



Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth: Evaluation Report

Funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation

2017 - 2020



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About Blueprint

Blueprint for Life is an organization that offers culturally appropriate programs designed for youth, founded on hip hop, rooted in traditional culture, and centred on community needs. Built into the programming is the long-term goal of not only promoting the healing of individuals and communities, but also of building long-term sustainability and leaders for tomorrow.

In 2014, Blueprint Pathways was created as federally incorporated non-profit to extend the reach of Blueprint for Life programming into Urban Centres and Youth Correctional Facilities. Pathways was the recipient of a \$500,000.00 grant from Justice Canada and completed three years of programming in maximum security youth facilities across Canada. Blueprint Pathways is likely the largest group therapy program in the history of Canada's corrections system.

One of the main recommendations we heard in our work with youth in secure detention, was that youth need supports like Blueprint not only while in custody, but in the community to help them avoid ending up in the justice system in the first place.

This series of Blueprint programs – *Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth* - funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, emerged as a response to this need, to serve a preventative function, and to reach youth before they end up involved with crime, gangs, or experiencing mental health issues. Blueprint programming in the community serves as an important source for building networks and supports during difficult transitions youth face as they grow into early adulthood.

Check out these videos capturing the spirit of Blueprint's Ontario Trillium Foundation program series.

[Blueprint Pathways - Ottawa Urban Schools 2018 YouTube video](#)

[Blueprint Pathways - Frederick Banting Alternative High School YouTube video](#)

[Blueprint Pathways - Banting Alternative follow up program YouTube video](#)

[Blueprint Pathways - Sir Robert Borden 2019 YouTube video](#)

[Blueprint Pathways - Ottawa Technical Secondary School 2020 YouTube video](#)

[Blueprint Pathways AY Jackson 2020 YouTube video](#)

For more information about Blueprint please check out [Blueprint's Website](#).

Our Team

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Thank you to our partners and collaborators: Rideau Rockcliffe Community Centre, William E. Hay Centre, Notre Dame High School, Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program, Sir Robert Borden High School, A.Y. Jackson Secondary School, Ottawa Technical Secondary School, Ottawa Pathways to Education, Elizabeth Wyn Wood Secondary Alternate Program, Richard Pfaff Alternate Program, Norman Johnston Secondary Alternate Program, St. Pius X Catholic High School, The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, Carson's Community House, M.F. McHugh Education Centre School Program, Woodroffe High School, Sir Guy Carleton High School, St. Paul's High School

A Letter of Thanks

Well we have come to the end of an amazing 3 year run of healing programing funded graciously by the Ontario Trillium foundation. Of all the government and foundation funding we have received in the past we can honestly say we felt the most supported on this engagement with the Trillium Foundation being the most organized of all funding partners. Despite the Covid19 challenges we managed to complete all our programing and goals except for one final spoken word youth festival which was to be an additional add on for this final year.

Working under the premise that connected young people can create their own communities and support each other through the many issues young people face, we used hip hop, traditional culture, poetry, photography, journaling, drumming and meditation, to create bonds and healing. If young people don't connect in positive ways, they will often seek out negative ways of belonging in the form of gangs, antisocial behavior, racist idealism, and often destructive behavior in their homes or to themselves. On the flipside we know that when people connect in positive ways, not only are these things reversed, but young people are more likely to reach out and use social supports and each other when needed. We applaud the Ontario Trillium foundation for making "Connected People" a priority as when it happens in a positive way it creates not only wellbeing for individuals, but also wellbeing for society where empathy can organically grow. All of this is of crucial importance today as we live in a modern world where not everyone is treated as equals and many systemic issues raise their head in ugly ways.

We worked with over 600 youth, teachers and social workers with our week intensives followed up by powerful spoken word and dance workshops. The intensity of the week programing gradually opened up fears, wounds, trauma and challenges, replaced by hope, new friends, shared healing, community, and new ideas on how to engage life. It was a time of deep reflection with conversations that the youth owned and directed. Many youth expressed that the Blueprint experience was one of the most intense and positive things that had taken place in their lives. Not only giving them confidence in themselves but chipping away at the loneliness many of them often feel trapped in. We worked with lots of special needs youth, alternative school youth, youth with anxiety, mental health challenges, addictions, youth from poverty and low-income housing, newly immigrated youth, youth of color, incarcerated youth, and indigenous youth. Youth who most often feel forgotten and without a voice.

To help capture the spirit, passion, creativity, and bonding we created many documentaries on the projects and I really hope people take the time to bear witness to these amazing young adults. To



Ontario's Attorney General presents Blueprint with Trillium Award

humanize things beyond statistics we have included not only youth testimonials, poetry, photos and art in this report, but also links to these amazing videos.

We are particularly proud of comments from the school boards especially in the alternative system. In our first Year of working at Banting Alternative School we were told we had the largest group participation and buy in, in the history of their programming. This extended into the following year where four different Alternative Schools arranged transportation so that the youth could all participate together. Again, this programming created a new benchmark of cooperation within the alternative system. (Special shout out to Mary Williamson from Banting for all the ongoing love and support – ya'll honorary Blueprint for life !!!).

Another exceptional thing happened. Three youth from the first year's programming went on to not only become youth mentors but also Blueprint staff as we continued our work in other schools. Witnessing the personal growth and commitment of these youth was healing and confidence building for them, but also gave great hope in life's possibilities to their peers.

There are so many partners and schools to thank all the way from admin staff, to student counsellors, educational assistants, teachers, principals and community organizations like Pathways to Education and the Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre. Thank you all so much for believing in your youth and actively participating in our work. So many diamonds in the rough got to shine with your support.

Another amazing thing happened during all this community engagement. We actively had my son Aaron Leafloor who has Downs Syndrome and Autism involved as a full-time staff on all projects. Obviously as his dad I was extremely proud, but I totally did not anticipate the power that his presence would have not only on our team but on the large groups we worked with. It helped hammer home the point that we really did want any special needs youth and their support workers involved, but it also truly created a caring environment that was healing beyond my expectations. Empathy for each other is hard to create, but when it happens organically its magic.

I really need to thank the Blueprint Team and our Board of Directors. Troy, Steve, Marie, Julie, Abria, Christine, Sami, Brad, Candice, Jamaal, Ray, Habiba , Aaron, Corey, Jamie, Sarah, Emma, Andel, Alonzo, Alex, Sanjay, Chris , Ken and Susan. You are not only incredible artist, researchers, and human beings, but your ability to honestly reach and empower youth are the most beautiful gifts I have ever seen. I'm honored to have worked side by side with all of you. I will see you all on future projects after this Virus thing gets taking care of!

