Youth Mental Health Summit provided a pivotal platform for discussing mental health challenges and support mechanisms. The ability for participants to candidly share their experiences in a safe environment highlights substantial progress in addressing mental health and wellbeing, alongside fostering strong identity and social connections among youth.

Digby: The partnership with Primary Health for the Rural Youth Connections Project supports comprehensive health care by helping youth access appointments with medical, dental, and mental health care. The adaptation of lunch and learn sessions to online platforms covering topics from mental health to practical life skills like healthy cooking on a budget reflects a comprehensive approach to youth wellbeing, especially during the challenging times of COVID-19.

Kahnawà:ke: Mention of holistic wellness and identity indicates a focus on supporting the overall well-being of youth, including physical, mental, and emotional health, as well as helping them explore and affirm their identities. The Health & Wellness summer initiative exemplifies CBYF's commitment to holistic health. Engaging youth in community development as part of wellness activities highlights the initiative's success in integrating health and community engagement.

Yellowknife: Initiatives like COVID care packages, a youth mental health magazine, and the integration of holistic wellbeing approaches such as the medicine wheel into programs exemplify meaningful support for youth's holistic health.

SERVICE NAVIGATION & ACCESS TO SUPPORTS

After participating in CBYF, the majority of youth shared a heightened sense of responsibility towards addressing systemic challenges in their communities, such as the housing crisis, food insecurity, and the need for culturally safe mental health and harm reduction services. In the group interviews, many youth expressed feeling stigmatized when accessing services or having a limited sense of what kinds of services are available and how to access them. Youth in rural areas also mentioned barriers such as financial challenges and transportation costs, as well as systemic barriers such as structural poverty, discrimination, and lack of safety. Throughout the evaluation reports led by CBYF communities, youth shared that CBYF helped to better support their lives and overcome barriers by guiding them through the complexities of available resources and essential support services – such as mental health, housing, employment, and food. For example, in Regina, 81.82% of surveyed youth in the ‘Discovering Your Path’ workshop series noted discovering untapped resources that they had not known about before joining the workshop series.⁶ Likewise, in Yellowknife, the Community Youth Teams Cup project helped increase youth

awareness of local supports and programs, with 58% of surveyed youth feeling more informed and knowledgeable about available community services as a result of their participation in the project.⁷

During the group interviews, community partners and youth from 12 communities highlighted their strengths in supporting service navigation and access to support. In communities like Alberni-Clayoquot, Sudbury, and Prince Albert, youth took a leading role in leveraging technology to produce community maps and video directories to simplify finding and accessing support services. During the group interviews, community partners shared that these tools have not only improved service accessibility but also, by engaging youth in the production process, enhanced their skills and created employment opportunities. Similarly, in Grande Prairie and Regina, communities have partnered with institutional partners like the municipal government and 211 to make connecting youth with the resources they need more accessible, demonstrating CBYF's flexibility and responsiveness to emerging needs. Youth from group interviews in Chatham-Kent, Corner Brook, and Yukon mentioned how

⁶CBYF Regina (2023). CBYF Journey for Upfront Evaluation Framework.

⁷CBYF Yellowknife (2022). Community Youth Teams Cup (CYTC) Evaluation Report.

integrating direct wrap-around services into the program design of initiatives was critical for building trust and a sense of comfort to meaningfully participate in CBYF. Furthermore, youth shared how CBYF helped empower them to access resources and overcome barriers, such as the cost of transportation in rural areas. This was heard in the group interviews with Digby, where multiple youth took advantage of the transportation initiative that provided gas cards to attend activities, which highlights the impact of improved access to information and services in rural areas.

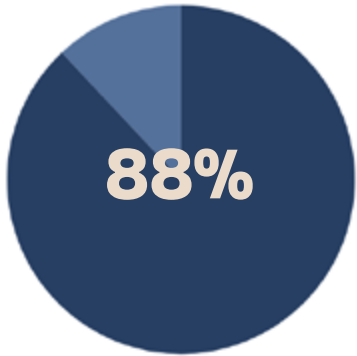
Youth shared more insights on the positive impact of CBYF's focus on service navigation and access to support in the Listening Campaign survey. The majority of youth reported:

- Finding it easier to understand what help or services are available (88%)

- Feeling welcomed and understood when getting help (85%)
- Experiencing simplicity in getting help or services after engaging with CBYF (76%)

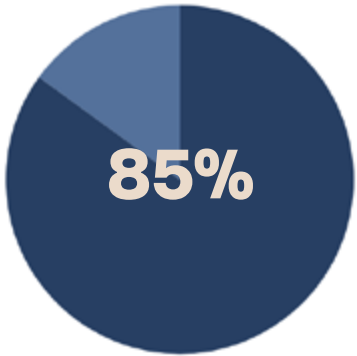
Additionally, CBYF has facilitated cost savings on services for youth and addressed online or technological issues in accessing needed services.

