

Toronto's Youth Serving System:

Fragmented paths to youth development

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Toronto's Youth Serving System: Fragmented paths to youth development

Executive Summary

In 2004, United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) established a strategic priority to set youth on pathways to success. Over the past several years, UWGT has worked to increase opportunities for youth through community investments, research, and other special initiatives. These activities have helped to identify the need to explore the systemic policy gaps and barriers affecting successful youth outcomes.

In response, UWGT undertook a policy research project to document and analyze the systems and policy structures within which the youth-serving sector functions. The purpose of this project was to determine the extent to which policy and program coherence existed in relation to youth services and supports in Toronto.

The research project comprised an extensive environmental scan involving interviews with over fifty-five stakeholders. These stakeholders were from diverse sectors of governmental and non-governmental youth serving organizations, funding groups, policy-makers and youth engaged in serving other youth and/or their communities.

A literature review was conducted using approximately eighty sources comprising of formal research, discussion papers and reports prepared by youth-serving organizations. The review helped to inform the analysis of findings from the stakeholder interviews. Research on youth tends to reveal an over emphasis on youth problems such as substance abuse, homelessness, delinquency, however, there is also an increase in focus on studies addressing youth development and the use of an ecological or holistic framework (Becker and Luthar, 2002). Various discussion reports commissioned by youth serving organizations lean towards the holistic frameworks highlighting the importance of integrated policies and services across the continuum of youth development.

The information from the stakeholder interviews was analyzed in several stages. The preliminary findings were presented and validated with stakeholders using four focus groups. The findings discussed in this report incorporate feedback from the validation process.

The thematic findings are discussed below under five headings: 1) context; 2) approaches in working with youth; 3) policy; 4) funding; and, 5) organizations, programs and services. Although these are discussed separately, there are complex interactions between the themes.

Context

Demographics: The increased immigrant population in the Toronto suburbs resulted in increased diversity of youth needs and impacted the nature and level of programs and services available to youth. Significant barriers to service, particularly for youth from diverse backgrounds, have emerged. These barriers were related to the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of

programs. Concerns have been raised about serving “hard-to-reach youth” and gave the issue of resolving barriers to service a greater sense of urgency.

Approaches to Working with Youth

Multiple theoretical frameworks to working with youth: The youth serving system has experienced extensive innovation through a variety of trial initiatives resulting in the use of multiple approaches to programming. Stakeholders viewed the use of multiple approaches as a means to allow extensive creative strategies to respond to the diverse needs of a non-homogeneous group of youth. On the other hand, use of multiple theoretical approaches has been challenging because those engaged in service delivery work from different perspectives resulting in lack of continuity, available supports, disconnects and fragmentation of services. Additionally, the notion that youth can make positive contributions to society has gained rapid acceptance; however, the programmatic responses using this concept have not been applied consistently. Stakeholders shared a strong desire to move from an individual “fix-it” to a more holistic approach involving youth, families, neighbourhoods and communities.

Prevailing deficit-based approach to youth: The problem-based approach was centered on a view that youth are a troubled group who need help. There has been a growing acceptance of strength-based initiatives using asset-based and resiliency-based approaches; few investments have been made in nurturing and facilitating youth development while larger investments have continued to be devoted towards addressing specific youth problems.

“It’s not too late” – changing the mindset: The “early years” or “zero to six” age-group have received significant attention and investments using evidence-based and strategic focus of policy-makers, funding organizations and society as a wise preventive strategy. This focus, however, has not allowed balanced attention to the entire youth development continuum and may have influenced a belief that, after the early years, we have “missed the boat”. On the contrary, evidence has been highlighted that show that positive development can occur in later years and therefore, it is important to expand focus to reach across the youth development continuum.

Policy

Multiple policy-makers: Three levels of government and multiple non-governmental organizations have set policy at the macro, meso and micro levels from the perspective of different Ministerial or departmental perspective resulting in fragmented approaches, gaps and lack of integration in addressing youth needs.

No overarching policy framework: There was strong agreement that a comprehensive youth policy framework would enable cohesion between policy decisions, programmatic responses as well as enable better coordination, collaboration, synergy and accountability within the youth system. It was noted, however, that emphasis be given in ensuring that an overarching policy framework served the broad and diverse needs of youth. Strong and sustained leadership and cross-sector collaboration was recommended to champion the development of a policy framework that is long term and lends itself to the development of sound strategic directions.

Working in silos: A theme of working in silos emerged repeatedly, although stakeholders noted that there was a desire for collaboration. Benefits of moving towards an integrated system were discussed, including reducing duplication, sharing knowledge and leveraging resources. A clearinghouse for the youth-serving sector was suggested as a means for wider sharing of knowledge of innovative and effective programs and services.

Funding

Funding for youth programs and services was provided by three levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal), non-governmental organizations as well as user-fees. Core, project and seed funding structures were commonly identified. Additionally, grassroots organizations and youth led initiatives were often required to have trusteeship arrangements with other larger, established organizations.

Environment of competition: Lack of long-term sustainable funding was blamed for an environment of competition among youth-serving organizations. It was noted that legislated programs, however, receive sustainable funding; albeit, not always at adequate levels. Many social service programs were faced with multiple short-term, project-based funding and have been challenged in continuing to offer the programs once the funding period ran out. Consequences of the environment of competition included deterrence in sharing of organizational intellectual capital and difficulty in attracting highly-skilled personnel due to the low salaries offered in the sector.