Love and Respect

Buddha aka



Stephen Leafloor
BA, MSW, M.S.C, Ashoka Fellow Canada,
Founder of BluePrintForLife.ca
Executive Director Blueprint Pathways

Executive Summary

Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth

Blueprint Pathways is a hip-hop arts and discussion-based program designed to empower marginalized youth and reduce social isolation. 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 combining arts, dance and intense discussion, Blueprint programs activate youth's physical, mental, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual selves. This unique format aims to build a foundation for social connection, break barriers and build bridges, and discover pathways for a connected life. Ultimately, Blueprint wants to help young people reduce social isolation and develop healthy social connections.

As part of the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Connected Peoples funding stream, Blueprint received a grow grant for a three-year series of nine programs in the Ottawa area. *Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth* worked with several local partners to provide programming to Crown Ward youth, alternative schools, youth in custody, youth at risk for gang-involvement, first nations youth, youth from immigrant families and youth with disabilities. We delivered week-long intensive 'Main Programs' (9 am – 4 pm) combined with 8-week (2 hrs/wk) dance and spoken word Follow Up Programs. Main Programs took place at 1) Rideau Rockcliffe Community Centre; 2) William E. Hay Centre; 3) Notre Dame High School; 4) Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program; 5) Sir Robert Borden High School; 6) A.Y. Jackson Secondary School; and 7) Ottawa Technical Secondary School.

Program Evaluation

A mixed method design was used to evaluate Blueprint's Main Programs which included both quantitative (participant surveys) and qualitative methods (written questionnaires). 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.

Summary of Results

A total of 505 youth and staff completed the week-long intensive program. The evaluation findings show that Blueprint helped build a foundation for making connections through: a) increased engagement in healthy activities and meaningful discussions; youth expressed an intention to continue these activities and continue telling their stories; b) new coping strategies to help manage stress and emotions; c) personal achievement and confidence to try new things, connect with others, set goals and build skills. Findings showed that Blueprint helped participants build bridges with others and breakdown barriers inside themselves through a) getting to know others and developing more open and supportive connections with their peers; and b) increased knowledge of self, gaining insight into their own emotions, past experiences, choices and who they are/who they would like to be as a person. The data also suggests that Blueprint helped to youth create pathways to a connected life through: a) Social provisions that protect them from social isolation (attachment, social integration, guidance, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, and opportunity for nurturance), b) connecting youth supports, and highlighting creative strategies for engaging and supporting disconnected youth, c) enabling youth goals and aspirations for a healthier and more connected life.

Introduction

Background

Loneliness is a damaging social problem. Being excluded causes a kind of social suffering that lights up the brain in the same pattern as physical pain (Eisenburger et al. 2003). The emotional fallout of rejection triggers defensiveness, disables empathy, reduces cooperation and rouses aggressive tactics, setting up a destructive cycle that will further isolate the individual (Twenge et al 2007, 2001). The ensuing chronic stress can create lasting physical, social, emotional and psychological ailments (Caspi et al. 2006, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2015; Bethune, 2014).

The impacts of loneliness are especially detrimental in the formative years of youth. Adolescence and young adulthood are crucial times for healthy social development. Young people are forming their hopes and dreams for the future, preparing for the next steps in their education and careers, and engaging in social connections that form the basis of how they will relate to others throughout life. Experiencing social isolation and feelings of exclusion can undermine all of this.

Social isolation is complex and not only takes place around issues of poverty, race, culture and gender (Angus Reid, 2019), but is also deeply impacted by the lived experience of trauma (complex trauma and singular events). Cultivating healing, hope, trust and open dialogue needs to be done in creative ways that set up safe environments for social connection to re-root and flourish. The arts and art culture can be nourished as a safe place for youth to find their own voice and healthy ways to connect with others.



Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth

In 2017, the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Connected People's Grant funded Blueprint Pathways for a 3-year (2017 – 2020) program series *Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth* focused on connecting marginalized and disconnected youth. The aim of this program series is to reduce social isolation and help youth achieve a sense of belonging within their local communities.

Throughout these programs Blueprint Pathways 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 youth with disabilities.

Through arts-based activities, hip hop culture, self-reflection, mentorship and deep discussions, youth learn to support each other, gaining confidence, and a deeper connection to the people in their community. Youth get nudged out of their comfort zone to dance, stomp, bucket drum, meditate, write, use their voice, and self-reflect. This creates unique bonds of trust, enhancing the intensity of the engagement, and sets the tone to have honest and open discussions about the struggles in their lives. Blueprint's dynamic staff team further break down barriers by modelling innovative ways of talking about difficult issues such as abuse, anger, addiction, bullying, racism, asking for help, tapping into outside resources, and finding paths for healing. Many youth leave the program with deep connections to others, a renewed sense of hope, a new reservoir of coping skills and a sense of belonging.



Our Impact Framework

In this Blueprint program series, our aim is to equip youth with tools to reduce social isolation. We do this by providing fun opportunities for community engagement and personal achievement, while also teaching youth coping strategies for when life gets difficult. Our discussions and positive interactions lay the groundwork for appreciating each other's unique contributions, as well as youth seeing the value that they themselves bring to their community. Our hope is to create a space for youth to build sustainable connections with their peers, adults and community organizations. The specific program objectives and measurable outcomes are broken down in the Figure below.



Figure 1. Blueprint Pathways' impact framework for reducing social isolation in youth participants. The three main impact pillars include 1) Building a Foundation for Connecting Youth, 2) Helping Youth Build Bridges and Break Barriers, and 3) Supporting Pathways to a Connected Life. The expected outcomes that help support each of these pillars can be found in the circles below each pillar heading.

Building Partnerships

The Journey

Blueprint started out working with many community partners in the first year of programming and discovered that although many organizations expressed a keen interest in being involved, when it came time to commit to the programming, there were some challenges in organizations sending their staff and youth. We quickly refocused and realized that a school was the ideal place to form an anchor for our week intensives and that schools would be happy to send their youth who may be struggling in the regular curriculum. So we became the curriculum for the entire week for all the youth involved. This made us an ideal fit for the alternative system but also for regular schools who often had youth who were falling through the cracks, struggling socially, or perhaps struggling with English as a second language coming from a family newly immigrated to Canada. Every school population also has youth that need special supports, such as youth with Downs Syndrome, Autism or physical or behavioral challenges. It was a great benefit for all participants to have these youth involved as we were able to actively celebrate diversity every day. We also were blessed to be able to work with incarcerated youth at Ottawa's William Hay Centre. We also often had many youth from racialized communities, along with Inuit and First Nations youth. The common thread was that the youth we worked with often felt isolated from the larger school populations or in their communities. Part of the success of our program can be seen in the fact that schools recognized the needs of their own students. The need to broaden their perspectives, have fun, feel a part of something and discover they were not alone in their teenage challenges. Our systems we have set up in our world have many youth falling through the cracks. All our partners recognize this but often don't have options to turn to. To all our partners - **thank you!**



Our Partners

Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre and Carson's Community House provide a range of social supports and services that enable the empowerment of residents, community resilience, and the inclusion of all.