The ability to convene organizations to adapt and respond to the emerging needs of youth has allowed CBYF to be impactful across communities. CBYF helps foster a more inclusive, responsive, and supportive environment by ensuring that young people not only know about the services offered but can also easily access the help they require.



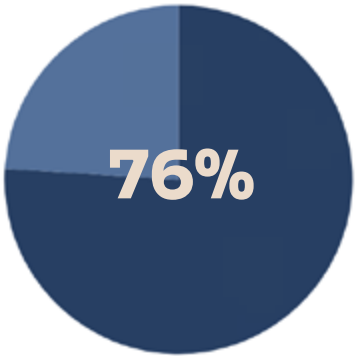
Understanding Services

88% of youth found it easier to understand what help or services are available in their community



Feeling Welcome

85% of youth shared CBYF made it easier to feel welcome and understood when getting help



Simplifying Help

76% of youth shared that CBYF made getting help or services in their community simpler

QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“ People are starting to look for resources to help their goals and help them socialize with others in society. The youth were always inspired to help each other out in any capacity ”

“ Working with vulnerable youth [through CBYF], **I can help youth get into housing and see their dreams come true through employment services.** I got to go into the direct frontline services helping youth with housing ”

“ We’re working on creating a community map for our area ... It's been really cool to see youth involved in that and gain some new skills around that. And also how much is going to help on the other end, youth and other community members as well ”

“ There was a reason why [students] weren't currently attending schools, whether that be food insecurity, transportation, or other barriers like getting to school or being present at school. So **we were able to move funds to be able to support those students. That was really cool** ”

“ [The Food Sovereignty Action Team at the Kahnawà:ke Survival School] is a **great example of working with other organizations in the community to lower the barriers to participation,** working with their schedules. I hope for the future of this project that these connections and collaborations continue to grow and result in more young people benefiting from what Kahnawà:ke Collective Impact has to offer ”

“ **Community partnerships created many safe spaces for youth that they didn’t have earlier.** Organizations collaborating on projects and working together has made youth comfortable to engage with and access services at other organizations. It’s a quick way to learn more about community partners versus navigating all the resources on your own ”

“ Youth voice is very important in how communities will work in the future to build more organizations and services. With projects done in the last months, youth input is very important because they use these services, and we need to meet their needs ”

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

Alberni-Clayoquot: The Be Safe App aims to support young people during a crisis by helping youth make informed decisions and access relevant and reliable resources in their area. Through regional collaboration across the West Coast, Bamfield / Anacla, and Alberni Valley, CBYF was able to renew licenses and get the app up and running for youth to engage with local and provincial mental health and addiction resources. The initiative also provided training for youth workers on safety planning rooted in lived experience of mental health and harm reduction.

Prince Albert: The Pihtikwe initiative addressed the challenge of service navigation by creating a video directory of services available to youth, making it easier for them to understand and access support. This initiative not only improved service accessibility but also engaged youth in the production process, enhancing their skills and creating employment opportunities.

Grande Prairie: The Community Compass was created in collaboration with CBYF Grande Prairie, Help Seeker, and the City of Grande Prairie to aggregate local youth resources on a digital app. The interactive resource directory illustrates how collaborative efforts between youth-led initiatives, tech companies, and the local government are making progress in creating more accessible and navigable support services for youth.

Sudbury: The creation of an interactive, crowd-sourced Community Map for youth services, resources, and activities within the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin reflects a tangible improvement in service navigation and access for youth by youth.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

CBYF has shown that when youth are empowered to lead, they not only contribute to critical community improvements but they also lay the groundwork for future generational change. During the group interviews, youth shared that CBYF has:

- Improved their confidence
- Helped them speak with local leaders about issues that affect them
- Provided the tools and skills to effectively lead in their communities

They also shared that CBYF has catalyzed a cultural shift in organizations towards working side by side with young people and centering youth voices in decision-making, leading to more inclusive and collaborative community initiatives. For example, in Sudbury, youth recognized the value of incorporating their voice in program design and decision-making to ensure that programs meet their needs and interests. In an assessment of Youth Recreation & Programming in Sudbury, 46% of surveyed youth expressed interest in leading recreational activities in their

community.⁸ Through CBYF, young people have been able to:

- Access leadership roles
- Actively participate in shaping their educational and career paths
- Significantly contribute to cultural and social initiatives in their communities

From Alberni-Clayoquot to Corner Brook, youth told stories in the group interviews about influencing community decisions, filling gaps in services, and organizing significant events in their communities. This illustrates the profound impact of CBYF on youth empowerment. For example, through CBYF, youth helped guide the Territorial Youth Strategy in the Yukon, the Youth Comprehensive Community Plan Chapter in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and the Youth Engagement Network with the Kahnawà:ke Council. Youth shared how powerful these experiences were to help inform governance systems and public policy by centering their lived experiences and visions for the future of community

