



# Blueprint Pathways Evaluation Report

Funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation

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## Our Team

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**Evaluation Volunteers:** Jacqueline Melindy, Sheena Taylor

**Schools and Facilities included in this Evaluation Report:** 1) Rideau Rockcliffe Community Centre (RRCC); 2) William E. Hay Centre (WEHC); 3) Notre Dame High School (NDHS).

**For more information about Blueprint please check out Blueprint's website:**

<http://www.blueprintforlife.ca/services/youth-corrections-outreach/>

## A letter of thanks from Blueprint Executive Director Steve 'Buddha' Leafloor

Well we have completed year one of our "Community Heartbeat Ottawa projects", and we are looking forward to two more exciting years of community programming. Up front I want to acknowledge and thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its generous support and funding for these projects. We chose to respond to a category flagged by the Ontario Trillium foundation as a priority area, where we reduce social isolation. It was a perfect fit for the multicultural work we do and in line with the Executive-Summary-Canadian-Index-Wellbeing-Report-Ontario-Eastern-Region's recommendation that youth engage more in Arts and culture. The arts as an expressive outlet for emotions and healing is a core component of our work, helping participants gain personal insight and self-esteem through their accomplishments. We build resiliency, helping youth acquire positive alternatives, rebuilding trust, and gaining new tools to access community resources when needed. Through our work we can reach marginalized youth in at risk neighborhoods, in both remote and urban communities, with a youth culture that they are interested in - reducing their isolation and giving them a positive voice. We celebrate diversity and use traditional culture as a strength to build a sense of belonging, empathy, and understanding towards others and their differences, utilizing creative ways to address the needs identified by youth and by youth engaged community partners. It's no small feat to deeply address topics like gang involvement, drugs and alcohol, school absenteeism, complex trauma, cultural isolation, manipulation, respect, bullying and models of healing.

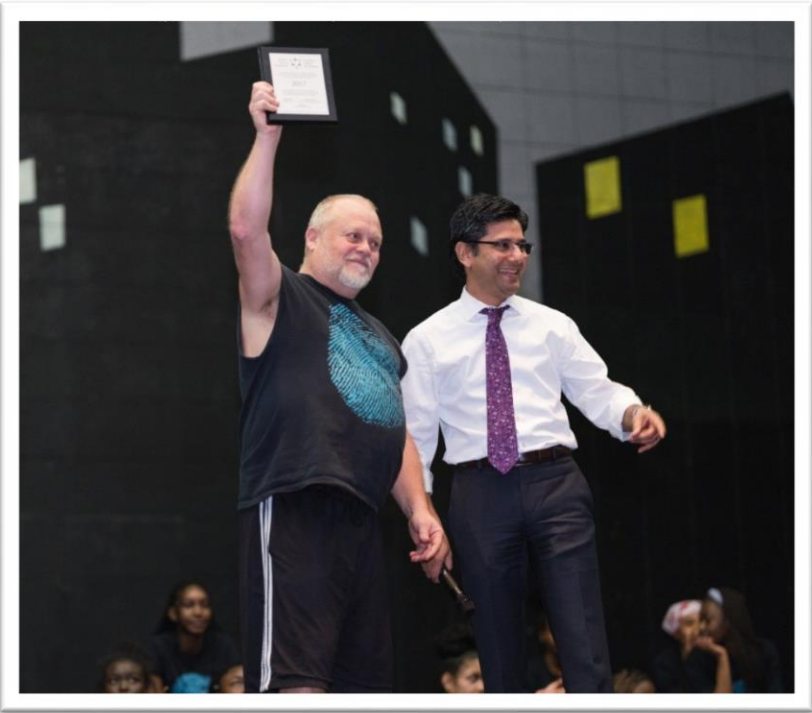
Several shout outs are in order as it's a big committed group that makes all the magic happen. First, thank you to the parents and teachers who trusted us in working with your youth on such sensitive topics. Also, a huge applause to all the youth who committed daily to such intense programming with honesty and open vulnerable hearts. You all shone brightly!!! Deep gratitude goes out to our diverse Blueprint team of facilitators who always come to the projects not only with great energy, passion and skill, but with the willingness to share their own vulnerabilities and stories.

We had lots of different types of agency support, but a few stand out. For our Lower-town project we could not have pulled it off without the daily support of Aline Abdulnour from the Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre. At the William Hay Youth Centre there was an amazing team making this all work, so a huge thanks goes out to Gord Boyd, Val Lawrence, Kaethe Imbert, Bill Fenn and the extended team of front line staff. The Notre Dame High School project would not have taken place without the commitment and support of Alana Trines and

Brent Kaesler from Pathways to education. For our follow-up programming we had great support from Viki Holan from the Richard Pfaff Alternate Program and Mary Williamson from the Frederick Banting Alternate Program. Thank you everyone for your commitment to youth!

We are also grateful that Ontario's Attorney General Yasir Naqvi came out to celebrate the youth's achievements at the Notre Dame High School Show and help acknowledge their accomplishments when they received their awards.

I am also very grateful for the behind the scenes work of our research team. Thx Emma Ware, Sarah Tumaliuan, and all our volunteers for capturing what we do and putting it in a format to share with others. Beautiful photos and a year in review video where also produced by Steve Haining so a big hug also goes out to him.



Ontario's Attorney General present Blueprint with Trillium Award

All in all, it was an amazing year. We streamlined some of our approaches and we are fully scheduled for year two. We are on track to work with approximately 200 more youth and outreach workers and build communities that reduce social isolation. Bravo everyone!

“Each One Teach One”

**Stephen “Buddha” Leafloor**

BA, MSW, M.S.C, Ashoka Fellow Canada,  
Founder and Executive Director

## Executive Summary

### Program Goals

Blueprint Pathways is a hip-hop arts and mental health discussion-based program designed to empower marginalized youth to build better futures. Blueprint's innovative approach includes a) dance, spoken word, meditation, art, journaling, drumming, stomping, ceremony and cultural activities b) role models, mentorship and discussions (on topics such as anger and impulse control, support systems, alcohol and drug abuse, trauma and healing), and c) community, culture and performance. By centering on dance activities and group discussions, Blueprint programs holistically activate physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual health. This unique format aims to foster adaptive behaviour in youth and to improve the quality of their social environment. Ultimately, Blueprint wants to help young people take control of their own futures towards positive community engagement and personal achievement.