The William E. Hay Centre, a 40-bed residential facility serving male youth in secure detention and secure custody.

M.F. McHugh Education Centre School Program provides educational programs and services to students who are in Care and /or Treatment, Custody and Correctional Facilities.

Notre Dame High School (NDHS) is a Catholic high school in Ottawa's west. NDHS anchored the Blueprint program and youth from four different 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).

Pathways to Education program started in Toronto in 2001 and expanded to Ottawa in 2007. There are currently 20 Pathways to Education program locations across Canada. High school drop-out rates of program participants have decreased by as much as 70 per cent and the rate at which youth go on to college or university has increased by up to 300 per cent.

Sir Robert Borden High School is a large, culturally diverse, community-based secondary school that inspires learning while promoting well-being, creativity, critical thinking and leadership.

A.Y. Jackson Secondary School develops students into informed, literate, decision-makers who become well-rounded and caring global citizens.





Ottawa Technical Secondary School (OTSS) educates for the world of work, providing life and employability skills in an environment that encourages responsible citizenship and fosters hope, inspiration, and opportunity. OTSS hosts District Special Education classes, such as the General Learning Program, Physical Support Program, Autism Program and Behavioural Intervention Program.

Norman Johnston Secondary Alternate

Program is part of a family of 6 Ottawa-Carleton District School Boards serving 1100 students. Alternate programs developed in Ottawa in the 1980's to remove barriers to success and increase the independence of our students.

Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program aims to provide an alternate form of attaining secondary school credits. Students come to Frederick Banting for many different reasons including needing high school completion, academic upgrading, flexible scheduling, or needing a change from the traditional high school model.

Elizabeth Wyn Wood Secondary Alternate Program supports students having difficulties with the regular curriculum and requiring an educational experience outside of regular high school.

Richard Pfaff Alternate Program offers flexible schedules, workplace opportunities, smaller classes and self-paced learning. The Alternate Program is primarily an independent learning environment where students complete one credit at a time and at their own pace.



St. Pius X Catholic High School, founded in 1958, the school, operated by the publicly funded Ottawa Catholic School Board, teaches grades 9-12. As of September 2012, enrollment stood at around 900 students.



The Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) has been serving Inuit children, youth and their families since 2005. Originally established by parents of children in the Head Start program at Tungasuvvingat Inuit, OICC has become a multi-service Inuit organization that provides cultural, educational, recreational and social support services to families of Ottawa's growing Inuit population.

Program Design

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, bucket drumming and body percussion, photography and video, 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 reduced social isolation.



Blueprint Staff

Blueprint programs are led by a diverse team of top Canadian 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 hip hop community and culture supported them throughout hardship, trauma and healing. The staff's cultural diversity reflects that of the participants 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.

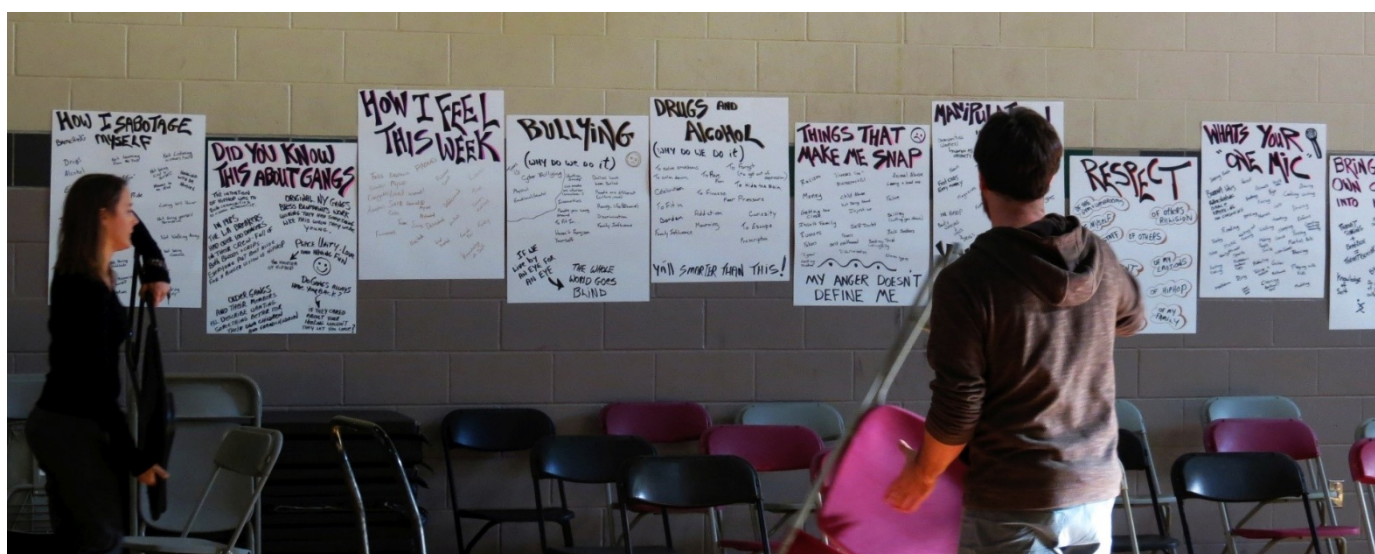
This project featured a videographer and photographer to capture the flavour and emotion of the program.

Main Program

The Main Program takes place over a single week, Monday to Friday, 9am – 4pm with 5 to 9 staff members. Blueprint encourages staff from partnering schools and organizations to participate along with youth. This gives youth the opportunity to build different and stronger relationships with local community mentors and supports. Buddha (Stephen Leafloor, Blueprints Founder and Executive Director) along with Blueprint's staff team, lead the group in discussion sessions staggered between dance instruction, and other art-based activities, such as spoken word and artwork. Youth work together throughout the week to create a showcase, presented on the final day of the program. This is a powerful way to create a shared sense of pride in the group as a team. While the content and flow of each program is adapted to meet the cultural and educational needs of participants, the programs tend to follow a general schedule of discussion topics and activities, as follows:

Main Program Discussion Topics

- How to cope when life gets hard - finding your 'one mic'¹ and Buddha's Story
- Cultural pride and bringing your own culture into hip hop
- Media manipulation
- How we sabotage ourselves, negative self-talk, impulse control, substance use, and toxic relationships
- Respect and loyalty to oneself, others (treatment of women), one's environment and community
- Bullying, learning to say you're sorry, rebuilding relationships and fear of trusting
- How to reach out for help and community resources
- Toxic vs healthy relationships
- Why not gangs: a hip hop perspective – getting a new familia
- Healing paths, sexual abuse and being safe. Healing throughout one's life and asking for help
- Who to talk to when bad things happen. Personal Inventory, safety plans and outside resources
- How will you sabotage (and save) yourself?



¹ 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 challenges in life.