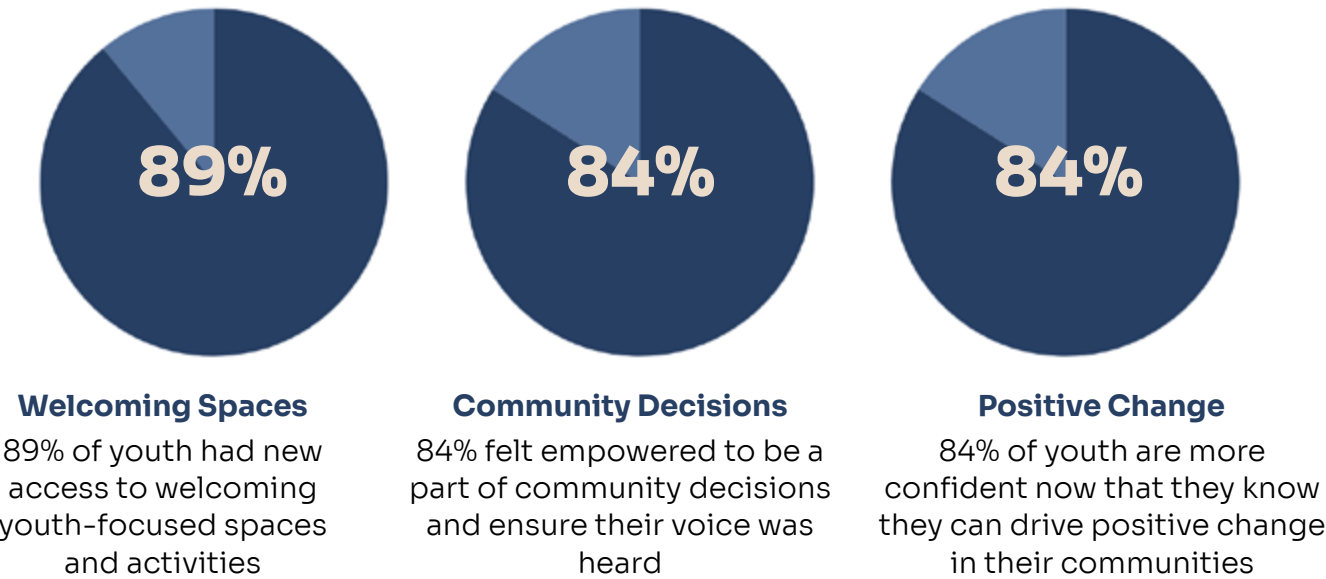
⁸Future North (2022). Youth Recreation & Programming Assessment.

planning and development. The engagement of youth in various leadership roles, such as Portage La Prairie's Youth Support Navigator role and Youth Ambassadors in Laval, also demonstrate CBYF's commitment to integrating youth voices, visions, and decision-making power into the fabric of community development.

More broadly, the governance structure of each community's CBYF initiative was supported by youth leaders who sat on the CBYF Leadership Table and the Backbone Team. These spaces created opportunities for youth to gain leadership skills, help plan the design of the initiative, and be treated as equal members to adult contributors. For example, a member of a CBYF Leadership Table shared, "I feel I am fulfilling my dream job with being able to make a change for youth in my community." Through the Listening Campaign survey, youth shared that these leadership roles made them feel seen and supported, enhanced their social connections and employment experience, and empowered them to envision and work towards a lasting positive impact on their communities.

Survey results reinforced the impact of leadership opportunities, with a majority of youth reporting newfound confidence in accessing welcoming spaces and activities designed by youth (89%), learning new skills (85%), and feeling empowered to participate in community decisions (84%) due to their involvement in CBYF. With the help of CBYF, 84% of youth feel confident that they can drive positive change. Additionally, connections with mentorship opportunities and leadership experiences have been crucial for personal growth and skill development, with 78% of youth surveyed engaging in community activities outside CBYF's scope, highlighting CBYF's far-reaching impact on youth engagement and leadership.

Throughout the Listening Campaign, youth shared that CBYF helped fill a profound need to integrate youth into leadership roles and address their ongoing civic engagement. Rather than being tokenized or merely consulted, youth shared that they want to be meaningfully incorporated into decision-making and program design. CBYF has been able to amplify youth engagement, empowerment, and leadership through its activities and help youth take on significant roles in shaping their future.



QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“ **The youth of the community are the literal future of that community.** If the community wants positive change, working within the community is the way to go. Only the youth know what they want from the future and just need help in making that happen ”

“ In order for us to make change, we need to continue to allow youth to be involved, allowing them to be part of these discussions so they are being heard and validated instead of having adult allies saying what’s best for them. **To be part of the CBYF project is an honor because starting off from not knowing what we wanted to do with this project, to now where we have had over 120+ youth involved** in different events or programs CBYF Regina was able to fulfill is such a rewarding feeling ”

“ [Since participating in CBYF], I have noticed an increase in youth leaders and a very large increase in graduation rates ”

“ I run my own social justice club at school thanks to the experience I gained in CBYF ”

“ Prior to my involvement with CBYF, I was unsure what I would pursue after completing high school. My participation with CBYF allowed me the opportunity to see the concrete differences that community organizations make on individual’s everyday lives. As a result, **I’m now committed to a future where I plan to study public policy to create wide scale legislative change that matches the objectives of the CBYF project ”**

“ I have gained a sense of confidence. **CBYF folks are supportive and make me feel like I belong and am able to share anything without feeling judged.** I had an opportunity to travel to Toronto to participate in an anti-racism conference and I’m eager to bring the learnings to my own community ”

“ [CBYF] has been such a valuable leadership opportunity that has opened countless doors for me over the past three years. **I think that I am now seen as a leader of youth in my community by the community at large ”**

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

Chippewas of the Thames First Nation:

The youth-led creation of the Youth Comprehensive Community Plan that was brought to council to consider a standalone youth department is a great example of “nothing about us without us.” It was agreed by youth and adult allies that the plan would have a positive impact on community engagement by providing space for young people to share their needs and voice their opinions on key strategies such as housing, transportation, and economic justice.

Saint-Léonard: Youth from Saint-Léonard expressed the value in holding educational spaces for and by youth to learn things that are not taught in school in order to build self-esteem and understand their ability to make a difference in their community. For example, the Génération influente event brought together nearly 50 youth to discuss mental health, community safety, citizen engagement, education, entrepreneurship, culture, and the environment. The initiative also collaborated with Fablab Onaki, an Indigenous-led digital fabrication training program, for its teachings on digital manufacturing tools in an Indigenous

community context. This collaboration also illustrated a space where youth were able to blend technology and cultural education, broadening their exposure and understanding of Anishinaabe traditions and futures.

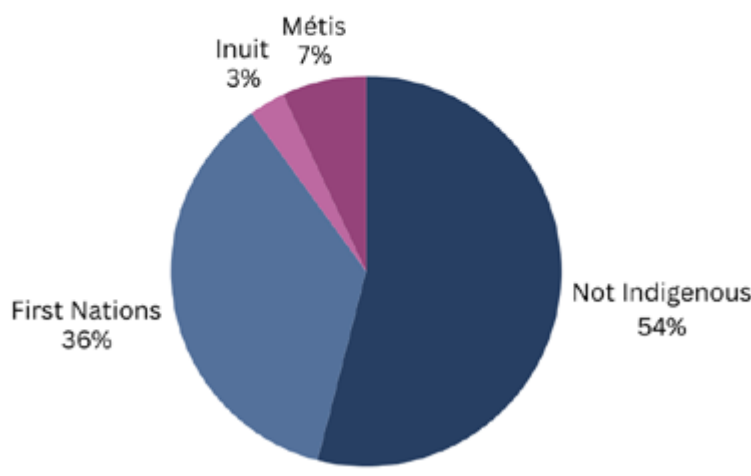
Yukon: Youth who were part of CBYF Yukon were instrumental in shaping the Territorial Youth Strategy, which is a guiding document for key policies and resources impacting young people’s lives in the territory. Over the course of four days in 2023, over 200 youth gathered from across the territory - including from fly-in communities - to participate in a Youth Summit. The youth-led summit created space for young people to engage in workshops and inform the first year priorities of the Territorial Youth Strategy. Youth leaders have also been invited to fill influential positions, such as sitting on boards and committees, where their voices are valued by adults and elders.

IDENTITY & SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Youth shared that identity and social connection are integral to feeling valued in their community. Young people deserve to live with dignity, respect, and feel valued as a part of their community in order to realize their full potential in education and employment. The importance of creating safer spaces, cultural engagement, and intersectional opportunities for social connection and peer support is critical to building youth confidence to help them prepare for new challenges in the future. This is particularly important for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) who experience systemic and interpersonal racism in their schools and communities. In Sudbury, a focus group with BIPOC youth revealed that 66.7% of participants experienced racism at school, reflecting challenges in forming positive social connections in educational environments that may lack cultural sensitivity.⁹ To respond to these challenges, the initiative supported Equity Action Teams to focus on multicultural education in high schools to foster youth leadership, create safer spaces, and nurture arts-based learning. Additionally, nearly half of the youth engaged in our Listening Campaign survey identify as Indigenous (45%) with nearly a third of

those participants identifying as Two-Spirit (31%). This highlights the importance of recognizing the distinct needs and intersectional experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to ensure their cultures are represented and respected within educational settings. For example, a youth shared the “need for Métis individuals to receive support and cultural help,” as distinct from services directed towards First Nations.

