OUR EMERGING ADULTS:

Bringing Transitional Age Youth Into Community

Project Report

April 2017

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Preface

"We were born to be spiritual beings--loving and kind."[1]

The potential that we are born with is shaped by our experiences as we travel through our world. In the modern North American mainstream practice, families are foundational and when families are absent or deemed to be inadequate to meet the needs of growing children, the state steps in. When the state steps in, they become the legal guardian with all of the responsibilities expected of parents. Historically, the state as parent has been shown to be largely inadequate to meet the complex needs of children.

We share the land with the First Nations whose rearing of children is a communal responsibility. The state's intervention into First Nation child care had many adverse impacts and recently there has been a paradigm shift back to the historical two row wampum belt agreement. It is a slow shift with many navigational hazards emerging along the way.

Children and youth enter government care through child welfare, developmental services and correctional systems. The trigger for each system is trauma-based therefore each child or youth has already being negatively impacted prior to governmental care. Trauma creates its own care needs apart from general child rearing activities. In addition, child care providers can inadvertently or deliberately cause further harm to their wards. When society (or communities in the case of First Nations) takes on responsibility for lives, they are accountable for the results of their actions. It is this that brought community stakeholders together to facilitate "Our Emerging Adults-Bringing Transitional Age Youth Into Community" as a forum to consider actions taken and actions that need to be taken to improve inadequate guardianship systems. The forum was held on February 13, 2017 at Manidoo Baawaatig Campus in Kenora. Although most attendees were citizens and or Kenora service providers, some attendees were from First Nations communities.

The project was designed in three parts with each segment serving a different purpose. The organizing process was a capacity building exercise in collaborative community development. The forum was an event meant to establish a base understanding of Transitional Age Youth (TAY) related resources/needs, offer an opportunity for broader community networking and to provide a space for creative solutions development. The final piece of the project is the summative evaluation which provides a document that reports on information shared and evaluates the overall effectiveness of the project.

We thank all who contributed and participated in this community event. We hope that the spirit of collaboration that led us to and through this project will continue to weave through our daily lives, bringing us together in order to generate collective impact on those issues that are hurting the peoples within the City of Kenora and neighbouring First Nations.

Steering Committee Membership

Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services, Changes Recovery Homes, Creighton Youth Services, CMHA Kenora Branch, FIREFLY, Kenora Association for Community Living, Kenora Chiefs Advisory, Kenora Fellowship Centre, Kenora Rainy River District Child & Family Services, Kenora Rainy River District Human Services Justice Coordinating Committee, Kenora Substance Abuse & Mental Health Task Force, Making Kenora Home, Nechee Friendship Centre, Mental Health & Addictions Programs Lake of the Woods District Hospital, Northwest Community Legal Clinic, Northwest Health Unit, Ontario Provincial Police

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[1] All unreferenced quotations are from project participants. Attribution is avoided to increase the collaborative voice.

Our Sharing

"Growing up was mostly bad. Once in a while I got a good worker or a good foster home but it never lasted."

"We struggle with limited resources, the constraints of confidentiality, fragmented services and a lack of integrated service planning protocols."

"I see the kids on the street but I don't know what to say or do that would help."

Youth. Service Providers. General citizenry. All see the issue through the stream of faces that pass them through the days. Hopelessness lurks behind the tsunami of need that flows through the community. Although joyful moments of connection do splash up, it is hard to hold onto those moments because the oppressive need surges onward despite efforts to channel the waters.

Defining At Risk Transitional Aged Youth

There are many different sectoral definitions of transitional aged youth. For the purpose of this forum, youth between 14-24 years who are involved with children's services (protective, justice and developmental) and will require adult services are transitional age youth (TAY). It is broad span but because youth can declare themselves independent at the age of 16, transition must be considered before that point. One of the many challenges to age-based definitions is that there is a difference between chronological and functional ages. Quite practically, frontal lobes are still developing until about age 24 for all people and specifically the trauma that brings youth into state-supported care impacts neurological development negatively.


Falling Off the Ferris Wheel

Social services are the safety net of the community. Youth who are receiving services within the children's sector often do not transition into the adult support system despite the need. They slip through for a lot of reasons- some drop out, some lack the ability to navigate the systems, some are impacted by trauma and cannot connect easily. The bottom line is that once they fall out of the protection of our social structures, they are at elevated risk for multiple conditions including homelessness.