Main Program Activities

- Warm up and cool down (daily)
- Dance skills: backspin, top roc, freezes, dance routines – the hustle, stomp, bucket drumming, traditional culture (lessons that build throughout the week)
- Traditional hoop dancing, and indigenous culture presentation about the significance of regalia and smudging
- Songs, spoken word and raps
- Visualization/meditation exercises (daily)
- Simple homework
- Journaling, self-reflection and poetry (ongoing)
- Art project (builds throughout the week)
- Photography and video
- 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 or 8 week spoken word workshop (2 hrs/week), or a 16 or 8 week follow up dance program that contained similar dance activities as the Main Program.

The spoken word workshops were run by 2 facilitators who encouraged participants to build vocabulary and tap into the therapeutic and cathartic properties of writing and claiming their words by practicing the art of spoken word. The workshops create a safe place for youth's voices to be heard, teach youth how to enhance their writing skills, and build confidence in taking ownership of their words. They teach 'Literacy is a weapon', upbuild vocabulary, demonstrate proper usage of literary devices, build performance techniques and encourage the use of learned material from school courses. Participants are supported to produce a minimum of two completed 'Spoken Word pieces.'

Spoken Word Program Themes

- What's your legacy? Write it and recite it. Take ownership of your words.
- My life story.
- Rebuilding concepts of loyalty & respect.
- The importance 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 the Final Showcase Event, which brings families and community together to witness youth's talent and performance.



Program Evaluation

The evaluation focused on the Main Program and used a mixed method design, including both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (written response) components. For all evaluation methods, participants were informed about the purpose of the evaluation, and care was taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the evaluation data. Completing the evaluation was voluntary and there was no penalty for non-participation.

Social Provisions Scale Survey: The Social Provisions Scale (SPS) is a standardized measure put in place by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for all projects under the Connected People funding stream. This measure helps assess a program's impact on protective factors related to social isolation.

The Social Provisions Scale has 6 subcomponents, each measuring different aspects of social connections and relationships (Cutrona and Russell, 1987). These include:

- **Attachment** measures emotional closeness of personal relationships from which one derives a sense of security.
- **Social Integration** measures a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar activities, attitudes, beliefs, interests, concerns, and likes.
- **Reassurance of Worth** measures perceived recognition of one's competence, skills, advice, talent and abilities by others.
- **Reliable Alliance** measures the assurance that others can be counted upon for dependable help, assistance, aid, and emergency contact.
- **Guidance** measures access to guidance during stress, and sources for advice and problem disclosure.
- **Opportunity for Nurturance** measures a sense that others rely upon one for their well-being.

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 comparison of youths' scores *Before* and *After* the program's delivery. The Social Provisions Survey analysis used a repeated measures ANOVA, and used data only from participants who completed at least 80% of both the *Before* and *After* program surveys. Surveys were matched using anonymous unique data identifiers generated in the Ontario Trillium Foundation's evaluation forum. Data that could not be matched was not included in the analysis.

Polling Survey: In addition to the Social Provisions Scale, Blueprint created a survey designed to capture outcomes unique to the Blueprint model such as the adoption of the 'one mic' approach as a coping strategy and attitudes about culture and diversity.

Written Answer Questionnaire: The written answer questionnaire was designed to understand the program's impact on youth's knowledge-of-self and how this has helped them to connect with others. Responses to the written answer questionnaire was combined with data from other letters, poetry, and testimonials about the Blueprint program. While the entire evaluation focused on the main program, feedback from of the spoken word workshops were included in the qualitative data set. This data set was analyzed using a thematic analysis, where themes were drawn out of the data to tell the story of Blueprint's impact on the outcomes related to social connectivity among youth.

Results

Demographics Results

Program Participation

Overall, approximately 505 youth and community partners completed the Main Program and 313 completed the follow up programming. Of those participating in the Main Program, a total of 294 completed the demographics survey, with an average age of 16 years (min = 14, max = 25), 131 males, 162 females and one person who did not specify a gender. Twenty-three participants identified as newcomers to Canada and 11 identified as refugees. Each individual program breaks down as follows:

1. At Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre, in October 2017, 27 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. Of these, 14 participants completed the demographics survey, 8 males and 6 females. The average age was 19 years (min = 17, max = 25).
2. At William E. Hay Centre, in November 2017, approximately 22 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 9 male participants completed the demographics survey. The average age was 18 years (min = 16, max = 19); and 2 participants identified as newcomers to Canada.
3. At Notre Dame High School, in February 2018, 49 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 29 participants completed the demographics survey, 6 males and 23 females. The average age was 15 years (min = 14, max = 16). Five participants identified as newcomers to Canada and 2 identified as refugees.
4. At Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program, in October 2018, 43 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 25 participants completed the demographics survey, 12 males and 13 females. The average age was 17 years (min = 14, max = 19).
5. At Notre Dame High School, in February 2019, 81 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 47 participants completed the demographics survey, 15 males and 32 females. The average age was 16 years (min = 14, max = 18). Five participants identified as newcomers to Canada and 3 identified as refugees.
6. At Sir Robert Borden High School, in February 2019, 82 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 39 participants completed the demographics survey, 13 males and 26 females. The average age was 15 years (min = 14, max = 20). Three participants identified as a newcomer to Canada and 1 identified as a refugee.
7. At Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program, in November 2019, 54 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 41 participants completed the demographics survey, 16 males and 25 females. The average age was 17 years (min = 16, max = 21).
8. At A.Y. Jackson Secondary School, in February 2020, 67 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 54 participants completed the demographics survey, 29 males and 25 females. The average age was 15 years (min = 14, max = 18). Three participants identified as newcomers to Canada and 1 identified as a refugee.
9. At Ottawa Technical Secondary School, in February 2020, 80 youth and community partners participated in the Main Program. A total of 36 participants completed the demographics survey, 23 males, 12 females and 1 person who did not specify a gender. The average age was 16 years (min = 14, max = 19). Five participants identified as newcomers to Canada and 3 identified as refugees.

Diversity of needs and abilities

In the written evaluation responses, many teachers, Blueprint staff and participants themselves provided insight into some of the unique needs and (dis)abilities of Blueprint participants on this project. Teachers described a high prevalence of special need including autism, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, behavioural challenges, mental health and anxiety disorders. Experiences of bullying, difficulties with social settings and/or histories of trauma were common. Many students also faced socio-economic barriers, had limited positive role models, and/or community supports.

Ethnocultural Demographics

Figure 2. shows the breakdown of ethnocultural identities for the program overall and for each facility.