Organizations, Programs and Services

Difficulty accessing programs: Toronto had a wide range of youth programs across the sectors; but, the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of programs was variable. Additionally, youth involvement in planning and programming was minimal and where youth were involved, they were stretched due to the limited number of youth that tend to be involved. Accessibility challenges included lack of awareness of programs by youth, their parents as well as staff in different agencies. The short shelf life of programs, as a result of project based funding, added to the confusion on program availability and access. Use of outreach workers and partnerships with grassroots organizations were strategies used to address these challenges. Sub-segments of the youth population identified as especially vulnerable included youth involved within the criminal justice system, youth with mental health issues, Aboriginal youth, homeless youth, young women, especially those with children, African Canadian youth, newcomers and children between 11 and 15 years of age as well as youth who were involved in “hard core” gangs.

Challenges in providing holistic responses: Comprehensive, multi-dimensional/multi-faceted or holistic responses were viewed as ideal approaches in working with youth; however, providing such responses was demanding. Some of the factors contributing to this challenge included lack of horizontal integration in the system and difficulties in providing support to youth using various referral channels or multiple points of entry. Holistic responses that were school-based and involved community-based organizations were thought of as promising practices. Such responses addressed many of the determinants of well-being including housing, nutrition, education, employment, safety and sense of inclusion. Programs that addressed a combination of

prevention, intervention, and positive youth development were also cited as important. To provide such holistic approaches, comprehensive assessments, well-trained staff as well as effective case managers were considered essential along with sustainable and sufficient funding.

Stakeholders noted that a large investment took place for youth in the education sector for the academic development of youth; however, there was a significant gap in integrating non-academic youth development requirements. A policy framework that integrated both the academic and other youth needs would result in a more comprehensive and holistic approach to working with youth and provide evaluation of youth outcomes in an integrated manner. Additionally, since mandatory programs generally received sustainable funding, stakeholders were interested in pursuing avenues where programs and services that were necessary for positive youth development could become part of mandatory programming.

Fun not seen as important: The benefits of recreation have been well documented. A theme that was echoed time and time again was the need to provide an environment that allowed youth to play, have fun, creative outlets and opportunities to develop through positive interaction with their peers. There was a lack of recreational activity at school, after school and in the wider community. Access to diverse recreational activities were needed in safe environments and supervised by adult mentors and/or coaches. Also needed were culturally sensitive activities that provided choices for both genders.

Decentralization and centralization of youth serving organizations: The youth-serving sector in Toronto has experienced a tension between the need to centralize certain functions (e.g. research, advocacy, referrals) while maintaining independence and autonomy in other areas (e.g. financial control, service delivery). This was reflected in the various networks that have been established in recent years as a means of centralizing some organizational activity. Youth-led groups appreciated the centralized support functions such as human resources, financial management, report writing, etc.

In summary, the youth policy research project provided evidence that the youth system in the Toronto area was fragmented and challenged. The extent of fragmentation was felt across all sectors serving youth and the youth themselves. Efforts were being made to counteract these challenges; however, these were seen as band-aid solutions for the short run. The youth policy research pointed to three broad conclusions:

1. Youth needs require concerted and long term priority matched with appropriate investments and collaboration amongst the stakeholders;
2. The systemic issues creating a fragmented system need be addressed using sustainable strategies that lead to both the horizontal and vertical integration of the youth serving system;
3. Best practices and research evidence need to be consolidated with a view to dissemination and uptake at the policy and programmatic levels.

Having a youth-centric or youth-friendly system is a lofty but attainable goal that can be leveraged on the current tide of readiness displayed by Toronto youth system stakeholders.

Carlito's Story

Escaping political persecution from a war torn country, a family of eleven sought temporary asylum in two other countries for about seven years before getting political refugee status in Canada. After many years of struggle for survival, the family was thrilled to have a secure home in Canada.

The family's nine children ranging from ages five to seventeen were ecstatic about the nearby schools in their new home country. They would no longer have to skip school to help support the family's daily sustenance. The children participated in a number of school activities and had a variety of future goals. One child wanted to become a businessman, another a police officer, yet another wanted to follow his father's footsteps and become a Professor. The wish list went on.

Carlito, the one who wanted to become a businessman, joined an after school youth club. Unlike some of his friends' parents who came to drop them at the club; his parents generally stayed home. They were too shy to interact with other families. They could not afford to buy him the "cool" shoes advertised on television and did not understand that it was fashionable to wear pants three sizes larger, nor did they understand why he had to change his name ... but Carlito was happy.

Carlito was popular with his group and the adult leaders at the club. The leaders understood him and often complimented him for his achievements and commitment to the club. It is at this club where Carlito found acceptance, a sense of belonging and recognition. Regrettably, a policy change in one area of government influenced a change in accessibility of the school space where the youth club was held as well as increased the operational costs of some community programming. As a cut back, the location of Carlito's youth club shut down. Carlito lost the relationships with his leaders as well as with some of the youth that he had connected with at the club.

Although he was aware that there was another club he could join in a different neighborhood, Carlito was afraid of yet another change. He feared he might not get the same acceptance and popularity as he had received in his own neighborhood. Carlito started hanging around a nearby plaza with intentions to befriend the local businessman and find a part time job. He soon connected with some entrepreneurs ... a group of youth enjoying the luxuries of life selling drugs.

Not knowing the true nature of his employment, Carlito's parents were happy that their son was acquiring new skills in his part time job and that he was able to financially contribute to the well being of their family. They were proud of him.

Additionally, amongst the youth in his neighborhood, Carlito became not only an entrepreneur but also a law enforcer. When someone violated the group norms or an outsider tried to "rip-off his gang", it was Carlito they turned for enforcement. Carlito, yet again found acceptance, recognition and a new sense of direction in his life.

Carlito's story highlights the effect of the fragmented paths to youth development. These include lack of parental knowledge/engagement, discontinuation of service, and lack of youth engagement along the developmental continuum. His story can be related to the impact of fragmented policies, funding mechanisms, and program service planning in the youth serving sector.