### Evaluation

As part of the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Connected Peoples funding stream, Blueprint received a grow grant to run three programs across Ottawa. Part of this funding was allocated to evaluating the Blueprint Pathways program to better understand the impact of program activities on participants. The goals of this evaluation include: a) to better understand the outcomes of Blueprint Pathways, and the mechanisms by which these outcomes emerge, and b) to inform program development and increase Blueprint's positive effects on participants.

### Methods

A mixed method was used to evaluate Blueprint Pathways including both quantitative (surveys with participants) and qualitative methods (written answer questionnaires with participants). One quantitative survey, the Social Provisions Scale, was conducted in a *Before/After* design, to compare scores *After* program completion against the participant's baseline scores (*Before* the program). Another quantitative survey, polled participant's opinions on how Blueprint impacted them. The qualitative component consisted of written answers from youth participants. The program was evaluated at 1) Rideau Rockcliffe Community Centre (RRCC) October 2017; 2) William E. Hay Centre (WEHC) in Ottawa in November 2018; 3) Notre Dame High School (NDHS), February 2018. A total of three programs were carried out over 1 year of funding.

### Summary of Results

A total of 96 youth and staff completed the Main Program (23 RRCC, 22 WEHC, 51 NDHS). The results of the evaluation show that Blueprint Pathways has been successful in achieving a number of the outcomes set out in our three program objectives. Evidence showing that Blueprint helped equip a diverse group of marginalized youth with tools for reducing social isolation included: a) demographic information demonstrating a diverse group of racialized participants, some of which were immigrants and refugees; and b) increased engagement in healthy activities (meditation, dance, spoken word, art and journaling); c) boosted confidence and d) increased use of healthy activities as a coping strategy to help manage stress and emotions. Evidence that participants obtained new respect for diversity and knowledge of self-included: Survey responses showing that Blueprint helped participants a) share their culture, b) learn about their own culture, c) learn about other people's culture, d) become more accepting of people's differences; e) increase their self-reflection and knowledge of self. The data also suggests that Blueprint helped to improve participant's social connectivity, yielding: a) increased social attachments (sense of emotional closeness from which one derives a sense of security), b) new friendships, c) new capacity to reach out for help and tap into community resources.

## The Blueprint Program

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*“They come for the hip-hop and stay for the healing.”*

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### Background

Blueprint is not your run-of the-mill youth outreach program. In Blueprint, youth become empowered with a culture they are interested in. Youth get nudged out of their comfort zone to dance, stomp, bucket drum, meditate, write poetry and self-reflect, and have honest open discussions about the struggles in their lives. The hip-hop helps them connect, and the conversation help them open up and reach out. By centering on dance and cultural sharing, while also weaving in group discussions, Blueprint programs activate physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual health in a powerful community setting.

It was over 10 years ago, when Blueprint Founder Stephen Leafloor, AKA “Buddha”, first developed the Blueprint program as a tool for intergenerational and community healing. Having experienced the healing effects of hip hop arts and culture first hand and armed with expertise in the field of youth social work and breakdance, Buddha designed a potent ‘blueprint’ to foster healing in communities undergoing repeated cycles of trauma and tragedy. Blueprint’s innovative model of healing has brought positive hip hop healing programs to over 5000 youth in First Nations, Inuit and new immigrant urban communities. More recently, Blueprint adapted its programming to meet the diverse cultural and mental health needs of youth in secure detention facilities.



In this Ontario Trillium Foundation funded program series, the Blueprint model has been expanded once again to serve various under-resourced, at-risk communities across Ottawa. Blueprint has engaged community partners to work with Crown ward youth, alternative schools, youth in custody, youth at risk for gang-involvement, first nations youth, youth from immigrant families and disabled youth. The aim is to reduce social isolation and help youth achieve a sense of belonging with their local community. Social Isolation, a feeling of being disconnected from the community, can be a toxic force in youth’s lives exacerbating feelings of low self-worth, shame, loneliness, depression, and other mental health concerns. Through team building activities, self-reflection, and deep discussions, youth learn to support each other, gaining confidence, and a deeper connection to the people in their community.

Check out this [video](#) capturing the spirit of all three programs in Year 1 of the Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant.

## Program Goals, Objectives and Indicators

Blueprint aims to equip youth with sustainable tools towards reducing their social isolation through positive community engagement, healthy coping strategies and personal achievement. Towards this goal, the program objectives break down as follows:

### Program Objectives

*To provide tools for reducing social isolation to a diverse group of marginalized youth:*

Indicators: youth demographics (including age gender, newcomer status, and ethno-cultural background); the use of healthy coping strategies, participation in healthy community activities, and increased confidence.

*To promote positive attitudes about diversity and knowledge of self:*

Indicators: opportunities to share culture; increased appreciation for diversity; increased knowledge of self.

*To improve youth's social connectivity:*

Indicators: improved connection with others (Social Provisions Scale), a willingness to reach out for help, a new awareness of community supports, and new friendships.

### Program Participation

Blueprint partnered with 3 different core community agencies to help connect youth with the Blueprint program.

Program 1: The Main Program took place at the [Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre](#), which provides a range of social supports and services that enable the empowerment of residents, community resilience, and the inclusion of all.

The follow up Spoken Word program took place at Carson's Community House.

Program 2: The program took place at [The William E. Hay Centre](#), a 40-bed residential facility serving male youth in secure detention and secure custody. The centre provides a series of educational options and life skills training through the McHugh School Program. Blueprint received strong support from the McHugh School program.



Program 3: [Notre Dame High School](#) anchored the program and youth from four high schools attended through the [Pathways to Education](#) program, (Woodroffe High School, Sir Guy Carleton High School, St. Paul's High School and Notre Dame High School).