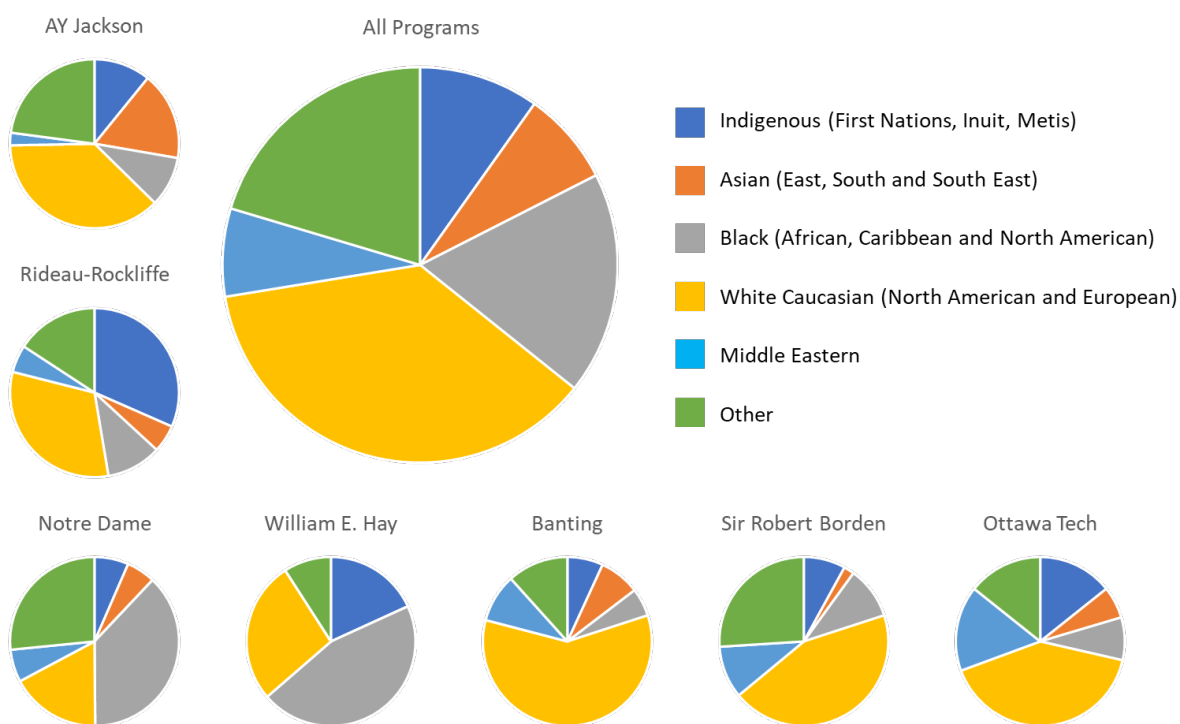


Figure 2. Pie charts present ethno-cultural identity for all Blueprint programs run under the Ontario Trillium Grant. Smaller pie charts indicate the demographic breakdown for each facility.



Evaluation Findings

Our main findings are summarized below and grouped according to our three main objectives.

Objective 1. A Foundation for Connecting Youth



Our findings demonstrate that Blueprint helped create a foundation for youth to connect with one another and with their community. This included opportunities to a) participate in fun activities and discussions (dance, drumming, spoken word, art, cultural activities, meditation, photography, and journaling), b) develop coping strategies and c) achieve new skills and confidence.

Engaging Activities & Discussions



In the written feedback received from participants, youth expressed how much fun they had learning new skills and engaging in mental health discussions in a group setting. Many teachers were surprised at how engaged their students were, especially in student populations where student engagement is difficult (such as teens who have autism, disabilities, or are otherwise having trouble connecting with others). The youth repeatedly described the environment as a safe and supportive space, free from judgment, where they felt free to express themselves. Each youth talked about the activities that interested them the most, ranging from dance, spoken word, beat boxing, slam-poetry, singing, drumming and dj-ing. Many youths described how these challenging, active and artistic activities allowed them to put their problems and differences aside, and just have fun with each other. While the hip hop helped youth bring their guards down, the talks gave them the opportunity to discuss (sometimes difficult) topics that were important to them; youth said they learned, opened up and shared in ways they had not done before. Many youth described the program as a deeply healing experience.

At first, I was worried about whether some of our students would be able to handle this loud interactive super social event. Boy, was I wrong. It was FANTASTIC! Some of the students I was most concerned about thrived and came out of their shells in a way I have never seen before. One was a grade 9 student who happens to be on the autism spectrum. This is a student who struggles everyday just to stay in his seat throughout a class. This week he learned dance routines, drum rhythms, poetry, beat boxing and most importantly he sat front row during every talking circle, actively listening and participating. This week, I saw things I never thought I'd see. We had about 60 students from all walks of life, all with very different abilities. Most of these teenagers, by the end of day one, were hooked [...]. Some even came earlier to wait outside the gym for the BluePrint staff to arrive, others staying to play music, dance or just hang out during lunch break.” - Staff, Ottawa Technical Secondary School

53% intend to continue dancing

35% intend to continue doing poetry and spoken word

48% intend to continue doing art

30% intend to continue doing cultural activities

45% intend to continue doing meditation

25% intend to continue drumming

33% intend to continue using their voice to share their story

Coping strategies



Both youth and teachers talked about the effectiveness of Blueprint's one mic² message as a coping strategy. Youth described how they will use the one mic approach to manage stress, channel their emotions, get in touch with their thoughts, and 'stay grounded' when times get tough. Youth also mentioned that their one mics helped them stay connected to peers, community supports and resources, and that their connection to other people, and new willingness to trust and ask others to help, is perhaps the greatest coping strategy of all.

"This experience with Blueprint has helped me understand that I'm capable of putting myself out there. Normally I would stand on the side lines and observe what was happening rather than be a part of it. However, this week I realized that I don't have to wish I was up there, freestyling or reciting poetry -- I can actually make it happen. When I stepped into the cypher I felt an extreme rush of anxiety...I powered through and hearing everyone clap and cheer immediately made my heart burst with joy. I felt really confident and proud of myself, which is an abnormal experience for me. That experience helped me pursue other goals of mine...Blueprint made me realize that I am more than my anxiety and I don't owe it anything."
 – Youth, Main Program

"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, Main Program

- 74%** intend to use the one mic concept as a coping strategy
- 52%** will use their one mics to reflect on their life choices
- 70%** will use their one mics to manage stress and emotions
- 59%** will use their one mic to boost their confidence
- 48%** will use their one mics to live a healthy lifestyle
- 42%** will use their one mic to give their life purpose
- 45%** will use their one mics to connect with friends

Personal Achievement and Confidence



Youth told us about gaining new skills, confidence and personal growth. Many youth, especially those that hadn't previously engaged in many community activities, were proud, and surprised at themselves, for trying something new, and sticking with it throughout the week. Youth who previously felt isolated and anxious about connecting, talked about gaining confidence to connect with others, find their voice and make friends. Other youth said they were pushed creatively 'out of their comfort zone' to develop skills, perfect dance moves, write great lyrics and produce art they were extremely proud of. Youth participating in the spoken word follow up programs talked about developing their vocabulary, speaking skills, writing abilities and knowledge of literature; and learned to appreciate the profound value of these skills. While the forms of personal development varied widely, the experience of being pushed out of their comfort zone to grow was described by many as uncomfortable but

extremely valuable for their growth and confidence. Many youths felt the confidence they gained would help them gain control of their lives and futures.