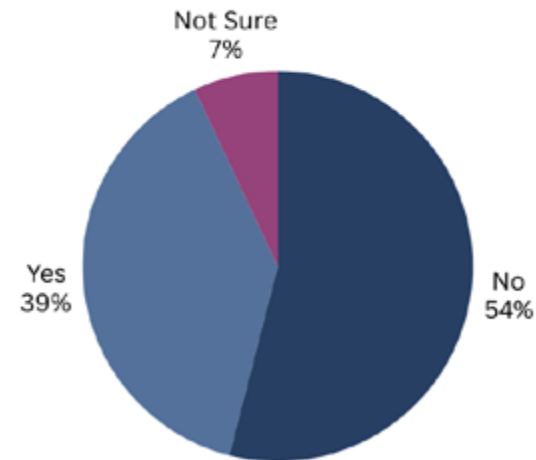
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS WHO IDENTIFY AS INDIGENOUS



⁹Future North (2023). Culture of the North: BIPOC Youth Taking Action

Over a third of youth who responded to the Listening Campaign survey identify as people with disabilities (39%). A disability can be visible or invisible and impact physical, mental, learning, emotional, development, or other facets of young people’s health. In both the survey and group interviews, youth shared about the value of centering disability justice in youth programming and school curriculum. The creation of safe and inclusive spaces, as seen in Chilliwack and Saint-Léonard, has also been pivotal in allowing youth to engage authentically with peers and community members. These spaces encouraged sharing and mutual respect and supported networks that extended beyond professional development to personal growth and well-being. This demonstrates the importance of centering accessibility and fostering a sense of belonging, pride, and interconnectivity among youth.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS WHO IDENTIFY AS LIVING WITH A DISABILITY



Nearly half of youth who responded to the Listening Campaign survey identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (49%). When diving deeper into communities like Prince Edward County and Kahnawà:ke, youth shared that the organizing of Pride events and Indigiqueer film nights helped pave the way for groundbreaking support and inclusion in their communities that have significantly contributed to youth feeling more connected to their cultural roots and identity. These initiatives not only celebrated 2SLGBTQIA+ communities but also challenged societal norms to promote a more inclusive and accepting community ethos. The creation of youth-led murals in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Corner Brook, and Digby also highlighted CBYF's role in intertwining artistic expression with identity and cultural appreciation.

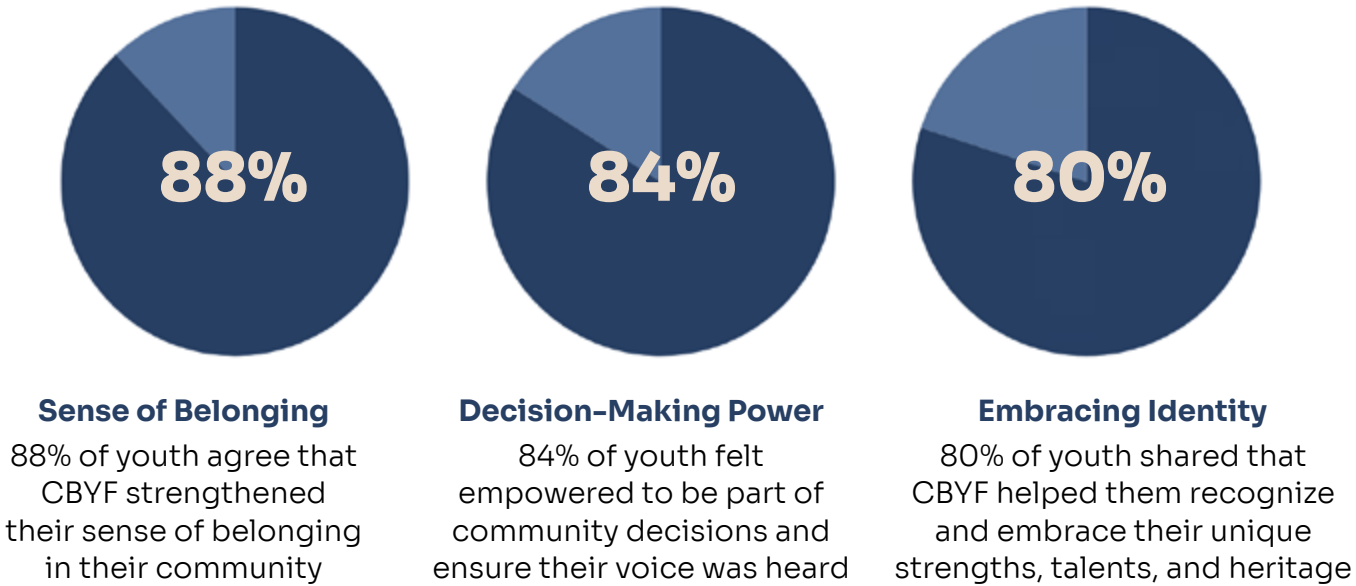
Survey results showcased the impact of CBYF, with 88% of youth acknowledging a strengthened sense of community belonging and 84% of youth reporting that they felt empowered in community decisions to ensure their voice was heard. Youth reported that CBYF supported them in learning about new places and events to connect with peers. Additionally, youth shared that being in CBYF helped them:

- Connect to mentors and valuable community members
- Recognize and embrace their unique strengths, talents, and heritage
- Feel less judged or treated unfairly for being themselves.