### Program Breakdown

This series of Blueprint Pathways programs uses the same basic ingredients that has made Blueprint successful in the past. These include: 1) role models, mentorship and mental health education led through group discussion; 2) breakdance, spoken word, arts, meditation, journaling, self-reflection and cultural activities; 3) community, culture and performance. By combining pillars of cultural, social, emotional, and physical well-being, Blueprint aims to empower youth with strong community connections, and reduce social isolation.



### Blueprint Staff

Blueprint programs are led by a culturally diverse team who are among Canada's top artists, breakdancers, cultural leaders and youth outreach workers. Many have life experience that the youth relate to. Each individual has their own unique story about how the hip hop community and culture supported them throughout hardship, trauma and healing. The staff's cultural diversity reflects that of the facility's youth population and enables youth to have a selection of personalities, stories and perspectives to connect with. Blueprint staff members teach youth how hip-hop arts and culture can be a powerful template to engage healthy notions of social support, community connections and cultural pride.



This project featured a videographer and photographer to capture the flavour and emotion of the program.

### Main Program

Blueprint Pathways' Main Program is a weeklong intensive 9am – 5pm program with 5 to 9 staff members

Blueprint encourages staff from partnering programs to participate along with youth. This gives youth the opportunity to build different and stronger relationships with staff. Buddha, along with the Blueprint staff, leads

the group in discussion sessions staggered between breakdance instruction. There are alternative activities such as spoken word and artwork to get involved in for those youth who prefer to engage in those side projects. Each program is slightly unique, and the content is adapted and modified based on both the cultural and educational needs of the youth in the facility, as well as the staff's skills and expertise.

### *Main Program Discussion Topics*

1. Bringing your own culture into hip hop and cultural pride.
2. Anger management (finding your 'one mic'<sup>1</sup>) and Buddha's Story.
3. Media manipulation.
4. Sabotaging yourself with drugs and alcohol.
5. Respect and loyalty of oneself, others, one's environment and community - treatment of women.
6. Bullying, learning to say you're sorry, rebuilding relationships and fear of trusting.
7. Impulse control.
8. How to reach out for help and community resources
9. Toxic vs healthy relationships
10. Why not gangs: a hip hop perspective – getting a new familia
11. Healing paths, sexual abuse and being safe. Healing throughout one's life and asking for help.
12. Who to talk to when bad things happen. Personal Inventory, safety plans and outside resources.
13. How will you sabotage yourself (upon release from the facility)?

This menu of topics is adapted slightly based on specific needs of the youth in each program.

### *Main Program Activities*

- a. Warm up and cool down (daily).
- b. Dance skills: backspin, top roc, freezes, dance routines – the hustle, stomp, bucket drumming, traditional culture (lessons that build throughout the week).
- c. Traditional hoop dancing, and indigenous culture presentation about the significance of regalia and smudging.
- d. Songs, spoken work and raps.
- e. Visualization/meditation exercises (daily).
- f. Journaling, self-reflection and poetry (ongoing).
- g. Art project (builds throughout the week).
- h. Final showcase (families and community members come to see the show).

### **Spoken Word and Dance Follow Up Programs**

Following the Main Blueprint Program, youth had the opportunity to participate in a 16-week Spoken Word Workshop (2 hrs/week), or a 16-week follow up dance program that contained similar dance activities as the Main Program.

The Spoken Word workshops were run by 2 facilitators who teach participants that 'literacy is a weapon'. Participants are encouraged to build vocabulary and tap into the therapeutic and cathartic properties of writing and claiming their words by practicing the art of spoken word.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'One Mic' concept comes from a song by rapper Nas, with the line 'All you need is one mic'. 'One mic' is a metaphor for having a passion. Whether it's dance, writing, kayaking, singing, or math, all you need is one thing to focus on to keep you going through tough times in life. Blueprint teaches youth that their 'one mic' can be used as a coping mechanism for managing anger and other maladaptive behaviour patterns.



### *Spoken Word Program Themes*

- a. What's your legacy? Write it and recite it. Take ownership of your words.
- b. My life story.
- c. Rebuilding concepts of loyalty and respect.
- d. The importance and significance of journal writing, and the value of keeping this practice over your lifetime.

Participants from the follow up programs had the opportunity to share their achievements in a Final Showcase Event, which brings families and the community supporting youth together to witness their hope, pride and self confidence.

## **Evaluation Methods**

### **Design and Measures**

The evaluation was conducted as a mixed method design and included both quantitative surveys and qualitative written responses.

**Social Provisions Scale Survey:** This survey was a standardized measure put in place by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for all projects under the Connected People funding stream, aimed at reducing social isolation.

The Social provisions Scale has 6 subcomponents, each measuring a different aspect of outcomes derived from building social connections and relationships (Cutrona and Russell, 1987).

These include:

1. *Guidance* (advice or information)
2. *Reassurance of Worth* (recognition of one's competence, skills and value by others)
3. *Social Integration* (a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar interests, concerns, and recreational activities)
4. *Attachment* (emotional closeness from which one derives a sense of security)
5. *Opportunity for Nurturance* (the sense that others rely upon one for their well- being)
6. *Reliable Alliance* (the assurance that others can be counted upon for tangible assistance).

The Social Provisions Scale was collected using a *Before* and *After* design, meaning that the same survey questions were delivered the week prior and the week following the Main Program. This allowed us to compare youths' scores on program outcome measures before and after the program's delivery.

**Polling Survey:** In addition to the Social Provisions Scale, Blueprint created a survey designed to capture the impacts of the Blueprint Pathways program on participants. This survey captures elements unique to the Blueprint model such as the adoption of the ‘one-mic’ approach as a coping strategy and impacts on youths’ beliefs around embracing culture and diversity.

**Written Answer Questionnaire:** The written answer questionnaire was designed to gain a more holistic sense of the impact the Blueprint program had on self-reflection, self-confidence and self-knowledge. These traits are important because they lay the ground work for understanding others.



## Results

### **Program Objective 1: Provided tools for reducing social isolation to a diverse group of marginalized youth.**

Survey data reveal that Blueprint Pathways has created opportunities for a diverse group of youth to a) participate in healthy community activities, b) develop new skills, confidence and coping strategies.