² One mic is used as a metaphor for finding activities you love, activities that make you happy and give you confidence. Youth are taught to have many of these activities on hand for different scenarios, and to use these activities as a healthy way to cope with difficult emotions, situations or experiences.

Objective 2. Building Bridges and Breaking Barriers



Our evaluation demonstrates that Blueprint helped youth to build bridges with peers in their community by a) getting to know others and the value of their differences, b) breaking down walls and barriers within themselves to understand themselves better.

Getting to Know Others



Youth valued the opportunity Blueprint gave them to learn about other people - their backgrounds, their journeys, their successes, and struggles. They talked about how important it was for them to hear their peers and staff tell their stories so openly; it helped them understand and appreciate other people's choices and perspectives, and also shed light on the unique value that every person brings to the group. Youth said the sense of empathy and compassion they developed went beyond the walls of the Blueprint program and gave them a new understanding of how to treat friends, family members and strangers. Youth also talked about how watching other people's talents and skills in dance, spoken word or other art-forms, gave them deeper insight into the uniqueness and beauty of people's characters, because it came across in their creative expressions.

60% learned more about other cultures and backgrounds

70% learned to celebrate our differences

60% learned to be more accepting of people that are different from them

I learnt so much about the people around me at this school through Blueprint, and it taught me that people have so much depth to their personalities. Everyone has something to offer, and so much beauty to them.

– Youth, Main Program

Knowledge of Self



Youth said that Blueprint helped them understand themselves better. Many youth mentioned one of the major keys to this self-reflection was by learning from the different life-paths and experiences of Blueprint staff and other participants. Youth talked about how this helped them better understand their own past experiences and struggles and reflect on the choices they made. Many youth expressed how much it helped to understand that they weren't alone in their struggles, that so many people were going through similar situations and that this shared experience gave them confidence to cope and reach out for help if needed. Youth said that the

"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." – Youth, Main Program

experience will help them make more thoughtful and active decisions about the pathways they take in future. Youth also talked about how the artistic activities helped them get to know themselves better, their skills and weaknesses and helped put them in touch with their thoughts and emotions in ways they hadn't experienced before. Some youth said they gained a completely different outlook on life after the Blueprint program, 'finding themselves' and deciding to be a better person for themselves and for society.

Objective 3. Pathways to a Connected Life



We found that Blueprint helped participants find pathways to social connection, including: a) increased social provisions (attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, guidance, opportunity for nurturance), b) increased integration of youth's support systems, c) new aspiration and goals for their future.

Social Provisions



Results show that the Blueprint program had a significant impact on 5 of 6 subcomponents of the Social Provisions Scale across schools and facilities *Before* the Main Program and compared them to scores *After* the main program. We found significant increases in the following subscales:

- **Attachment** ($F(1, 222) = 19.99, p = 0.00$) measures emotional closeness of personal relationships from which one derives a sense of security.
- **Social Integration** ($F(1, 221) = 14.48, p = 0.00$) measures a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar activities, attitudes, beliefs, interests, concerns and likes.
- **Reassurance of Worth** ($F(1, 220) = 22.50, p = 0.00$) measures perceived recognition of one's competence, skills, advice, talent, and abilities by others.
- **Reliable Alliance** ($F(1, 221) = 8.80, p = 0.03$) measures the assurance that others can be counted upon for dependable help, assistance, aid, and emergency contact.
- **Guidance** ($F(1, 221) = 19.53, p = 0.00$) measures access to guidance during stress, and sources for advice and problem disclosure.

There was no significant change between the Before and After scores for the Opportunity for Nurturance subscales in the Social Provisions Scale (measures a sense that others rely upon one for their well-being).

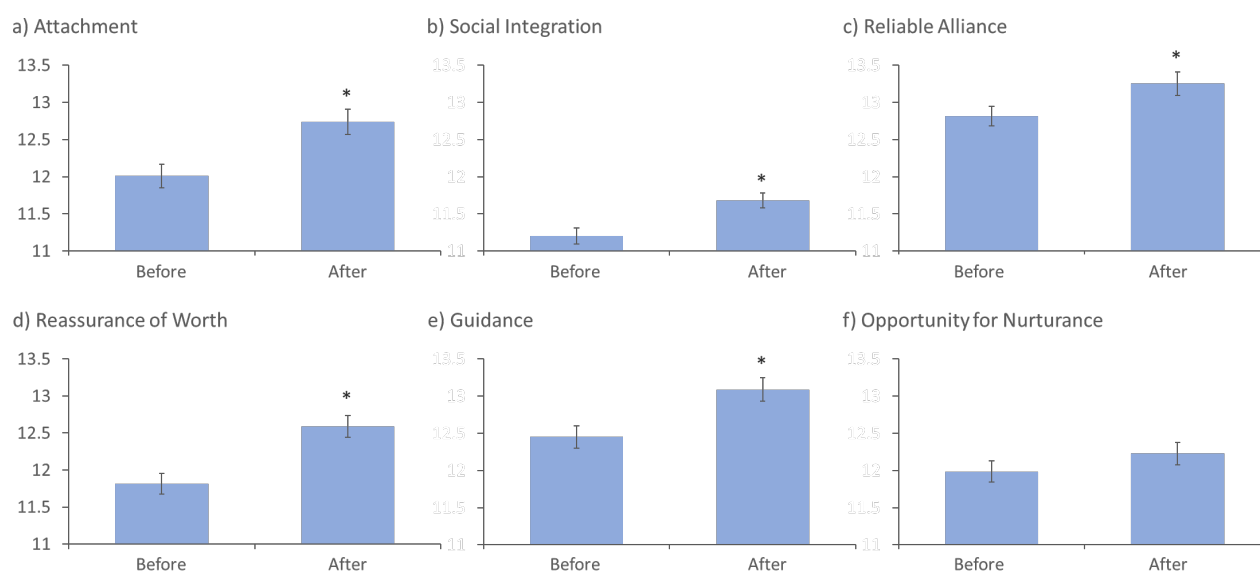


Figure 2. Social Provisions Scale. Graphics show changes in scores on 6 subscales of the Social Provisions Scale *After* the Blueprint program as compared to scores achieved *Before* the program. Error bars represent standard error of the mean. An asterisk (*) indicate a statistically significant difference between *Before* and *After* scores.

Participants written responses gave depth to the results of the Social Provisions Scale:

Attachment

In their written statements Blueprint participants talked about the sense of emotional safety that allowed them and their peers share their experiences, stories, and discuss uncomfortable topics freely without feeling judged. Many eluded to a feeling that the group became a family, and made school feel like home with an unprecedented level of emotional connection and closeness.