Toronto's Youth Serving System: Fragmented Paths to Youth Development

Introduction

Purpose of the Policy Research Project

In 2004, United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) set a strategic priority to set youth on pathways to success (UWGT, 2004). Over the past several years, UWGT sought to increase opportunities for youth through community investments, research and other special initiatives. These activities identified the need to explore the systemic policy gaps and barriers affecting successful youth outcomes.

In response, UWGT undertook a policy research project to document and analyze the systems and policy structures within which the youth-serving¹ sector functions. The purpose of this project was to determine the extent to which policy and program coherence existed in youth services and supports in Toronto. The findings from the research project would be used to inform its public policy, advocacy, convening activities and funding priorities. The key audiences for the research report included UWGT members as well as non-member agencies serving youth and UWGT partners that were involved in establishing policies that affect youth.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the project:

- What were the range and type of services and programs available to youth in the Toronto area?
- What were the existing policies, frameworks and funding structures supporting the youth system?
- What were the gaps and disconnects in/for youth services, programs and policies?
- What were the promising practices and opportunities to address the gaps and disconnects in the youth serving system?

Methodology/Limitations

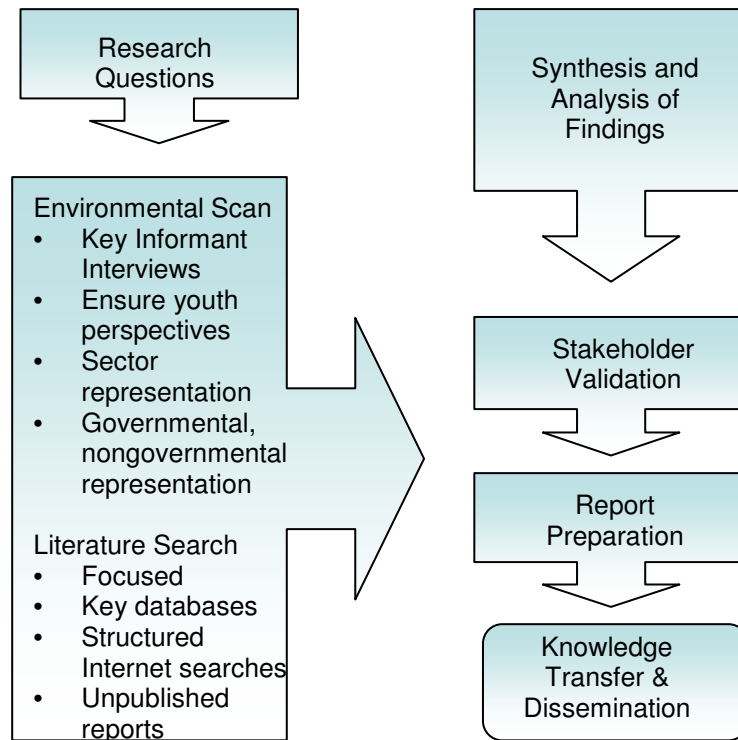
The youth policy research project comprised of four key components:

- 1) Environmental scan;
- 2) Literature review;
- 3) Analysis of findings; and,
- 4) Validation of preliminary findings.

See Figure 1 for an overview of the methodology.

¹ For the purpose of this research project, “youth-serving” refers to the broad range of policies, organizations, programs, services and activities for youth, including government mandated programs, community programs, and intersections with sectors such as education, health, employment, justice, social services, recreation and culture.

Figure 1: Youth Policy Research Project Methodology



Environmental Scan – Stakeholders were identified through UWGT contacts as well as through the use of snowball sampling². These stakeholders were working or associated with the following sectors: education, mental health, public health, employment, child protection, youth engagement, policy (at all three levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal), non-governmental funders, youth, recreation, social services, youth justice and researchers. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and took place either in person or by telephone. Each interview lasted one to one and a half hours. A total of fifty-six (56) interviews were conducted. Handwritten notes were taken and subsequently typed and coded using pre-established codes (themes that emerged from literature review and early interviews).

Literature Review – An information specialist³ searched two databases (Web of Science and Social Science Index) for English articles written since 2000. Search terms included: “youth”, “adolescent”, “policy”, “youth at risk”, etc. All abstracts were reviewed by the lead researcher and selected based on relevance for the project. Seventy-five (75) articles were retrieved and read in full. Information was extracted based on a loose set of predefined concepts. Additionally, stakeholders interviewed were asked to recommend reports, reviews, evaluations, strategy papers, policy frameworks or other related material. Searches of select internet websites also resulted in several key publications. Approximately twenty (20) such resources were collected and reviewed by the research team.

² Snowball sampling refers to a technique of identifying names of subsequent stakeholders through recommendations by previously interviewed stakeholders.

³ Librarian specializing in professional searches

Synthesis and Analysis Methods – Findings from the environmental scan and literature review were synthesized and analyzed through the following process:

- All interview notes from the interviews were reviewed by the research team comprising two senior researchers and a research assistant. The interview notes were organized to answer the original research questions.
- Policy information from the interviews was mapped by sector: education, health, social services, justice, etc.
- Preliminary analysis was conducted by the research team by asking the following questions: What does the information gathered tell us about the state of policy development in the youth-serving sector? What challenges and gaps exist in the youth-serving sector that reflects on existing policy or lack of policy? What challenges are faced in the implementation of one or more policies?
- Secondary analysis was conducted by reflecting how the thematic findings were supported by the literature. The research team reflected by asking: What does the literature inform us about youth issues, policies and programs? Does the literature validate what we found in the interviews? How does the literature further our understanding of what we learned from the interviews?
- Tertiary or additional analysis was conducted by discussing the thematic findings with the project sponsoring team. The research team looked for additional and alternative insights and explanations for the findings.