These results highlight CBYF’s success in fostering a supportive environment for all youth.

Overall, youth reported that CBYF made significant strides in representing and respecting the unique and intersectional identities of youth within educational settings and community spaces while

mitigating ongoing challenges in ensuring that these efforts were not isolated but part of a continuous commitment to inclusivity and support. Youth overwhelmingly voiced that CBYF helped strengthen community ties and supported them in feeling valued, connected, and empowered within their community.



QUOTES FROM YOUTH

“ [CBYF] has helped me with widening my social circle. **It was barrier-free. I felt included and welcomed. It wasn’t complicated for a person with a disability like me** - I didn’t have to do another “assessment” or intake. I just showed up ”

“ The project has definitely influenced more positive aspects in my life. I love the sense of belonging, the community work, the youth-led focus and just about everything else that goes into this project. I am so happy to be a part of it! ”

“ About a year ago, at a moccasin making workshop, **we got together and it helped with meeting new people and connecting culturally and creatively. It was inspiring.** Everything went naturally and people of different age groups volunteered and took roles in sewing, beading or figuring out outfits ”

“ It’s important for disabled persons to be in the curriculum and to change mindsets in education and the community. We still have integration/segregation and not full inclusion ”

“ The language and cultural mentorship program paired language learners with elders to talk and learn from a first language speaker. **This encouraged reconnection and improved the mood of both people involved ”**

“ With the Reconciliation Project, I had the opportunity to research and attend meetings to advocate for change. **I’m feeling hopeful for the future because of all the kind-hearted people working hard to make positive change ”**

“ I think for me, [CBYF] just helped me be more social. And I've got to see some of my closest friends connect more to their identity and find out more about themselves... It helps me just re-evaluate the different things that everybody goes through ”

“ I think being able to... engage in [CBYF events] **has really allowed both my mental and physical health to skyrocket towards the positive.** And I just want to see more of that ”

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

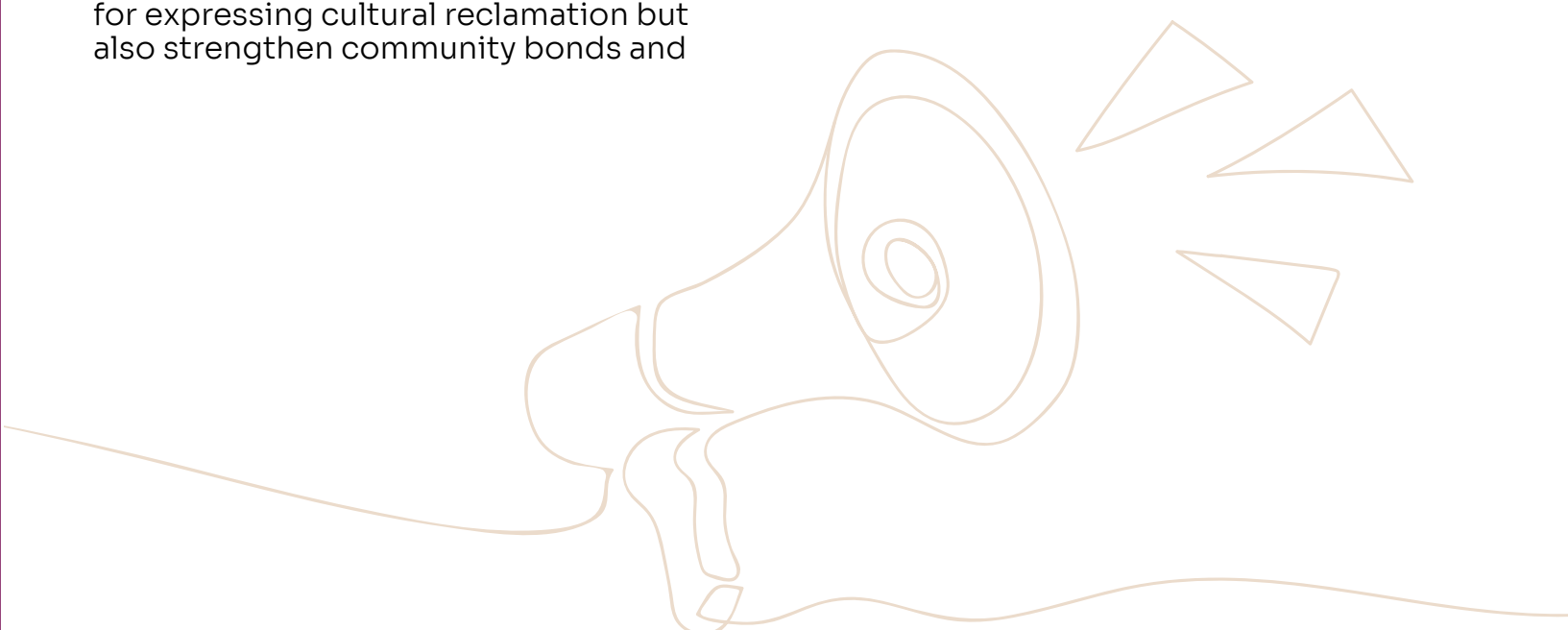
Chilliwack: Many stories from Chilliwack highlight the creation of safe, inclusive spaces where youth can engage authentically with peers and adults, fostering positive identities and strong social connections. Examples include the Beyond the Bell initiative, skatepark initiative, and hangout clubs where youth can be themselves and foster kindness, generosity, and social connections.