Social Integration

Various teachers, especially at alternative schools, described a high prevalence of social isolation in their students prior to the Blueprint program. They also said Blueprint had a powerful impact on connecting youth with one another. Youth talked about making friends or deepening existing friendships through shared interests in program activities, like dance or spoken word. Youth also discovered that difficulties they initially perceived as being unique to them, such as mental health or family situations, were more common among their peers than they expected, making them feel like they were not alone.

Teens need to talk, share ideas, to share laughs, to experience REAL LIFE situations and feel pride at completing something together. Blueprint allows this to happen and the impacts are so evident and flow over into the classroom long after the program has ended. Students who I have not seen engage in conversations are talking to each other in the hall and “Hanging Out” during breaks. I heard one student say to another one today “I didn’t even know your name before”.

*- Teacher, Frederick Banting
Secondary Alternate Program*

The day of our showcase holds a very special place in my heart because it was so amazing to be a part of something where everyone was so accepting and having so much fun.

– Youth, Main Program

Youth described a positive energy and sense of unity when everyone worked together to create the final showcase. No matter what their differences, youth felt they belonged to something that was joyful and valued by everyone. Having fun, talking, laughing together, and experiencing pride in a shared accomplishment (putting on a show) was described by one participant as a celebration of each other’s differences, and unique strengths. Embracing diversity to grow and strengthen of a sense of ‘togetherness’ came through strongly in the written statements from both youth and teachers.



Reassurance of Worth

In their written statements, youth talked about struggling with concepts of self-worth prior to the Blueprint program. During Blueprint, many youth felt that they were able to overcome these doubts. They spoke about feeling love and encouragement to express themselves. Feeling valued, and not judged helped them relax, explore their abilities and build confidence. Youth learned to recognize their own strengths and talents, their ability to collaborate and the value they bring to a team. Teachers talked about how they saw skills and strengths that were rarely shared in a classroom setting, and that Blueprint helped youth share these gifts by helping youth see that there is value in what they have to say and do.

There is stigma surrounding the students at alternative school, a lot of us being labelled as drug addicts, and kids when problems. [...] This workshop proved that we are more than that. It showed us that we are on a healing journey, providing us with healthy resources, encouraging us to become the best we can be.

– Youth, Main Program

Reliable Alliance

Youth said Blueprint helped them gain a sense of having reliable supports for tangible assistance and aid in times of need. This sense of support was derived, not mainly from the Blueprint team, but more

importantly, from peers and teachers. Youth felt that they had made new friendships and strengthened their bonds through discussion and activities, learning to understand and trust each other. Teachers mentioned the value of getting know their students better, and how this would help them better support their students in future.

“[Blueprint] helped me by getting 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, Main Program

Guidance

Youth talked about how the discussion topics were extremely poignant, and relatable to their current situations, struggles and problems. Youth said that hearing other people’s stories helped bring difficult issues to light and that the discussions showed them positive ways to deal with problems. Youth expressed that this subtle guidance helped them shape their approach to making decisions and responding to adversity. Many youth felt that the topics addressed in Blueprint should be more regularly accessible in schools.

I found that most of the topics resonated with things I am personally dealing with, along with friends I have who are in my age group. Bullying, respect, drugs, alcohol, self-sabotage and healthy relationships are topics that are very important for teenagers to hear about to apply to their individual lives.[...] This is real life lessons that we can take with us for the rest of our lives. – Youth, Main Program

Opportunity for Nurturance

Although the Opportunity for Nurturance Subscale on the Social Provisions Survey did not show any significant effect of the program, we did see evidence in the written responses suggesting that youth learned about nurturing. Youth said they gained a better understanding of other people's needs and past experiences, and the importance of giving support, respect, compassion, positive encouragement, and love to other people (even strangers). When youth practiced this 'nurturing' behaviour, they felt the impacts exceeded their expectations and often resulted in reciprocal relationships and 'webs' of support. Instructors noted that the fact that former students served as role models and facilitators was a powerful way to nurture these networks of peer support.

Blueprint taught me the power of positive encouragement and its effect on people. Blueprint was a chance to practice empathy and compassion on people I didn't even know. I was surprised to receive the same back. Blueprint ultimately changed the way I perceive strangers. – Youth, Main Program

Connecting Youth Supports



While many of the partners (schools and community organizations) involved in this program series were already working as a highly connected network of supports for youth, written responses suggest that Blueprint impacted the network's interactions in several ways. For one Blueprint helped organizations form some new and/or deepen existing connections with other organizations supporting youth. For some teachers and staff, Blueprint's approach inspired them, and changed their perspectives and approach to student programming. For example, one teacher talked about realizing the value of organizations that can bring unique experiences and skillsets to students. Another teacher said that, in the past, they had matched their programming decisions to the trend of students being more reserved in recent years, and that the Blueprint program has caused them to rethink this approach. Teachers felt that, after experiencing Blueprint, it was clear that alternative schools (especially) needed more programming for building positive community interactions and social skills. Several teachers admired Blueprint's approach of combining active and artistic activities with open discussion about personal challenges and hoped to integrate this approach into their schools and/or classrooms in some way.

"Blueprint helped me recognize/remember the need to look for organizations that can bring new and unique experiences and skill sets to my students. Anytime my students can connect with a caring adult is a special and welcomed opportunity. Alternate students are often marginalized in their home schools and they aren't the students participating in extracurricular or unique learning situations. It was truly heartwarming to watch them take part in something bigger than the classroom." -Staff, Frederick Banting Secondary Alternate Program

Goals and Aspirations



Many youth said Blueprint helped them find a sense of direction, to set goals and to aspire for greater things. They talked about learning the value of connecting with others to achieve their goals, that to achieve something bigger, they cannot do it alone. By hearing success stories, being supported and encouraged, and learning skills to cope when things do not go according to plan, youth gained confidence to pursue their goals. Whether it was singing, writing, supporting and teaching others, or simply doing well in school; they felt equipped and supported to set goals and make plans. Youth said they better understood the learning process, discovering that it was actually a good thing to try and to make mistakes. This new confidence in their ability to persist and learn from setbacks, made them feel like they could achieve way more than they previously imagined for themselves.

[Before Blueprint] I was just slugging through the motions and doing dumb stuff. But after Blueprint I've reflected, changed and re-evaluated my place in life. A year ago, I had no goals. Personally, I think I would have no future. Now I want to be the UFC middleweight champion and I have a plan to get there. – Youth, Main Program

I have had a rough year but regaining my excitement about writing and literature over the past two weeks, has gotten me back on my feet in school and in life.
– Youth, Spoken Word Follow up Program

- 70%** feel a greater sense of community belonging
- 67%** created new friendships
- 60%** are inspired to teach others what they have learned
- 45%** gained new options for community resources to reach out to
- 52%** learned how to reach out for help



Discussion

The evaluation suggests that the *Blueprint Pathways for Connected Youth* program series has been successful in achieving many of the outcomes set out in our three program objectives. Overall, we obtained evidence supporting our Impact Framework (Fig. 1).