Validation of Thematic Findings – Four focus groups were organized, made up of a combination of some of the stakeholders interviewed and also additional stakeholders. The majority of the additional stakeholders were identified through the snowball sampling but had not been interviewed in the environmental scan phase of the research project. Care was taken to create focus groups that included cross-sector representation and youth from grassroots organizations. Invitations were sent by email and each focus group was targeted to have between eight (8) and twelve (12) members. An executive summary was sent to confirmed focus group members a minimum of a week in advance. A total of twenty-seven (27) individuals participated in the focus groups.

Limitations – Several limitations should be noted on the methodology for this research project:

- Stakeholders for the interviews and validation phase were selected using referrals from known sources. We may have inadvertently missed other important and informative perspectives.
- The literature review was broad and used as a backdrop to inform the analysis. Keeping the broad perspective resulted in identification of an extensive list of abstracts which were reviewed by one lead researcher. The broad perspective did not allow for in-depth review of any specific sector or policy element.
- Due to time constraints, focused review of the literature on questions arising from the analysis of the findings was not possible. Hence, additional questions that resulted from preliminary analysis were not followed up in the literature. These questions are listed in the final section of the report as “unanswered questions”.

Context

Demographics

According to the 2006 Statistics Canada census, youth between the ages of 15 and 24 increased slightly from 12.4% in 2001 to 12.7% and comprised roughly 13% of the total population of Toronto. With 318,655 youth, almost equal split between male and female, youth remained a steady yet vital minority of the Toronto population. Additionally, youth immigrant population rose dramatically between 1991 and 2001 by 24.5%. The visible minority youth population became larger than the non-visible minority youth population (Statistics Canada, 2001). The diversity of the Toronto population makeup came from having a diverse immigrant population that speaks over seventy-six (76) languages (Cheng & Yau, 1997) and represented most of the cultural groups around the world (www.toronto.ca). Of particular note, over 30% of all immigrant children were members of families who lived under the poverty line (Beiser et al, 1999).

Although overall, Toronto's youth population (13-24 years of age) had declined between 1991 and 2001, the number of younger youth (13-19 years of age) had increased both in the inner city and the inner suburbs (Statistics Canada, 2001). In the suburbs, the younger youth population increased by 92%, much of it newcomer and visible minority. It is expected that the youth population will steadily increase until 2011 and the demand for educational, social and recreational services will continue to increase.

How do these demographic changes impact youth-serving organizations? First, schools must address an increasingly diverse population; specifically, the need for culturally sensitive approaches to teaching and for school organizations to consider the holistic needs of the students (Metcalf, 2003). Schools must work far more effectively with neighbourhood and/or other organizations in the community, such as faith or culturally-based groups or organizations. Creating nurturing environments with positive adult/youth relationships as well as warm relations and programs with parents have been suggested as successful strategies for improving academic and social outcomes for the students (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Second, many organizations have identified the difficulties in reaching youth. Distance is only one contributory factor. Organizations are finding they need to invest a lot more in outreach activities, getting to know the communities better, getting to know where and how youth "hang out" and understanding the culture of different youth groups. Disseminating information about programs and services was time consuming and required constant vigilance, but it was even more difficult to get youth to come into established organizational spaces. Successful programs have taken their initiatives to schools, malls and ethno-specific community settings where youth tended to frequent.

Third, the diversity of youth characteristics and needs has meant that there was a greater requirement for a broad range of programs and services, along with the pressure to recruit and train staff and youth leaders that reflected the diversity in the target groups. There was a continuing need for special programming, but because of limited resources, this occurred on a piecemeal basis, creating some targeted programs. It often meant that some youth groups were not offered targeted programs, if any.

Findings

Environmental Scan Findings

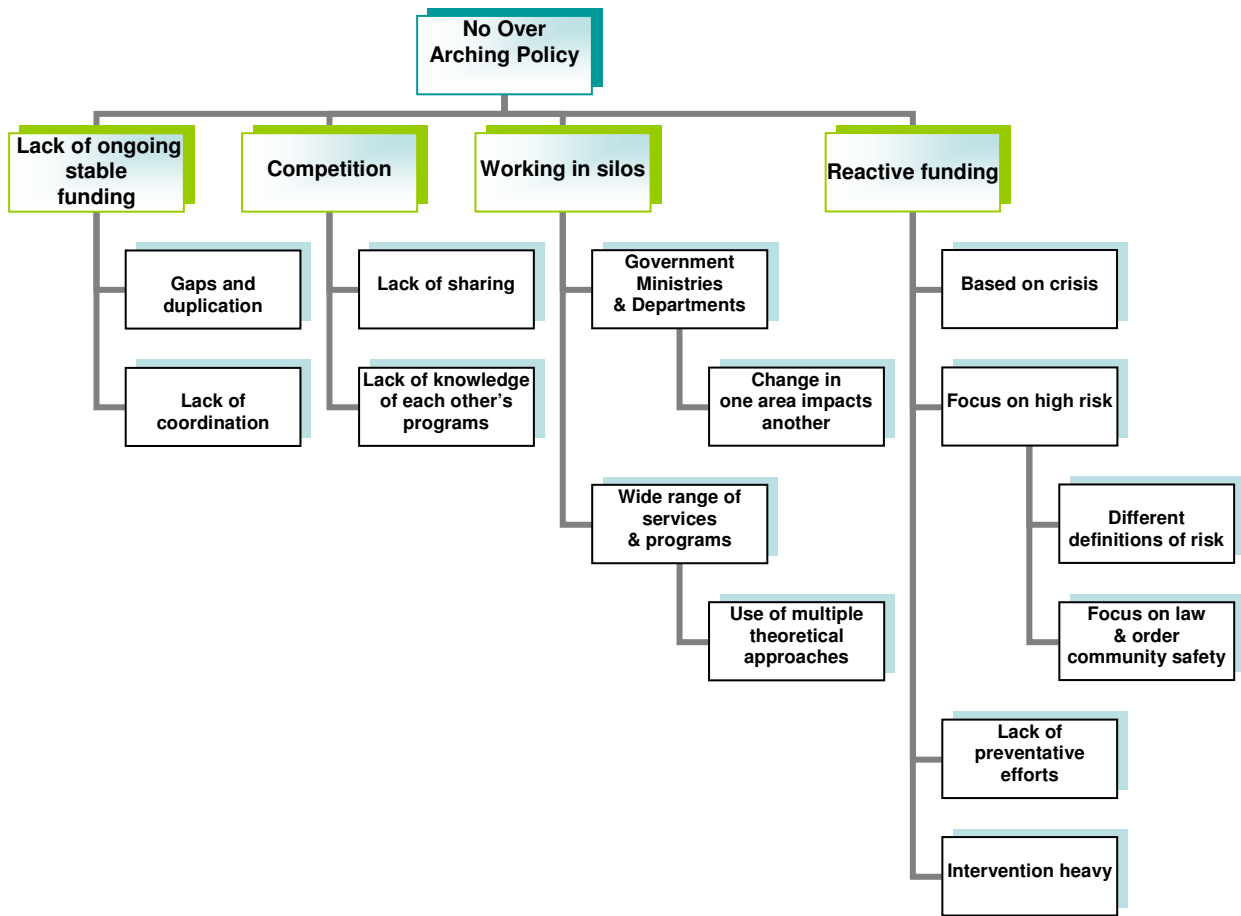
Interviews were conducted with fifty-six (56) stakeholders (two interviews were conducted with two to three individuals) from across the youth-serving system, with interests in housing, education, employment, mental health, youth engagement, social services, public health, planning tables as well as policy decision-makers from both government and non-government funding bodies and researchers or youth experts. The findings from the stakeholders are summarized as follows:

- a) Toronto had a multitude and broad spectrum of policies, programs and services for youth; often developed using diverse theoretical perspectives. A sampling of these are provided in Appendices A and B.
- b) Although there have been recent attempts to place priority on youth, there were many and varied gaps in working with youth.
- c) An extensive set of policies directed the work of various players in the youth serving system. These could be thought of as a patchwork of policies addressing specific needs, issues or concerns.
- d) Changes in one part of the system or one sector had consequences in another part of the system or another sector.
- e) There were issues of duplication, inefficiency as well as limited effectiveness of many policies and programs.
- f) Youth policies and programs had a heavier focus on intervention strategies to address problems faced by youth and a lesser focus on actually preventing problems from occurring in the first instance.
- g) Many stakeholders spoke of their specific policy or program as a “promising or best” practice as this was either not existing elsewhere and/or was found to have positive impact on youth outcomes.
- h) There was a lack of knowledge-sharing amongst organizations in the youth serving system.
- i) Unanimously, all stakeholders spoke of the mismatch between the needs of youth, the under-investments in youth and the lack of sustainable, long term efforts.

The above key findings were found to be remarkably consistent across the sectors involved in working with youth.

The highlights of the findings are mapped in Figure 2 to demonstrate the interrelationships among them. These findings are discussed in greater detail under the section “Discussion of Findings”.

Figure 2: Highlights of Findings from Environmental Scan



Literature Review Findings

Much of the literature included research involving interviews with youth and their parents, surveys of youth and community members as well as focus groups with students, service providers and service organization leaders. A consistent focus of the literature on youth in North America was on youth development, including health and social issues as well as programs, services and opportunities for youth participation. Additionally, the literature pointed to challenges and barriers that affect youth as well as gaps in policies and services.

The review of literature validated the findings from the environmental scan of youth programs, services and policies conducted for this project. The strongest point identified is the notion that multiple assets or multiple prevention strategies are more effective than single strategies (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006). Using an ecological⁴ framework, which takes into consideration youth characteristics as well as family, school and community factors, has been found to contribute to academic performance achievement (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Brofenbrenner, 1977; Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993).

⁴ “Ecological”, in the context of this paper, refers to the relationship between human beings and between human beings and their physical and social environments.

When students actively participated in community activities outside school hours, the impact on positive development was greater, especially for youth in high-risk neighbourhoods (Quane & Rankin, 2006). Structured community programs involving skill building have been found to be more beneficial (Mahoney et al, 2001; Perkin et al, 2007); for example, transitional housing program incorporating life skills training (Bridgman, 2001).

Emotional attachment and bonding also have a strong impact on youth development. A supportive relationship with an adult such as a teacher or mentor has been found to be a very important protective factor in studies on resiliency (Becker and Luthar, 2001; Partners in Change, 2005; Evans & Ave, 1997). However, socio-emotional interventions without appropriate attention to academic reform were not effective in changing academic performance. Becker and Luthar (2001) summarized the factors needed for disadvantaged children to have lasting academic achievement. These included “teaching and learning approaches that are designed to support feelings of belonging, academic self-efficacy, and mental health” (p. 204). Additionally, they outlined evidence-based factors for a successful curriculum to include building on children’s cultural knowledge, opportunities for self-exploration and expression, structuring learning activities of interest and meaning to students and maintaining some level of students’ responsibility for their own learning.

A large body of literature addressed problems or risks faced by youth. School/community engagement, family connectedness and friend connectedness were all associated with youth health risk factors such as smoking, drinking, depression and early sexual activity among others (Carter et al, 2007). The greater the youth engagement and connectedness with family/friend/school/community, the lesser was the risk factors. Additionally, factors such as depression and loneliness were linked to higher suicide rates. Suicide-related deaths continue to be the second leading cause of death among youth (Zenere & Lazarus, 1997).