#### *Opportunities for a diverse group of youth.*

#### **Demographic Results: Age, Gender and Newcomer Status**

Overall across all schools and facilities, 96 youth and staff participated in the Main Program. A total of 55 participants completed the demographics survey, 23 males, 29 females and 3 people who did not specify a gender. The average age across all programs was 16 years (min = 14, max = 24). Seven participants identified as a newcomer to Canada and 2 identified as refugees.

At Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre, 23 youth and staff participated in the program. A total of 16 participants completed the demographics survey, 8 males, 6 females and 2 people who did not specify a gender. The average age at Rideau Rockcliffe was 17.5 years (min = 17, max = 24).

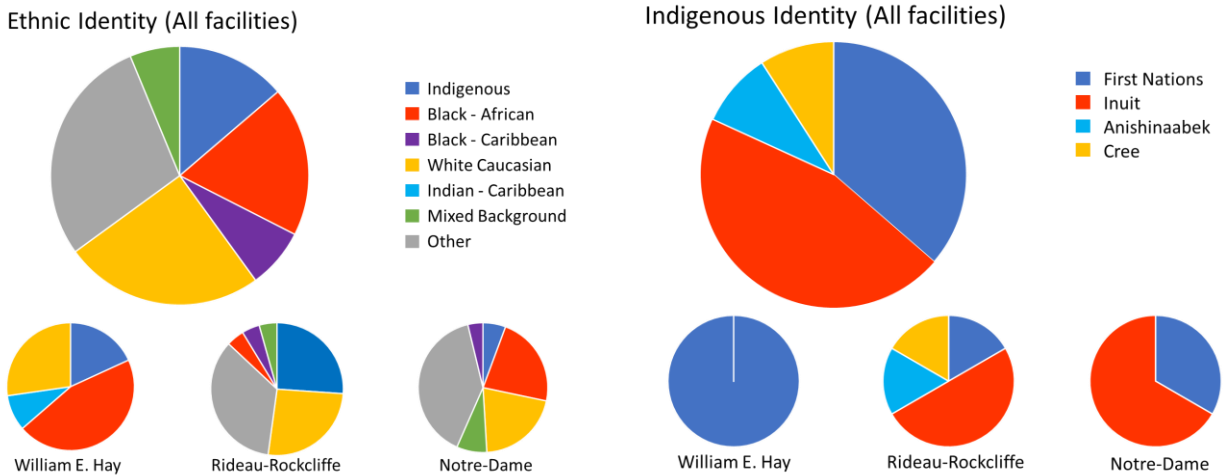
At William E. Hay Centre (WEHC), 22 youth and staff participated in the program. A total of 9 male participants completed the demographics survey. The average age at WEHC was 17.5 years (min = 16, max = 19); and 2 participants identified as newcomers to Canada.

At Notre Dame High School, 51 youth and staff participated in the program. a total of 30 participants completed the demographics survey, 6 males, 23 females and 1 person who did not specify a gender. The average age at RMYC was 15 years (min = 14, max = 16). Five participants identified as a newcomer to Canada and 2 identified as refugees.

Approximately 126 youth and staff attended various follow up activities. The evaluation focused on the Main Program, and therefore results reported below are for the Main Program, but not for the follow up activities.

## Demographic Results: Ethnocultural identity

Figure 1. shows the breakdown of ethnocultural identities for the program overall and for each facility. Participants came from over 20 different ethnocultural backgrounds, and 7 of them were newcomers, 2 with refugee status. Many youth participants came from racialized communities who often experience unfair barriers on their path through early adulthood. Blueprint connects with youth participants by providing a diversity of mentors and stories to connect with and having staff representation that reflects the diversity of the youth.



**Figure 1. Ethnic Identity Results** include a) Ethnic identity at all schools and facilities, where the ‘other’ category includes South American, Middle Eastern, South Asian and East Asian; d) Indigenous Identity, displays specific group identified by indigenous participants. Smaller pie charts indicate the demographic breakdown for each facility: William E. Hay Centre (Ottawa, ON), Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Centre (Ottawa, ON), Notre Dame High School (Ottawa, ON).

### Healthy community activities.

#### Written Answer and Polling Results

*“It helped me a lot how to have fun with people how to express myself and I learned how to dance and beat box. I had a lot of fun during blueprint everyone enjoyed it as well as I did and the fact everyone got together and did so well. I find that amazing everyone put all their problems aside for that one week that was awesome.”* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*“I learned how to DJ, dance, and make beats with drum sticks and my hands.”* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018



*"Now I can use my dance moves to express myself. Blueprint has helped me find myself and what dance really means... I wish Blueprint becomes an even bigger organization, so it can touch another kids heart just like how it touched mine because I'm 100% positive that there is another kid out there going through the things Buddha went through, so that Buddha can let them know it's all going to be fine"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*New Skills, confidence and coping strategies.*

**Written Answer and Polling Results**

*"The most interesting talk to me was where to get help and your one mic. My one mic is things I will do when I am stressed. This helps me to stay out of trouble. It's important to get help so that we find happiness."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*"I realized how much I love to dance and how much more positive with myself, that I shouldn't blame everything on myself. It is hard tho, always trying to*

*stay positive for others even tho you need help yourself."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

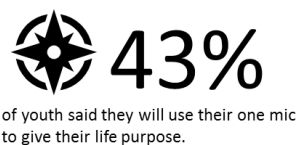
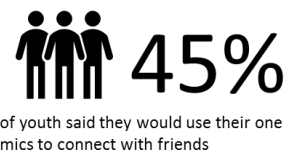
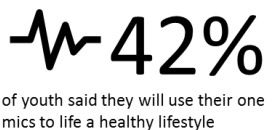
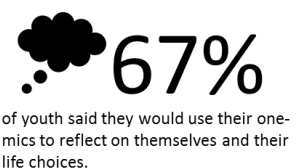
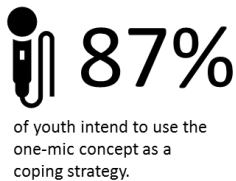
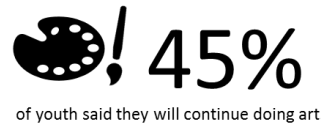
*"I already used dance to help express myself or just let go of stress or when I'm feeling down. So, it taught me new moves and some other ways to just take a break from life and lets me just connect with myself"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"of everything I learned this week they showed me how much confidence I have and how much I like dancing and learning new things"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"The thing I was most impressed about myself this week was that I didn't just up and call it quits, cuz I usually do with most things but I'm glad I pushed through and stuck with it till the end of the week"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*"I am most impressed about be being able to open my mind and try something new. Blueprint is awesome. I thought I wasn't going to like it at the beginning, but I loved it. I always thought people would judge me if I danced. I was wrong!"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*"Yesterday I realized that all my passions and hobbies tie into each other and keep me grounded. They tie into each other like a web that offers support, stability, and a way to nourish my mind, spirit and body."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, RIDEAU-ROCKCLIFFE COMMUNITY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2017