TAYs experiences reduce educational and employment attainment[2]. They have higher rates of concurrent substance use disorders with serious emotional disturbance or serious mental illness. They are also at higher risk for unplanned pregnancy, contact with juvenile and criminal justice systems and homelessness. More than half of the kids who have emerged from the child welfare system are

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[2] All TAY demographic data is from Without A Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey, Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd, Kaitlin Schwan, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2015

homeless before the age of 24. Further, over 70% of homeless youth are indigenous which is not surprizing given the cultural biases within the child welfare system that are only recently being recognized by Canada as a nation. Another high risk demographic are LGBTQ2 youth. This is a group whose needs have been missed locally in recent homelessness reports and advocacy efforts.
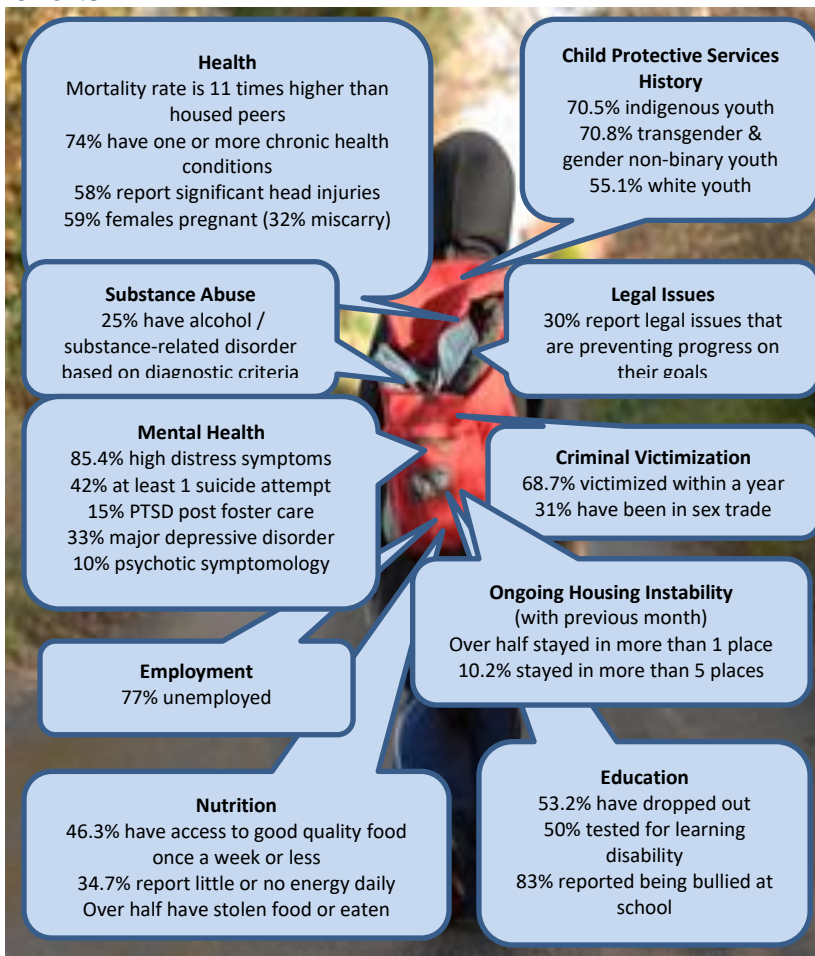
"Don't label us."

Research enables service providers to get a fuller picture of a population's needs. Research evidenced the call to address cultural bias within the child welfare sector. Research alerted local planners to the previously unrecognized needs of LGBTQ2 youth. Research supported the establishment of the local RISK table. Research is a tool that categorizes to increase understanding of contributing factors. When those categories become labels, they dehumanize the population that the research intended to help.