Family violence was also shown to have a great impact on youth development. Children who were exposed to violence in their families or communities repeated the cycle of violence (O’Keefe, 1997) and those youth with a high exposure to violence were more likely to report psychological symptoms. Although violence among males was more prominent, violence among female was on the rise. Molnar et al. (2005) found that 23.9% of girls between grade 9 and 12 years of age reported involvement in a violent fight. Girls who were fearful and faced violence in their communities found themselves staying home more often, needing to be accompanied when walking at night and in some cases joining gangs for protection. Youth who were less exposed to violence in their community were more likely to pursue opportunities of positive development and less likely to involve themselves in risk-taking behaviours. A multi-pronged approach has been suggested as necessary in supporting youth development (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006).

Positive youth development through successful prevention and intervention strategies relies on the availability and ease of access to programs and services geared toward youth (Rubinstein-Avila, 2006). However, one of the major barriers faced by youth was shown to be the absence of programs and services in their neighbourhoods (Louciades et al, 2007). Low-income neighbourhoods did not have the financial supports needed to provide after school development for youth within their community (Frazier et al, 2007; Morrison et al, 1997). A lack of services

within the community resulted in lower youth community engagement, which facilitated the presence of gangs resulting in higher-risk behaviours. In some cases, even when services were available, the lack of community awareness created barriers. Youth were unaware of the programs and services offered because of their location or lack of promotion (Solorio et al, 2006). When services were provided, they were geared to a specific segment of youth (Louciades et al, 2007). For example, anti-violence programs and prevention strategies were focused on boys and not girls (Roberts et al, 2005).

Other barriers and challenges that youth faced occurred due to stereotypes of youth as well as stereotypes of certain neighbourhoods (Jones & Perkins, 2006). For example, youth living in low-income or high-violence neighbourhoods were denied jobs and some youth did not get the attention and encouragement they needed in school (Bauder, 2002). Low or negative expectations by adults in authority positions were found to have negative impact on youth development (Jones & Perkins, 2006). The lack of programs, adequate facilitators as well as accurate information of developmental strategies created barriers that produced negative impacts on youth.

Taking on a youth-centred approach, empowering youth and giving them responsibility have been shown to have positive academic and developmental impact on youth (Nicholson et al, 2004). A wide range of effective policies, programs and services have been designed and implemented to create better opportunities for youth and their communities. Various promising practices have been cited in the literature. Peer mentoring, for example has been proven to be more effective than adult-youth mentoring (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006; Rosenblum et al, 2005). Programs that help develop resiliency and ability to cope with stressors have shown positive results (O'Keefe, 1997). Projects with partnership from across different sectors have shown positive results (Bridgman, 2001). Tackling root causes of youth crime such as poverty, lack of family stability, low interest in school and substance abuse, through targeted policies and approaches have also shown promise (Jenson & Howard, 1998; Kalil & Eccles, 1998).

Newcomer youth are a sub-segment of the youth population that face additional barriers. Anisef and Bunch (1994) reported a range of issues faced by visible minority youth including poor performance in class, behavioural problems, dropping out of school, poor attendance, and youth's hostile feelings toward school resulting in delinquent behaviour. They concluded that school policies, discriminatory actions by teachers and lack of encouragement to succeed as reflected in the organizational structure of schools "will continue to (keep youth) at risk unless the system as a whole is actively working to accommodate their differences and needs" (p 9).

In a more recent study, Anisef and Kilbride (2007) continued to document difficulties faced by newcomer youth. Youth reported the following: education was most important to them, but they continue to be hampered by poor second language training and the lack of recognition for their foreign-acquired education. They wanted teachers to reflect their ethnic backgrounds, school-based services that helped bridge the gap between school and home by incorporating programs for parents, health related information as well as job-related information, and lastly, ways to reduce barriers to employment. The basic needs of youth included; adequate housing, assistance in coping and addressing issues of identity and adjustment, culturally appropriate assistance in addressing issues that lead to violence such as low self-esteem, sense of alienation, lack of integration, peer pressure, dealing with harassment, racism and discrimination, and family-

oriented support and youth counselling to tackle the many stressors that come from migration and settlement concerns.

Mahon (2001) studied public policies for school age children in Canada that revealed some interesting conclusions that were validated by the findings in this research project. He reported that the educational sector has been faced with increased demands including linguistic, cultural and religious diversity; demand for choice; de-institutionalization in the health care sector; poverty; and, integration of information technology in curriculum. He reported that school aged children have received more attention than non-school age youth and that policies are generally being used in a targeted manner for specific groups of children and youth such as the National Child Benefit policy targeted to children from low income families. Additionally, there was recognition of the need to do more in the area of prevention – this has largely been in the area of health and child protection by fostering good parenting. Also, different juvenile justice policies exist across Canada with Ontario having more strict measures for offences while some other provinces have relied more on education and community action. Mahon (2001) also reported that provinces have recognized the need to break down the silos that have been common working modus operandi. A key challenge faced in breaking silos was the need to address the issue of client confidentiality. Lastly, to address the rights of children, child advocates have been established in various provinces.

Over the recent past, many jurisdictions have attempted to integrate public policies impacting children and youth through a process of establishing frameworks for youth policy. In a recent review (UWGT, 2007), a number of such youth policy frameworks have been cited including, British Columbia Ministry of Children and Families (2000), *Youth Policy Framework*; Government of Quebec (2001), *Quebec Youth Policy*; Department of Education & Skills, England, UK (2003, 2005), *Every Child Matters: Change for Children/Youth Matters Green Paper*; State of Victoria, Australia, *Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People*; etc.

Through the above brief review of the literature, highlights have been provided on the current state of youth development activities as well as barriers and potential opportunities for healthy youth development and supporting public policy.