*"[One participant] showed great restraint by removing himself, He knew he might blow so I'm proud of him. And the fact that he came back the next day – amazing!" - STAFF, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018*

**Program Objective 2: Built bridges promoting respect for diversity, knowledge of self and social inclusion.**

Written answer and survey data reveal that Blueprint Pathways helped youth to a) develop positive attitudes about culture and diversity, b) improve their knowledge of self (and ability to understand others), and c) improve social inclusion.

*Positive attitudes about culture and diversity*

**Written Answer and Polling Results**

*"The culture of hip hop doesn't care about your background. It doesn't matter where you come from and Blueprint staff is a perfect example of that because they all have a different background, which really amazes me."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"The power of Blueprint is that it takes all the participating people regardless of background, title, and position and levels the playing field to have everyone relate as fellow humans. It allows everyone to see each other in a different light in a safe and inclusive environment. It fosters tolerance and acceptance of differences. Amazing Program!!!"* - STAFF MEMBER, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*"They include a lot of diversity, so it doesn't make you feel uncomfortable. It makes you feel more engaged in the program. Others feel the same way and have the same energy as you so your able to have fun"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

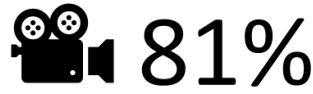


*"To me the most interesting talk was how [blueprint staff] came to be what they are. Because life paths and transitions are interesting to think about. One thing I learned this week is everyone has their own path."* – YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

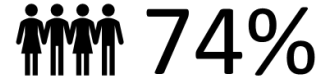
*Knowledge of Self*

*"Blueprint helps me understand myself better because it allows me to be myself knowing that no one will judge me for who I am. When I was dancing, I've noticed that everyone has their own character and now I have gotten to find out mine and that has been a great experience. Also, in group work I saw myself collaborating with others very well. I didn't just get to know myself but my body too and its strengths and weaknesses and that's how I got to know myself better."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"The blueprint team was awesome, they helped me when I struggled. They helped me find myself and helped me be a better person for myself and society."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018



of youth said they learned more about other cultures and backgrounds.



of youth said they learned to embrace our differences.



of youth said they learned to be more accepting of people that are different from them.



of youth said they were able to share their culture.

*"[Blueprint] helped me realize I need creative outlets. When I first started the program, I was stressed because of classes and a bit depressed, but it helped me express myself and it helped me take my mind off things... This has taken stuff off my shoulders that I had for a long time and I understand myself better because of it. Thanks Blueprint!"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"The Blueprint experience has helped me know myself by opening my mind to different paths in life I could possibly take. I was nervous at the start of the week but once the first day ended and the second began it got easier to just be myself around the blueprint team. My favorite part of the week was the final day when we put on the show for everyone to see. I struggled at times with some of the dance moves and at other times with staying on beat but by the end of the week, I've mastered how to get into the headstand position."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

*"The program brings new energy & provides each person to have self-reflection to overcome difficult situations. The sharing of stories has brought issues to light & positive ways to deal with them. Thank you to the staff at Blueprint for showing their 'one-mics' to youth and community partners and being real."* - STAFF MEMBER, RIDEAU-ROCKCLIFFE COMMUNITY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2017

*"To understand the outer world, reflect inward"* - BLUEPRINT STAFF, 2018

*"Blueprint gave me a different outlook on life"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

### Social Connectivity

#### Written Answer and Polling Results

*"Throughout the week I met new people and bonded with lots of fun and amazing people."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"It gave me a good chance to meet new people and make new friends. Also, it let me find people who share the same interests as me and I now have friends to sing and dance with. This has also helped give me more self confidence."* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018

*"At the show in the cypher I felt all the energy and I could do things that I never could do when I was practicing. My heart rose. I love blueprint. It really changed how I think. I will learn more about dancing when I get released. Everyone worked together beef or not. It was awesome. Seeing people work as a team. Blueprint 4 Life"* - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, WILLIAM E HAY CENTRE, OTTAWA, 2018

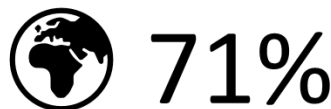
*"Blueprint helps me connect with others because we all have to collaborate and work together to make something as a team. We work with different people in different groups, so I can work and*



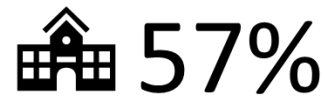
of youth said Blueprint helped them create new friendships.



of youth said Blueprint inspired them to teach others what they had learned.



of youth said Blueprint helped them feel part of the community.



of youth said Blueprint gave them new options for community resources to reach out to.



of youth said Blueprint helped them learn how to reach out for help when they need it.

*connect with different people coming up with ideas for dance moves for a routine.” - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018*

*“It helped me understand others a lot, seeing how they dance, all their amazing talents and even getting to get closer to people and making friends, it has also taught me that I have amazing friends and people who look out for me, and that I do have people to go to.” - YOUTH PARTICIPANT, NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA, 2018*

### Social Provisions Scale Results

There was a significant increase in the social attachment subscale of the social provisions scale across schools and facilities *After* the Main Program as compared to *Before* scores ( $F(1, 43) = 6.04, p = .018$ ).