Health
Mortality rate is 11 times higher than housed peers
74% have one or more chronic health conditions
58% report significant head injuries
59% females pregnant (32% miscarry)

Child Protective Services History
70.5% indigenous youth
70.8% transgender & gender non-binary youth
55.1% white youth

Substance Abuse
25% have alcohol / substance-related disorder based on diagnostic criteria

Legal Issues
30% report legal issues that are preventing progress on their goals

Mental Health
85.4% high distress symptoms
42% at least 1 suicide attempt
15% PTSD post foster care
33% major depressive disorder
10% psychotic symptomology

Criminal Victimization
68.7% victimized within a year
31% have been in sex trade

Ongoing Housing Instability
(with previous month)
Over half stayed in more than 1 place
10.2% stayed in more than 5 places

Employment
77% unemployed

Nutrition
46.3% have access to good quality food once a week or less
34.7% report little or no energy daily
Over half have stolen food or eaten

Education
53.2% have dropped out
50% tested for learning disability
83% reported being bullied at school

"I see agencies out there and they study to learn labels to put on people. These labels are barriers. In the Anishinaabe culture, these same people are special and have powerful gifts that are respected."

A benefit of living in a bicultural territory is the opportunity to consider other perspectives. Categorizing people is a social construct. The Caucasian culture has historically sorted people into normal and not normal based on behavioural expectations. This has resulted in negative labelling. We now know that labels are damaging in many ways. Labels distance people from each other. When we are striving to bring transitional aged youth into community, it is crucial that we reduce the distance between us. The plea from those with lived experience to "not label us" is call to remove the barriers that are inadvertently created through academic training.

"For the service providers here-get educated on our traditional ways because your ways haven't worked for us."

The Anishinaabe culture can teach us a different way. Rather than categorizing through a normal/non-normal construct, differences amongst people are respected. The same groups that are labelled within the Caucasian culture are celebrated as special people with powerful gifts. It is a perspective that leads to better social inclusion within community.

<u>Recognizing Needs</u>

"The biggest need for our youth is connection. They need to better connect to their own bodies, to their decisions, to themselves, to their lives and to others. Without connection, they just don't care and this leads to addictions and other abuse."

Our community has multiple resources that are focused towards the dysfunctional behaviours that arise from social disconnection but there has been little systemic consideration given to how humans connect. The child who was traumatized by previous family violence will experience disrupted personal development, impaired relationships and mental health dysfunction. Trauma informed practice moves beyond the outcomes (i.e. addictions, crime, violence) towards addressing the underlying trauma. Kenora Rainy River Youth Justice Service Collaborative has recently recognized the importance of this approach, provided training for local service providers and developed the Trauma-Informed Agency Protocol. It is progress but change comes slowly on the front lines.

"We have to be more collaborative, holistic and trauma informed. Services have to be wrapped around the youth and they need life skills."

Once children and youth are in societal care the focus is on basic needs-shelter, food, safety, physical health and education. These are measurable indicators of care. Behavioural management is geared towards maintaining the system-containing violence, operating schedules, staffing concerns. The continuing crises created by risky trauma induced behaviours reduce staff's ability to set goals for wards beyond ensuring basic care within the system. The system itself reduces potential connectivity through multiple moves, case worker changes and limited options.

"I counted up my placements and was in over 28 placements by the time I was 18. It was fill up a garbage bag and move on to the next place."

Case workers and caregivers are doing a difficult job within a system that operates on regulations, protocols and constrained resources. As with all employees, there are workers who are excellent, some who are good, some who are adequate and some who are bad. This is reality. The joy of a successfully empowering mentoring relationship soars high but the damage done by a bad employee slices deeply through a child or youth.

"At the age of 14, I went to a temporary group home to wait for placement into a foster home. I was raped by my caregiver. I next went into a foster home. It was good. They cared enough to have my favourite lunch waiting for me when I came home from school. I learned a lot. I wasn't easy but they never gave up on me."

We know that successful relationships develop out of trust. Trust arises from consistent positive interactions. Given that the youth in societal care already have trust issues, the dynamics of systemic care further erode trust.

"There is a lack of unpaid relationships in their lives. They are surrounded by paid staff who make their decisions, tell them they care and leave. Even the best staff still go home at 4:30.

They still go on holidays. They still change jobs. Revolving staff is normal in a system. These kids have very few, if any, genuine unpaid relationships."

Options are limited by resources. Resources rely on funding, staffing and volunteers. All of these are variable.

"Better identification of developmental delays at an early age would make a difference but testing costs money and accessing it isn't easy."

We are also further impaired by our own resistance to change. We may not like the results of currently delivered services but we are comfortable in doing what we know. Change is challenging. Changing service delivery models can mean having to learn new skill sets, adapting to managerial shifts or even a loss of jobs.