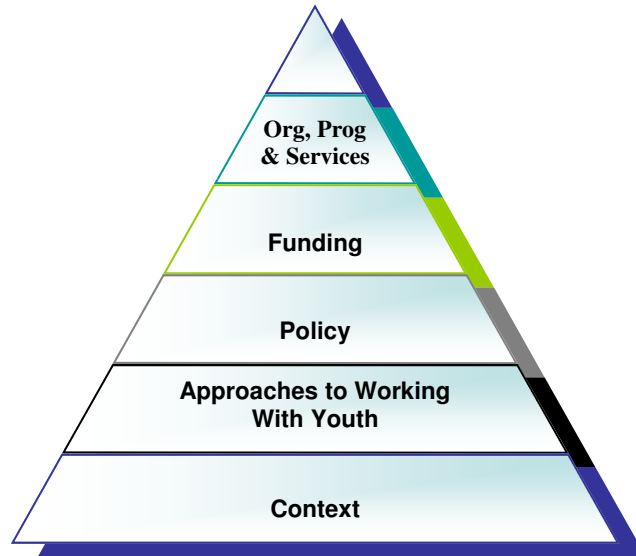
Discussion of Findings

Findings from both the interviews conducted for the environmental scan and the literature review are discussed in this section under several broad themes:

- Approaches in working with youth
- Policy
- Funding, and
- Organizations, programs and services.

Figure 3 depicts the organizing framework for the thematic findings. The context component has been previously discussed in this report.

Figure 3: Organizing Framework for the Thematic Findings



Approaches to Working with Youth

1. Multiple Theoretical Frameworks for Working with Youth

A wide range of strategies, terminologies and theoretical frameworks for working with youth were identified through the literature review and the interviews with stakeholders. Some of the approaches were championed by more stakeholders than others; particularly, those that utilized strength-based⁵ approaches. The movement towards strength-based approaches has been occurring gradually and incrementally over the last decade as new research has emerged; however, stakeholders were quick to note that policy-makers have not yet applied these newer principles in policy formulation and therefore, the spread of these strength-based approaches has been sporadic and inconsistent. Nonetheless, the stakeholders showed a strong desire to shift toward strength-based approaches such as asset-based models, resiliency, etc as well as a shift from an individual “fix-it” approach to a more holistic approach involving the whole family, neighbourhood, community development, etc. Table 1 provides a list of the theoretical approaches with short descriptions.

A harm reduction approach to support the multiple barriers that youth might be facing. Helping young people within communities to serve their communities is what should be promoted (Stakeholder)

⁵ Instead of focusing on what is wrong, strength based approaches focus on the abilities, talents and resources of youth, their families and their environments.

Table 1: Multiple Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical Framework	Explanation
Community development	A process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems
Grassroots approach, outreach	Similar to community development but tends to occur more naturally or organically whereby community members organize to undertake an activity of social change or action.
Harm reduction	An alternative public health philosophy to prohibition of certain dangerous lifestyle choices such as drugs, casual sex, etc.
Determinants of health approach	Health as a function of following clusters of factors – social environment, economic environment, physical environment, personal health practices, individual capacity and coping. These factors interact to produce health and wellbeing (Kidder and Rogers, 2004)
Life transition approach or Continuum approach	Pays attention to five life transitions: between infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and older adulthood (Kidder and Rogers, 2004). The transition phases are addressed as periods of opportunity as well as vulnerability.
Neighbourhood approach	Working in partnership with a neighbourhood community to plan and implement local priorities, initiatives and programs.
Nurturing approaches	Building upon resiliency as a construct for effective intervention. www.michaelungar.ca
Reactive approaches Problem-based approach	Strategies are based on specifically identified issues or problems that youth face, such as crime, school leavers, drug addictions, etc.
Rights-based approach	The right of adolescents to participate and to be engaged. This approach uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Kidder and Rogers, 2004)
Strength-based approach Asset-based approach Resiliency approach	These three related approaches focus on strengths, assets or resiliencies that youth may have or are in their environment. When strategies build on these factors, positive youth development and/or positive outcomes are realized.
Whole-family approach	Strategies that address the needs of the whole family as the unit of intervention or partnership in action.
Youth development	People, programs, institutions and systems who provide all youth— "troubled" or not—with the supports and opportunities they need to empower themselves. As Canada has a rich diversity of youth, it requires youth development in all shapes and sizes.
Youth engagement	“High levels of youth voice and decision making, responsibility, and commitment” (Jones & Perkins, 2006, p 8). Youth engagement refers to youth committing to active involvement, whether school, or community involvement, in which they take responsibility in some form of activity.

The availability of multiple theoretical frameworks allowed the youth-serving system to experiment with different strategies and programs using a variety of trial initiatives funded on a one time basis. These extensive innovations and creative approaches also allowed the proliferation of targeted approaches with the recognition that youth do not belong to one singular homogenous group (Kidder & Rogers, 2004; Metcalf, 2003) but rather, are diverse based on different characteristics such as developmental stage, gender, ethnicity, urban/rural dwellers, those living with family or those estranged, etc.

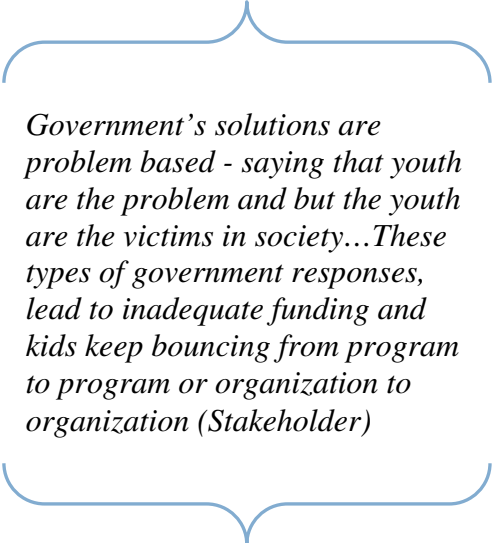
Challenges resulted from the use of different frameworks by different policy-makers and programmatic/service provider agencies within the same youth serving sector. For example, diversion programs in the criminal justice system were strength-based; however, implementation of these programs continued to focus on a “getting tough” approach. This resulted in distrust of the programs by both youth and youth-serving agencies. The consequences of these types of examples included youth falling through the cracks, getting disconnected from supports while other organizations scrambled to fill the gaps between the fragments of the system.