Specifically, our data yielded evidence supporting the following:



BLUEPRINT HELPED BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR YOUTH TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS THROUGH:



- Engaging activities and meaningful discussions. Youth expressed an intention to continue these activities and to continue telling their stories.



- Healthy coping strategies, using Blueprint's one-mic concept, youth built an arsenal of tools to deal with difficult emotions and challenges.



- Personal achievement and confidence to try new things, connect with others, set goals and build skills.



BLUEPRINT HELPED YOUTH BUILD BRIDGES WITH OTHERS AND BREAKDOWN BARRIERS INSIDE THEMSELVES THROUGH:



- Getting to know others and developing more open and supportive connections with their peers.



- Knowledge of self, gaining insight into their own emotions, past experiences, choices and who they are/who they would like to be as a person.



BLUEPRINT HELPED YOUTH CREATE PATHWAYS TO A CONNECTED LIFE THROUGH:



- Social provisions that protect youth from social isolation (attachment, social integration, guidance, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, and opportunity for nurturance).



- Supporting the connectivity of youth supports and highlighting creative strategies for mentors and teachers to support learning and social development in disconnected youth.



- Nurturing youth's goals and aspirations for building a brighter future. Youth built confidence to follow their passions and choose a healthier, more connected life.

Blueprint helped build a foundation for youth to connect with others

With fun, challenging activities, Blueprint pushed youth outside their comfort zones in a supportive environment that nurtured learning, connecting, personal achievement and confidence. For many youth, Blueprint was their first experience actually engaging in community activities with such a welcoming and



inclusive culture. For others, Blueprint helped deepen an existing interest or passion. The well-known health and well-being benefits of recreation include improvements in self-awareness, quality of life, hope, cognitive functioning, body image, stress mitigation and immune system function (Bilderbeck et al 2013; Cashin et al. 2008; for review, see Stuckley and Noble, 2010). Blueprint's approach of using positive interactions and hip hop culture to 'hook' youth on community recreation worked well, with many youth stating they would seek opportunities to continue participating beyond Blueprint.

The idea of using recreational activities, or 'one-mics', as a coping skill resonated with youth and was easy for them to apply in daily life. Youth talked about building their arsenal of one mics to apply to different situations, which builds confidence and resilience to be ready for anything. Youth explored these activities as tools to sort through difficult emotions, connect with others, get in touch with their creative thoughts and escape from stress. Youth walked away not only with confidence and tools to cope, but also with a plan to find support and direction in times of uncertainty.

The opportunities for personal achievement shined a light on each youth's unique strengths and abilities. Many Blueprint participants expressed surprise that they could do complex skills if they simply tried and practiced them. This simple lesson, that youth can control their own outcomes, is a powerful one. We know from research that confidence fosters resilience (Caputo, 2003). When youth develop a sense of control over their own achievements, they also feel more in control overcoming other challenges. While this lesson in self-confidence was taught to youth mainly through arts-based activities, our findings suggest that youth gained confidence in other challenging areas such as connecting with their peers, considering different life paths, or reaching out for help.



Blueprint helps youth get to know others and build their knowledge of self.

One of the unique aspects of Blueprint programming is that it mixes discussion-based therapy techniques with fun community activities. These two program pillars, together, help youth simultaneously break down internal barriers for connecting, while also building bridges to connect deeply with peers and mentors through discussions about life, its challenges, and healthy ways to thrive. Youth end up with a more complex and honest understanding of their peers, teachers and themselves. They learn compassion and empathy. Throughout the program, youth experience the organic transformation of their community into an environment of emotional safety, love and support. Youth develop their moral reasoning and begin to consider complex factors when thinking about one another's situations. Youth learn healthier ways to interact and support each other.

When Blueprint participants learn about the journeys other people's lives have taken, they also gain valuable insights into their own lives. Other people's stories help reveal alternate paths in complex situations. After discussing difficult topics, youth were given space and creative tools to deeply reflect on what they learned and build self-knowledge through writing, dancing, and collaboration.



Blueprint helps youth find pathways to a more socially connected life.

Increases in the subscales of the Social Provisions Scale (Attachment, Social Integration, Reassurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance and Guidance) suggests that Blueprint participants benefited in ways that will reduce their susceptibility to social isolation and its negative outcomes. We also found evidence that Blueprint influenced the network of mentors, teachers and trusted adults supporting youth. The sense of being supported helped youth set goals and aspire for healthy, more connected lives.

The increased scores on the Attachment Subscale suggests that Blueprint participants experienced an increase in relationships with emotional closeness and safety (Cutrona and Russell, 1987). While many youth come into Blueprint with 'walls up', Blueprint staff model and encourage emotional connectivity by creating safe spaces to talk about difficult topics. Youth develop a sense of security and willingness to open up. Building these emotionally safe relationships with peers have been shown to decrease loneliness, while increasing self-esteem, life satisfaction, and health (Quimby and O'Brian 2006; Russell et al., 1984; Cohen 2004).

The increased scores on the Social Integration Subscale suggest that Blueprint helped to create a more inclusive social environment. Social integration means having others to share activities with and having friends who share interests and concerns. This sense of integration can expand youth's social networks and build healthy patterns of trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000). The right kind of social integration is vital to a youth's success in employment, school performance and health (Mathur and Clark et al. 2014;

Conclusion

While many youth came into the Blueprint program feeling alone and isolated, they left feeling inspired, uplifted and connected. Youth engaged in fun recreational activities, meaningful discussions, developed coping strategies, learned new skills and gained self-confidence. They learned about each other and gained insights into their own identities, abilities, and values. They forged close supportive relationships, built community, and felt valued by mentors and peers. They imagined new goals for themselves and made plans to achieve them. The schools and teachers also gained new insights into the students, the support they need and the experiences they crave.

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 school, at home and as they grow into adults.

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, combined with careful mental health education, can be leveraged as a tool for healthy community development and social connection.



'They came for the hip hop, they stayed for the healing.'

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My experience at Blueprint for Life

Blueprint is a place where I am me.
Blueprint is a place where I feel free.
My experience of this I will never forget.
Here, is a place I'll never feel no threat.
We dance and drum to our own beat.
Move around all day and stomp our feet.
As our sticks bang the drums
Our hearts do a little dum dum dum
We twist and turn all day long
As we dance and clap to the song
We open our arms wide and cheer.
As there is no longer any fear.
I know you all are very smart
So you can understand this is from the heart
The things I've learned every day
I know from now on will forever stay
This is a week that will be very missed.
So now I shall give you all a goodbye kiss.

-- youth participant, A.Y. Jackson Secondary School