"Transitional Age Youth require specialized services."

Services defined by chronological age are not responsive to the functional variation amongst our TAY. We have to actively advocate for those who are transitional because we know that these youth often slip between sector gaps. We need to increase intersectoral communication overall, improve service coordination, and deliver programming that is accessible and efficient. This can only be done by enhancing commitment amongst partners and evidencing the work being done by shared data collection. Ultimately, funding decisions are considered through cost/benefit analysis as well as need.

"When we become more collaborative, holistic and trauma informed, we will be more effective. Services have to be wrapped around the youth and they need life skills."

On the ground supports for TAYs are essential. Their normative developmental tasks are generally concrete and immediate. Additionally, as noted earlier, experienced trauma delays neurological development. The functional ages of many TAYs are significantly below chronological levels and learning life skills will require significant support.

Youth coming out of care systems have few life skills and even fewer options for satisfying basic needs.

"Start with the basics. They need financial stability and housing. If they don't have that, they never get beyond just struggling to survive."

Resources begin with food and shelter. Kenora has a severe affordable housing shortage. Increasing numbers of youth are appearing at soup kitchens, food banks and the emergency shelters. We know that multiple systems are streaming youth into the city and this will continue as long as services and opportunities are centralized. The Housing First model requires housing options as well as support services. Further models have to be developed for housing young people who are struggling towards adulthood while dealing with their unique histories and conditions. Beyond stabilizing housing and meeting basic needs, establishing an appreciated life will require the support of the community. Too many young lives are lost to despair.

"It's all about relationships. We have to expect that our clients will fall and fall again but we also have to care about them enough to never give up. We are the game changers for these youth."

Prioritizing Populations

"I have been bullied a lot. I guess that I'm a target because of who I am."

Seventy-one percent (71%)[3] of homeless youth in Canada are transgender & gender non-binary youth. Unlike the First Nations who have traditionally accepted manifestations of the gender and sexuality spectrum as a gift, the European peoples have struggled with sexuality and gender variance over the ages. As the predominately European immigrants brought their view of sexual morality to North America, negative sexual stigmatization became imposed on the indigenous peoples through the colonial power imbalance. The modern struggle for gender emancipation is a recent human rights call for the non-aboriginal peoples and is a call to return to traditional respect for the First Nations.

"It is time to recognize that the trauma of colonization affects us all. After 500 years of rippling impacts, we need healing. The non-Anishinaabe ways have not worked for us. We need to do it differently."

Seventy-one percent (71%) of homeless youth in Canada are aboriginal. Most of these young people have exited from child and youth service systems.

"I was one of these youth who were put into a white home. It wasn't a bad place but it didn't fit. As an adolescent, I was dealing with addictions and my response was to run."

As a society, we have begun to recognize the inadequacy of uniform program models in serving a multicultural population. All cultures have perspectives that arise from their unique traditional practices.

"We are a spiritual people and we need more than what has been offered to us through services."

Beyond bifurcating services, we can enrich our own program options by learning effective practices from other traditions. A generation ago, acupuncture was a foreign, alternative healing practice. Today North Americans have benefitted from the integration of needling into mainstream medicine. It is the same with the same with social services.

"I am a grandmother and my role is to help others with what I know and can do. Saying no is not an option for me. One of the things that I can do is dress our people. It's a joy for me. I teach regalia making at the jail for our people who are there. I design items for others. I help families dress the spirits when loved members pass. Our traditional clothing is part of our culture and when the clothing is put on, pride in who we are shines.

I make my home a healing place for those who are hurting. I invite individuals to spend time in my home where we focus on holistic healing. With food and shelter taken care of, we share our

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[3] All TAY demographic data is from <u>Without A Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey</u>, Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd, Kaitlin Schwan, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2015

journeys. Feet are soothed with oils. We listen to the advice of Elders who visit us with their wisdom. We practice our traditions. This is how we can make a difference--by committing to what each of us can do for each other."

"What each of us can do" is a call that moves us beyond analysis of need into creative solution seeking. Recognizing that there is a need is the first step. The grandmother who spoke at the forum spoke simply of doing what can be done with the unique abilities that we each have. This is a reminder that each of us does have something that we can contribute to alleviate the problems arising from the issue. Many water droplets drip down the face of a rock cut but over time and with consistency, the stream of water droplets will break down the rock. Wisdom is always simplistically practical.