Chippewas of the Thames First Nation: The Youth Day event was hosted to celebrate Chippewa Youth while sharing identity, education, and art, with activities such as environmental sciences, mural painting, karaoke, Anishinaabemowin language learning, and traditional tattoos. The Ogichidaa Kwewag Group (Strong Women Group) also helped support learning in bundle building, crafting skirts, rattle making, and painting. These activities not only provide a platform for expressing cultural reclamation but also strengthen community bonds and

promote holistically taking care of yourself through Indigenous ways of knowing.

Kahnawà:ke: The active involvement and leadership of youth in conceptualizing, organizing, and participating in the first-ever Pride Parade in the community served as a platform for expressing identity but also strengthened community bonds. It was described as a historic moment for the town, indicating a breakthrough in community acceptance and belonging.

Prince Edward County: Events like Pride in the Park have enabled youth to feel heard, represented, and proud of their identities. Efforts to recognize and incorporate Indigenous cultures, such as the Street Naming Hackathon drawing on Indigenous language also highlight significant progress in place keeping.





CONCLUSION

The consensus among participants is clear: Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) serves as a crucial platform for young people to express their ideas and visions and plays a pivotal role in catalyzing positive community transformation related to education, health, and employment equity and sense of agency and belonging. CBYF is celebrated for its ability to empower youth, foster innovation, and ensure that the needs and aspirations of younger generations are incorporated into community development efforts. However, the success of these initiatives hinges on overcoming certain challenges, notably the need for long-term, sustainable funding and the provision of mentorship to navigate the complexities of project management and community engagement. Despite these hurdles, the benefits of youth-led initiatives—ranging from increased community engagement to the development of leadership skills among young people—are invaluable and long-lasting.

LASTING IMPACTS OF CBYF

Nothing About Us Without Us: CBYF has fundamentally altered the ways that communities approach youth engagement by moving away from consultation and towards genuine youth leadership, co-design, and decision-making power

over youth programming to support education, employment, and holistic youth development.

“I have witnessed a shift of people and service providers realizing they must listen to what youth say. Youth are now becoming more directly involved in projects for them”

– CBYF YOUTH

Pathways to Community Careers: CBYF helped steward a new generation of community workers by training and hiring youth in alternative career and academic pathways rooted in peer support and community care. Many youth shared that they are now interested in a wide variety of vocations in their community that they had not otherwise considered, such as social workers, mental health professionals, paramedics, teachers, youth advocates in schools, philanthropists, public policy analysts, entrepreneurs, tradespeople, and workers in non-profits.

“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”

– CBYF YOUTH

Community Pride: Many youth shared that collaborating with CBYF shifted their perception and pride in their community – and several shared that they plan to root their future careers in the community as a result of this work. Similarly, we’ve also heard from youth whose eyes were opened to the challenges existing in their communities. Now, they feel empowered and committed to advocating for local and systemic change.

“Youth in my community feel lost, but CBYF has helped open so many doors and opportunities for betterment, mental health, and all aspects of life to lead them to success. Although success is subjective, I think that CBYF has guided these youth to count little achievements by simply exposing them to services and giving them the stage to voice their concerns and opinions”

– CBYF YOUTH

Safer Spaces: Communities have been shaping what safety looks like and how to cultivate safer spaces in schools for youth to support 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, students with disabilities, BIPOC youth, and more. By educating educators and paving the way for youth-led spaces, CBYF has created new streams of thought that can continue to erode the harmful norms of traditional schooling and foster a safer environment for youth to graduate and envision their futures.