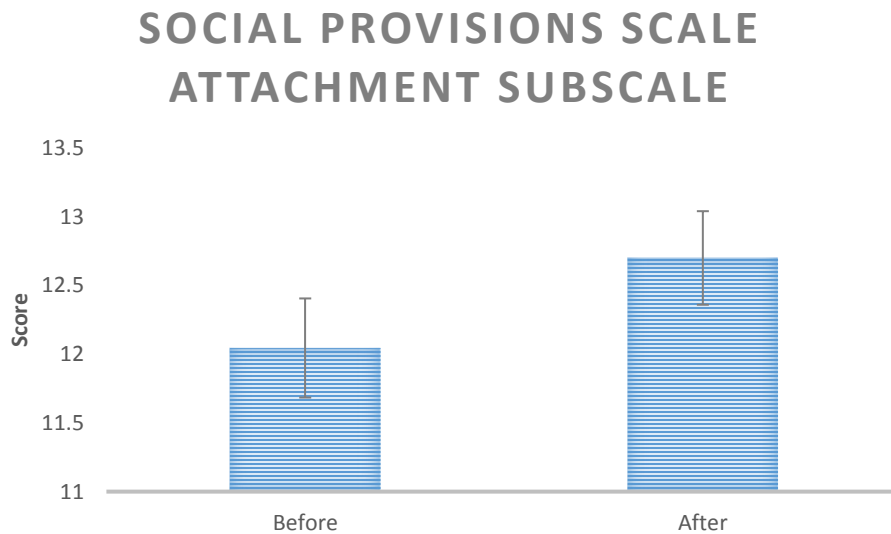


Figure 2. Social Provisions Scale, Attachment Subscale. There was a significant increase in scores on the attachment subscale of the Social Provisions Scale *After* the Blueprint program as compared to scores achieved *Before* the program,  $F(1, 43) = 6.04, p = .018$ . Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

The attachment subscale measures participants sense of emotional closeness from which one derives a sense of security (Cutrona and Russell, 1987), and consisted of the following questions:

1. I feel that I do not have close personal relationships with other people (reverse coded)
2. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being.
3. I feel a strong emotional bond with at least one other person
4. I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person (reverse coded).

There was no significant change between the *Before* and *After* scores for the other 5 subscales in the Social Provisions Scale, including Guidance, Reassurance of Worth, Social Integration, Opportunity for Nurturance and Reliable Alliance.

## Discussion

### Summary and reflections

The evaluation suggests that Blueprint Pathways has been successful in achieving many of the outcomes set out in our three program objectives. Overall, we obtained evidence supporting our Theory of Change (Fig. 2). Specifically, our data yielded evidence supporting the following:

A diverse group of marginalized youth gained tools for reducing social isolation:

- a) healthy community activities such as dance, stomp, drumming, traditional hoop dancing, spoken work, meditation and art, and youth expressed an intention to continue these activities.
- b) New skills, confidence and healthy coping strategies (e.g. using one-mics)
- c) Participants came from over 20 different ethnocultural backgrounds, and 7 of them were newcomers, 2 with refugee status. Many youth participants came from racialized communities or immigrant families, groups who often experience unfair barriers on their path through early adulthood.

Participants gained positive attitudes about diversity, and knowledge of self:

- a) opportunities to share culture
- b) knowledge about other cultures, one's own culture and a heightened respect for diversity
- c) self-reflection and knowledge of self

Participants experienced improved social connectivity:

- a) new friendships
- b) sense of close social attachments
- c) knowledge of and connectivity to local organizations, and understanding of how to reach out for help if needed

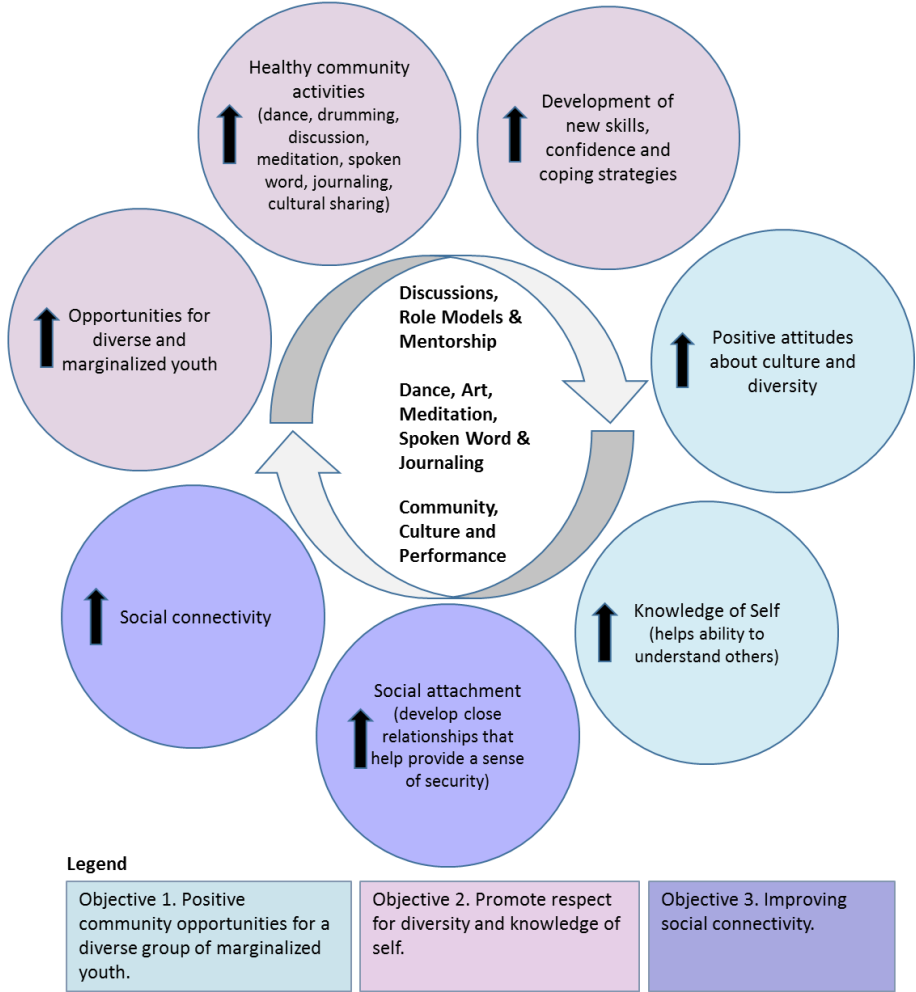




Note that the above is a superficial summary of the data. The results section can be referred to for a detailed description of outcomes across the different tools we used to measure program outcomes. It should be noted that the Polling Survey methodology used is limited in the conclusions we are able to make. While the Polling Survey gives us a good idea of the youth’s perception of the impacts that Blueprint had, it does not tell us definitively whether those outcomes changed significantly from *Before* to *After* the Blueprint program. The Social