Our Ideas

Ideas are the seeds of action. At the forum, ideas were elicited through group exercises, open discussion and written suggestions. All of the ideas have been collated and categorized for community use.

NEED	IDEA	TARGET	FACILITATOR	NOTES
Connection				
TAYs need to connect to themselves	Yoga/meditation instruction	Youth (in care & aftercare)	Service provider by contract	Proven strategy to teach youth to connect to their own bodies
TAYs need to connect to themselves	Practice trauma informed care	Service providers	Managerial leadership	Connecting youth to understanding impact of their own trauma helps them to understand themselves
TAYs need to connect to themselves	LGBTQ workshops	Youth	Managerial leadership	Connecting youth to their own sexuality and gender reduces identity crises
TAYs need to connect to services	Take directions from the youth	Service providers	Managerial leadership	Connecting youth to decision making process increases empowerment
TAYs need to connect with peers	Youth Drop-In Centre	All youth	Community	Youth must lead in the development & management of facility to increase personal commitment
TAYs need to connect with peers	Use social media	Youth (in care & aftercare)	Web master	Use strategically to connect youth to resources and each other
TAYs need to connect with peers	TAY empowerment gatherings	Youth (in care & aftercare)	Community Care Givers	Connecting through shared empowerment experiences will strengthen peer relationships
TAYs need to connect with a variety of community members	Mentoring by Big Sisters/ Brothers, Elders, those with lived experience	Youth (in care & aftercare)	To be determined	Each successful mentoring experience reduces risk to a youth and increases the youth's potential to thrive and contribute to community

NEED	IDEA	TARGET	FACILITATOR	NOTES
TAYs need to connect to the larger community	Youth to assist at community food security programs	Youth (in care & aftercare)	Care givers	Empowers youth to make a difference through connective social action and feel committed to the community in which they live
Resources				
Services Development	Youth Shelter/Hostel	At-Risk Youth	Funding Agent	Meets basic needs
Community Development	Affordable Housing	At-Risk Youth	Funding Agent	Meets stabilization needs
Services Planning	Intersectoral Communication	Service sectors	Collaborative	Increases systemic effectiveness through identification of roles and resources
Services Planning	Shared community goal setting	Service sectors	To be determined	Shared goals leverage resources towards community issue resolution
Services Planning	Understand features of unique service needs for TAYs	Service providers	To be determined	Allows for ameliorative planning to smooth transition of TAYs from child to adult services
Services Training	Interagency Training	Service providers	Collaborative	Increases shared information base between agency which improves communication
Services Training	Ensure all service staff utilize trauma informed practice	Service providers	Managerial leadership	Enables staff to work from the same perspective which increases counselling consistency for clients
Services Delivery	Ensure timely access to services	Service providers	Managerial/ Funding agent	Timely access optimizes service effectiveness and reduces slippage between service providers
Services Delivery	Wrap services around client	Service providers	Collaborative	Shared responsibility, dependability and role definition as well as co-counselling commitment increases accessibility, reduces service gaps and ensures services are focused effectively on client's needs.

NEED	IDEA	TARGET	FACILITATOR	NOTES
Services Delivery	Ensure life skills training	Youth (in care & after care)	Caregiver	Skills are inevitably required and need to become part of transition planning[4]
Program Enhancement	Early identification of FASD	At risk children	Funding agent	Identification allows for specific interventions to be put into place at the most appropriate time and focuses transitional planning
Services Development	Crisis Response Team	At-Risk Youth	Collaborative	Recognizes that immediate response is required during crises for harm reduction
Prioritizing Populations				
Services Training	LGBTQ workshops	Service providers & community members	To be determined	Sensitivity training increases inclusivity
Services Training	Anishinaabe cultural sensitivity workshops	Service providers & community members	To be determined	Increases cultural respect and relevance in service planning[5]
Services Training	Intergenerational trauma recognition	Service providers & community members	To be determined	Increase understanding of intergenerational trauma impacting our youth today so that we can all work communally towards reconciliation
Services Training	Cultural Practices Training	Service providers & community members	To be determined	Increase cultural competency with regards to language and ceremonies[6]
Services Planning	Leadership commitment to address needs of At Risk Youth	First Nation Communities, Chiefs and Council; municipal leaders	Collaborative	Because youth are often migrating between First Nation communities and Kenora, leaders have to work together to ensure that adequate supports are in every community