“Youth are struggling even attending high school on a daily basis, it is simply not a safe space, we need to continue to work on the support needed to make youth feel

safe at school so that they can even begin to think about graduation”

– CBYF YOUTH

Connection to Culture: For many communities, CBYF was one of the few ways for Indigenous youth to meaningfully connect with cultural practices, such as language reclamation and land-based activities. It also facilitated a youth-centred space for intergenerational learning and systemic change, such as informing local governance. These spaces of cultural reclamation will continue to grow under community stewardship.

“[CBYF] is a good way to help bring youth and elders together to share knowledge and keep our culture going strong”

– CBYF YOUTH

Holistic Understanding of Youth Education: Rather than taking a surface-level assessment of youth graduation rates as an indicator of success for youth across Canada, CBYF demonstrated the necessity to have a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the structural circumstances that are impacting youth wellbeing – such as mental health, substance use, housing, family life and relationships, nutrition, cultural supports, and more – as a precursor for educational achievements and employment pathways.

“You cannot begin to assess the outcomes of high school graduation rates and post-high school transitions until the supports have been put in place to allow youth to go to school on a regular basis”

– CBYF YOUTH

Ecosystem of Support: CBYF has created partnerships and networks at a local and regional scale that can continue to support communities and inform municipal, provincial, territorial, and national strategies for youth leadership and development. This rich ecosystem of support creates an opportunity to enhance collective impact by connecting youth across regions and communities to learn from one another and envision a future of sustained initiatives that can scale up to impact systemic change.

“Years of little seeds being planted, like leadership and interpersonal skills, are now blooming within my roles at work”

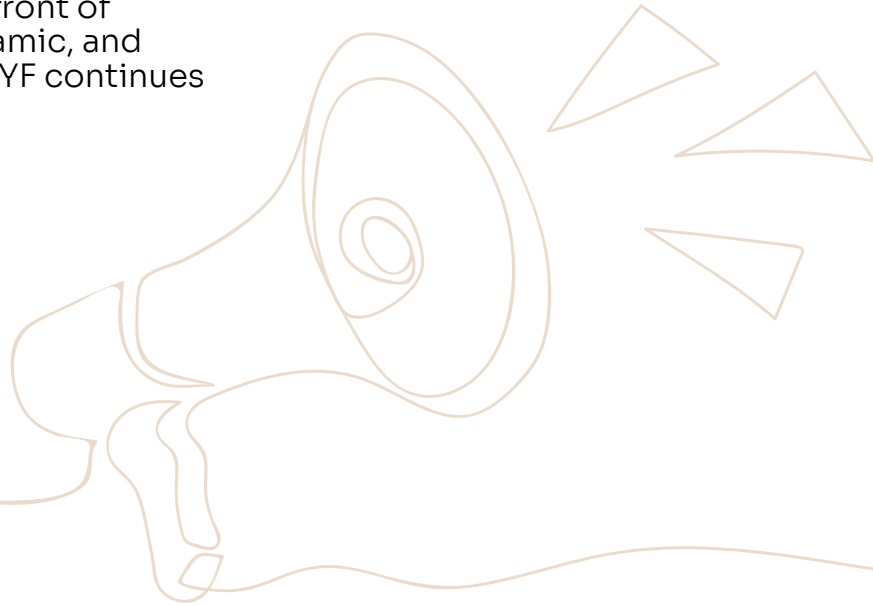
– CBYF YOUTH

In summary, the feedback underscores the power of youth to drive community change. By investing in and supporting youth-led initiatives, communities benefit from fresh ideas and renewed energy and lay the groundwork for a future where young people are at the forefront of creating more inclusive, dynamic, and resilient communities. As CBYF continues

to evolve, the foundations established by the 20 communities can continue to grow under the leadership of local backbone partners and networks. These initiatives have the opportunity to evolve and adapt to meet the diverse and changing needs of youth in the community. CBYF has significantly impacted the lives of tens of thousands of participants, offering personal growth opportunities, enhancing educational and career paths, and fostering a strong sense of community. By harnessing its lasting impacts and building on its strengths, CBYF can further its mission of supporting youth through their educational journeys and into successful adulthood.

If you would like to get involved, please:

- Connect with people passionate about youth futures at an upcoming [webinar, course, or other event](#)
- [Access tools, case studies and other practical resources](#)
- [Sign up for Tamarack newsletters](#)



COMMUNITY IS A VERB. EMPOWERING ACTION, INSPIRING CHANGE.

The Tamarack Institute empowers communities and individuals to break free from poverty, adopt sustainable climate transitions, invest in youth, and inspire belonging and purpose through coaching, collaborative partnerships, and guiding resources.

Tamarack’s Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) team supports and invests in youth-led action and strategic investments, shaping a future where the potential of every young person is realized.

Tamarack is located on Turtle Island (North America), the ancestral home of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. We acknowledge historical oppression and commit to addressing ongoing inequities in this territory.

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This report was a collaboration between Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement and Evenings & Weekends Consulting. We want to especially acknowledge the incredible work by CBYF team leads and youth leaders in all 20 communities.

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