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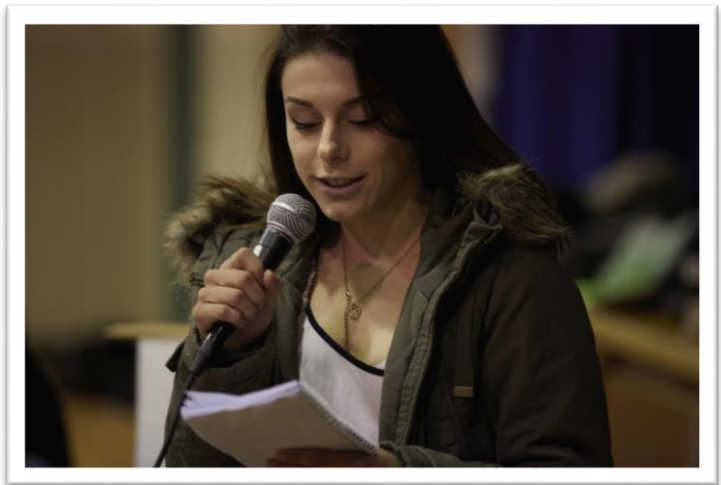
### Theory of Change: How Blueprint Works



Provisions Scale does have a *Before – After* design (participants filled out this questionnaire Before and After Blueprint), and therefore we can determine whether Blueprint significantly affected these outcomes. While we should be cautious about interpreting the data, we can draw out broad themes about the impacts of Blueprint on our program objectives.

### Blueprint provided tools for reducing social isolation to a diverse group of marginalized youth:

Our findings suggest Blueprint had a positive impact on youth by providing the opportunity for them to participate in healthy activities where they learned new skills and gained confidence. For many youth, Blueprint was their first experience being introduced to activities such as dance, spoken word, meditation and self-reflection. For others, Blueprint help youth solidify an existing interest and passion for these skills. There is abundant supporting evidence for the effects of physical and arts-based activities on health and well-being (Bilderbeck et al 2013; Stuckley and Noble, 2010, Cashin et al. 2008). Over 85% of youth expressed their intention to continue engaging in the healthy activities introduced to them, and to use these activities as tools to cope when times get tough. Evidence for the positive effects of these activities include impacts on self-awareness, quality of life, hope, cognitive functioning, body image, mitigation of stress and bolstering immune system function, to name just a few (for review, see Stuckley and Noble, 2010). By exposing youth to these healthy tools for coping, self-expression and community engagement, Blueprint helps youth see new pathways for leading healthy and productive lives.



The results highlighted how useful the concept of ‘one-mic’ was for youth. The ‘One Mic’ concept comes from a song by rapper Nas, with the line ‘All you need is one mic’. ‘One mic’ is used as a metaphor for having a passion. Whether its dance, writing, kayaking, singing, or math, all you need is one thing to focus on to keep you going through tough times in life. Blueprint equips youth with several activities that could be used as a ‘one mic’ coping device, including dance, storytelling, journaling, traditional culture, meditation, drumming, dj-ing and art and graffiti. Blueprint also encourages youth to explore other passions that might work for them. Blueprint teaches youth that they can have multiple ‘one mics’ ready for different situations to be used as a coping mechanism for managing emotions and curbing negative thoughts.

Over 60% of youth said they will use their ‘one-mic’ to help boost their confidence. We know from previous research that the sense confidence gained through learning new skills helps build resilience (Caputo, 2003). Self-confidence helps youth build a sense of control over their own life circumstances and can help buffer the impact of stressful life events on a youth’s mental and physical health. In the Blueprint Written Answer Questionnaire, many youths expressed surprise that they could actually do complex skills if they simply tried and practiced them. This simple lesson, that youth can control their own outcomes, is a powerful one. From there, youth talked about discovering how to develop their skill, individuality, and creativity; and the realization that they can take control of their accomplishments and change their futures. While this lesson of ‘controlling your own outcomes’, and developing your creativity and individuality was exemplified mainly through arts-based activities, the written answer results suggest that youth were gaining more confidence in making positive change across different life contexts. Youth expressed new motivation and confidence to consider different life paths, try new things, reach out for help and share their skills with family and communities. In other words, the impact Blueprint has on the youth’s self confidence in the context of dance, art and hip hop also seems to be translating into other aspects of the youths’ lives.

### Blueprint helps youth form positive attitudes about diversity and greater knowledge of self.

One of the unique aspects of Blueprint programming is that it mixes discussion-based therapy techniques with fun community activities that help break down barriers between the youth. In both program pillars, youth can share and learn about the culture and experiences of others. When youth learn about the diversity and experiences of their peers and mentors, they can also gain valuable insights about their own life experiences and pathways. This knowledge of self, in turn, helps youth become more compassionate and respectful of the diverse experiences and life paths of others.

Sharing stories and hearing the stories of others also appears to have an impact on the youth's capacity for tolerance and respect. Over 60% of youths reported learning how to be more accepting of people that are different from them. They talked about a realization that everyone has a complex background, and that people don't deserve to be judged based on their ethnic or cultural background, and first 'quick to judge' impressions. Over 80% said they learned about other

cultures and backgrounds, and over 70% said they learned to embrace these differences. This demonstrates the development of moral reasoning, where youth are using different logic for thinking through complex situations, thinking 'outside themselves', practicing empathy and finding healthier ways to interact with the world.