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[4] A common check list of life skill tasks should be shared between all TAYs and integrated in case planning requirements

[5] Elders need to be part of service planning for aboriginal youth/youth services

[6] Cultural competency tests should be mandatory for all Kenora agency staff. The test doesn't have to be onerous, but rather a check on whether the individual has committed to respecting the information provided. (i.e. 5 Ojibway words, knowledge of basic ceremonies, understanding social practices)

NEEDS	IDEAS	TARGET	FACILITATOR	NOTES
Services Planning	Consult youth on priorities for support services and cultural development	Youth Council; Youth (in care & after care)	To be determined	Youth led prioritization increases the relevancy of the planning
Services Planning	Enhance the connection between Elders & Youth	Elders; Youth (in care & after care)	To be determined	Elders have a traditional guiding relationship with indigenous youth
Services Training	Facilitator training	Indigenous Persons	To be determined	Training indigenous persons to deliver training (life skills, both traditional and non-traditional) increases the number of potential mentors for aboriginal youth

Forum Evaluation

Project Format

Kenora is working towards improved community well-being through respectful inclusion and collaborative effort. The Kenora Substance Abuse and Mental Health Task Force is comprised of over 30 members and was responsible for the development of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan that was endorsed by the City of Kenora. Core to the work of the Task Force is the collaborative model. The process to organize and facilitate the forum was as important as the forum's content.

Sixteen agencies organized the forum within an 8 week time frame. Agency representatives tended to be mid to front line staff who focused on practicality rather than theory or politics. Most communication and decision making was done by consensus online. It was decided early on that the forum would foster local connections and creativity. To support this goal, the forum was designed in three parts. The morning reviewed local resources and needs as well as programming trends. The afternoon featured speakers with lived experience to amplify the voice of TAY locally. Group exercises throughout the day encouraged public contribution to solution seeding. The evening was a planned celebration of youth with entertainment and games. The hosting costs were shared amongst the partnering agencies.

All were welcome to every session but partial attendance was allowed to meet individual schedules. Although conventional wisdom recommends that forums be targeted specifically to focus organizing on specific shared interests, Our Emerging Adults was meant to be broad-based. The general public was invited along with service providers, those with lived experience and TAY themselves. The leaders within agencies with youth in their care were asked to bring youth to the event alongside of staff.

Planners were challenged by the varying knowledge held by participants between the three groups (general public, service providers, those with lived experience/transitional aged youth). Each group held different types and degrees of knowledge so the agenda had to be carefully balanced to engage all. Because of acknowledged power imbalances between the invited groups, mainstream agency staff were limited to 5 minutes for presentations on their programs. Those with lived experience and members of the general public were encouraged to speak without time limits.

In recognition of the bi-cultural nature of Kenora, effort was extended to ensure that the event was inclusive of both perspectives and practices. The venue was Manidoo Baawaatig Campus. Acknowledgement of traditional territory, smudging and tobacco gifts were offered. A presiding Elder and traditional drum group led the participants through the event.

Attendance was planned for 60 participants and capped at 75. There was no fee for registration to reduce barriers for attendance by those members of the community who were not agency sponsored. Meals were provided.

Project Objectives

The three part project featured a collaborative organizing process, a forum (information, networking, creative problem solving) and a summative evaluation.

1. Work collaboratively to host a community event focused on TAYs
2. Develop a shared holistic understanding of TAYs as a demographic population
3. Review services and analyze gaps as they apply to TAY transitioning
4. Amplify the voice of TAYs to the larger community
5. Use a collaborative process for creative consideration of the challenges faced by TAYs as they try to navigate towards adult membership within the community
6. Use the conference as a networking opportunity to develop relationships between community members that will benefit the TAY population
7. Provide a written report on the conference that can be used as a foundational document to develop a strategy for local collaborative impact on TAY related issues.

Project Review

To obtain evaluative data, post conference interviews were held two weeks after the event. Twenty percent (20%) of the participants provided their response to specific questions and had the opportunity to comment further on the event.

Collaborative Organizing: Sixteen agencies contributed staff, donations and money towards the organizing of the TAY forum. Partners were diverse and came from the following sectors: developmental, social services, corrections, justice, health and child welfare. Representatives were from both the broader public services (62%) and from aboriginal focused services (38%).
　　The planning was freewheeling with many ideas being raised, dropped and bounced. The final agenda was a mixture of presentation, discussion and solution seeking. Partners were open in expressing their opinions and reliable in their commitments which encouraged trust to build between those partners who had not previously worked together before. This increased local capacity building for future collaborative projects.

Forum Participation: Fifty-three individuals (53) attended at least one of the three sessions (88% of target). The morning session had the most participants (44). Twenty-seven attended both morning and afternoon session and only 12 attended the youth celebration. One third of the preregistered guests did not attend (36% were ill; 45% cited unexpected work pressures). There was a viral infection that had spread through the community which impacted some of the presenters, hosts and potential participants.
　　For those who attended, most agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (42%) that participating in the event was a good use of their time. The attendee who disagreed pointed out that although he did not rate the event positively for himself and his own interests, he was thankful for the organizers of the event because it had meaning for others. Because of the mixed audience, it is useful to compare the satisfaction levels of those who were members of the general public (67% strongly agreed) with those who were service providers (83% agreed).

Information Presentations: The information chosen for presentation was densely packed. Establishing a common data base for population definition, program outlines and an environmental scan required a stringent facilitation which reduced opportunities for interaction

however participants did note that the facilitation did lead them to a better understanding of how the systems interconnected. Again, members of the general public experienced the greatest shift in knowledge gain (50% went from knowing little to knowing a fair amount or great deal). Services providers reported that their greatest gain was in understanding broader environmental trends and systems interconnections. Several commented on the validation they felt as the presentation supported their already formed personal perspectives. This allowed them to return to the workplace with greater confidence.

Experiential Presentations: The keynote speaker led strongly and participants appreciated his openness. For those who lacked direct/indirect experience with transitioning youth, the gift of his sharing allowed them to understand the lifelong challenges. Although a youth panel had been planned to further the sharing of lived experience, they were unable to appear. Fortunately, their voices were amplified through personal stories shared in the 2017 Homeless In Kenora booklet and a compelling photovoice presentation. Individuals did volunteer to step forward to share their own perspectives and stories which was much appreciated. Participants did express disappointment over the cancelled youth panel but felt that those who volunteered to fill in were admirable in their honesty and willingness to assist others to understand. The experiential presentations were illuminating and motivating. A young man, in describing his journey from gang member to family man, told the audience that nothing worked until he met a mentor with whom he "clicked". Post-conference discussions centered on what creates the "click" condition.

Youth Celebration: The organizers were depending on the agencies with wards in their care to bring youth to the afternoon and evening sessions. Due to illness and vacations, attendance of the youth demographic was disappointing. The unused food and game materials were shared with other community projects. Incorporating youth into activities requires more direct support.

Networking Opportunities: To encourage opportunities for networking, mixer games and tasks were built into the agenda. Participants reported that the opportunity to network was an important gain for them. In addition, the table discussions contributed to the collaborative compilation of ideas for seeding community development to serve the special needs of transitional aged youth.

Bi-Cultural Integration: As previously described, the forum was presided over by an Elder and the traditional drum of the Anicinabe. Forum hosts made individual presentations of tobacco gifts to each participant to honour what they were bringing to the event. Aboriginal organizations, speakers and participants further contributed to the respectful blending of peoples who share the land. Several non-aboriginal participants spoke of the impact they experienced through the words of the Elder and the voice of the drum.

Project Outputs & Outcomes

Four weeks is a short time span for evaluating project outcomes but there have been reportable outcomes. The community did come together to host a bi-cultural collaborative event focused on the developing understanding of the needs of transitional aged youth. Information was shared to expand the common knowledge base shared between service and public sectors. An environmental scan was presented and TAY related resources were reviewed. New relationships were developed between people sharing concern for our youth and new ideas were considered. A tabulation of the information provided and the recommendations made were included in the

summative evaluation and made available to all members of the community. How the community proceeds from here will determine the outcomes and how we proceed will determine the nature of our community.

The conference organizers were seeking to elicit small action commitments that collectively would have larger collaborative impact. One of the emerging projects that typifies this type of commitment is the proposed fashion show that is a fundraiser for a local non-profit. The event will include indigenous designs and feature TAY models. This is community connectivity.