### Blueprint helps to improve social connectivity and sense of social support

When Blueprint staff share some of their own stories about their past, this not only provides scaffolding onto which staff can connect and empathize with youth, but also serves to model this 'story-sharing' behaviour as a healthy coping mechanism that fosters social connection and paths to healing. When combined with team work and fun activities like dance, art, and spoken word, and traditional hoop dancing, Blueprint provides the perfect environment for healthy friendships to flourish. Indeed, over 80% of youth stated that Blueprint helped them to create new friendships.

Close social relationships act in a number of ways to directly affect health, and to act as a buffer mediating the ill-effects of stress on mental and physical health (Cohen 2004). The increase in the attachment subscale of the Social Provisions Scale scores suggests that participants experienced an increase in relationships with emotional closeness that help provide them with a sense of security (Cutrona and Russell, 1987). Increases in social attachment has been linked to decreases in emotional loneliness (Russell et al., 1984) and psychological distress; and increases in self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Quimby and O'Brian 2006). By emulating and practicing the coping skills that Blueprint champions (such as talking about stress and participating in healthy activities),

participants of the program should directly experience the positive impact of these practices on their relationships and well-being.

The evidence supporting increased perceptions of social connectivity suggest that Blueprint's impact on the social environment helps to create a more cohesive, connected and inclusive environment for everyone. Over 70% of youth said that Blueprint made them feel more included in the community. A sense of inclusion in community increases youths' access to what is referred to as 'social capital': relationships between individuals, social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000). The right kind of social capital and social participation is vital to a youth's success in young adulthood, as measured through outcomes like employment, school performance and health (Mathur and Clark et al. 2014; Cohen, 2004; Berg and Huebner, 2011). In connecting youth with a positive and healthy community from within the program, Blueprint hopes to give youth tools for building healthy social capital after the program ends.

## Conclusion

The evaluation presented in this report demonstrates that, over the course of the Blueprint Pathways program, youth gained tools to change certain aspects of their life towards more positive outcomes. They reported experiencing a heightened self-confidence by learning and sharing new skills. Youth gained and used new tools for connecting with peers and staff and built friendships that gave them a sense of social support. These outcomes are expected to not only positively affect the youth's behaviour and experiences within the Blueprint program, but also improve the likelihood that youth will succeed in leading a positive, healthy lifestyle once they leave the facility.

The mantra of the hip hop community is 'Peace, Love, Unity and Having Fun'. It is fundamentally inclusive and cohesive. Hip hop grew out of poverty and therefore is designed by and for communities experiencing hardship and marginalization. It is this community and social support piece that manifests such common statements as 'Hip



Hop saved my life'. Blueprint's work helps to shape a vision that Hip hop culture can be leveraged as a tool for healthy community development.

This series of Blueprint programs in the Ottawa area emerged out of a desire to produce programming that serves a preventative function in the community, to reach youth before they end up in secure custody facilities, in gangs, or with serious mental health concerns. Blueprint programming in the community serves as an important source for building networks and supports during the difficult transitions youth face as they grow into early adulthood.

Should you have any feedback, questions or concerns, or would like to share your story of how Blueprint has affected you, please get in touch with our Program Evaluator, Emma Ware at [emma@wellesleyinstitute.com](mailto:emma@wellesleyinstitute.com).

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Appendix A. Polling Survey Results

<b>Use of the 'one-mic'<sup>2</sup> as a coping strategy...</b>	
87%	of youth said that they intend to use the 'one-mic' concept as a coping strategy
<b>Activities youth intend to continue ...</b>	
76%	of respondents said they would continue dancing
45%	of respondents said they would continue meditation
45%	of respondents said they would continue spoken word/poetry
45%	of respondents said they would continue doing art
42%	cultural activities
38%	of respondents said they would continue story telling (telling their own story)
28%	of respondents said they would continue journaling
26%	of respondents said they would continue stomp
25%	of respondents said they would continue drumming
21%	of respondents said they would continue DJ-ing
<b>Youth intend to use their 'one-mic' to...</b>	
73%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to manage stress and emotions
66%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to reflect on their selves and their life choices
62%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to boost their confidence
53%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to live a healthy lifestyle
45%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to connect me with friends
43%	of youth said they would use their 'one-mic' to give my life purpose
<i>Table 2. Ways in which Blueprint helped youth develop the 'one-mic' strategy as a coping skill. Percentages in the left column indicate the percentage of respondents who selected the corresponding phrase to the right as something Blueprint did to help them develop their coping skills using the one mic-strategy.</i>	

<b>When it comes to culture and diversity blueprint helped youth to...</b>	
81.1%	of respondents said they learned about other cultures and backgrounds
73.6%	of respondents said they learned to embrace our differences
62.3%	of respondents said they learned to be more accepting of people that are different
37.7%	of respondents said they learned the value of sharing their culture
30.2%	of respondents said they learned more about their own culture
<i>Table 2. Ways in which Blueprint helped youth to promote respect for culture and diversity. Percentages in the left column indicate the percentage of respondents who selected the corresponding phrase to the right as something Blueprint did to help them develop their understanding of culture and diversity.</i>	

<sup>2</sup> The 'One Mic' concept comes from a song by rapper Nas, with the line 'All you need is one mic'. 'One mic' is a metaphor for having a passion. Whether it's dance, writing, kayaking, singing, or math, all you need is one thing to focus on to keep you going through tough times in life. Blueprint teaches youth that their 'one mic' can be used as a coping mechanism for managing anger and other maladaptive behaviour patterns.

Blueprint helped youth connect with others by...	
80.4%	of youth said Blueprint helped them create new friendships
76.5%	of youth said Blueprint inspired them to teach others what they have learned
70.6%	of youth said Blueprint made them feel included in the community
56.9%	of youth said Blueprint gave them new options for community resources they can reach out to
54.9%	of youth said Blueprint helped show them how to reach out for help when I need it
<p><i>Table 3. Ways in which Blueprint helps youth connect with others.</i> Percentages in the left column indicate the percentage of respondents who selected the corresponding phrase to the right as something Blueprint did to help them connect with others.</p>	