Another example of theoretical mis-alignment concerned the significant cutbacks of youth programs based on positive youth development concepts. These included reduction in numerous vital programs and services in schools such as outdoor education, youth and attendance counsellors, school and community advisors, music camps, vice principals, etc. These cutbacks have been blamed on a flawed funding formula for schools in Ontario (Rozanski, 2002). Although the government has acknowledged the need for change and some attempts have been made to alleviate the stressors caused by the funding formula, stakeholders reported that the assistance has not been substantive.

The use of multiple frameworks also resulted in programs that had an emphasis on different elements (e.g., individual youth, family, neighbourhood, issue). For example, a focus on the individual alone led to a different set of programmatic responses than when the focus is on the family or a neighbourhood. To illustrate, a family with three children may find a youth program after school at a nearby community agency but no offerings for the younger children. If the parents are unable to arrange for day care, they rely on the older youth for babysitting. The lack of a family-centred approach results in the older child forgoing the youth program that could have provided a positive development opportunity. Therefore, the implementation of programs based on different theoretical frameworks resulted in a diverse set of responses in working with youth but also created various new challenges.

2. Prevailing Deficit Based Approach to Youth

Stakeholders repeatedly discussed how youth were seen as problematic, particularly, by policy-makers, contrary to the growing literature on asset-based and resiliency frameworks. Although youth-serving organizations desired to see youth in a positive light, they pointed to the way policies were directed and noted that there were significant differences in investment towards prevention programs (e.g., recreation, education, community action, youth participation) versus intervention programs (e.g., criminal justice, addressing gang issues). These policy misalignments were seen as huge barriers for youth serving organizations as their funding sources were directly related to mandates based on a narrow deficit focus.



Government's solutions are problem based - saying that youth are the problem and but the youth are the victims in society...These types of government responses, lead to inadequate funding and kids keep bouncing from program to program or organization to organization (Stakeholder)

3. “It’s not too late” – Changing the Mindset

Stakeholders referred frequently to “zero to six” investments as a strategic, evidence-based movement that pushed the focus of policy-makers, funders and society to think about early childhood investment as a wise preventive strategy. Although in relative terms, analysis of the impact of these investments is still in its early stages, this directed focus has not allowed for balanced attention to the entire youth development continuum. It was speculated that the policy focus on the early years may have been detrimental for older children and youth as there may be a tendency to think that after the early years, we have “missed the boat” and little can be done. On the contrary, a good body of evidence supports the belief that middle years and teenage years are not “too late” for intervention (Mahon, 2001; <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au>).

Adolescence can be thought of as a developmental stage of both opportunity and vulnerability. It is a stage of rapid development requiring societal supports for youth to make a successful transition to adulthood. However, it was noted in the literature that unlike other age groups, there has been no decline in morbidity or mortality; largely because of issues such as substance abuse and preventable injuries such as car accidents (Kidder and Rogers, 2004). Changing the mindset of decision-makers should be done quickly if policy is to be directed in a preventative manner to address these concerns.

Policy

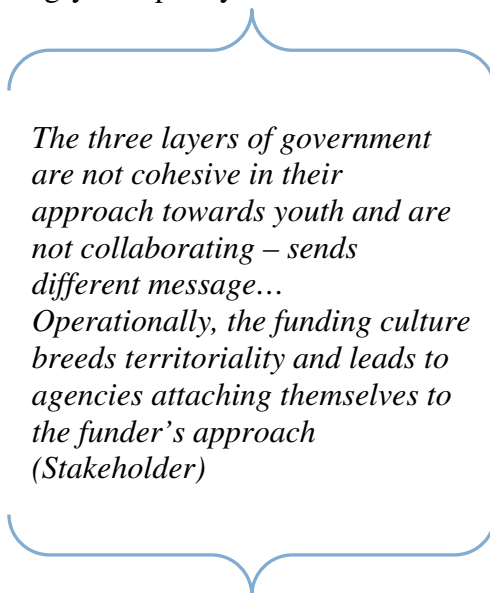
1. Multiple Policy-Makers

The youth serving system has been influenced by a patchwork of policies. Policies are generated largely by funders at three levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) as well as through various non-governmental organizations. Within government, there is no single youth serving ministry or department and therefore, policies were developed based on specific perspectives, issues or priorities. There is little evidence of coordination between the three levels of government, nor within any one level of government.

2. No Overarching Policy Framework

Stakeholders strongly supported a need for an overarching youth policy framework in Toronto; possibly even a provincial or national policy framework. Additionally, it was recognized that youth were not a homogenous population and therefore, appropriate safeguards would be needed to ensure that the policy framework did not create negative unintended consequences. The policy framework should be comprehensive enough to address the multiple needs of youth across the age continuum.

Stakeholders related that the lack of an overarching policy framework had a number of consequences. First, youth faced a wide range of gaps in services when one part of the system was not able to work synergistically with another part. For example,



*The three layers of government are not cohesive in their approach towards youth and are not collaborating – sends different message...
Operationally, the funding culture breeds territoriality and leads to agencies attaching themselves to the funder’s approach
(Stakeholder)*

Ontario Works' policy for long-term social assistance created barriers for programs that provided comprehensive, long-term support program for young women with children on social assistance to allow them to pursue post-secondary education. Although it has been widely documented that the trend for successful careers in adulthood requires education at the postsecondary level (Kidder and & Rogers, 2004), social assistance policies were geared to move people off social assistance as quickly as possible. Another policy disconnect for this same target population was the availability of subsidized child care only until six p.m. after which the women needed to pay for child care at regular rates. Such policies created huge barriers for single women with children who were trying to improve the quality of their lives.

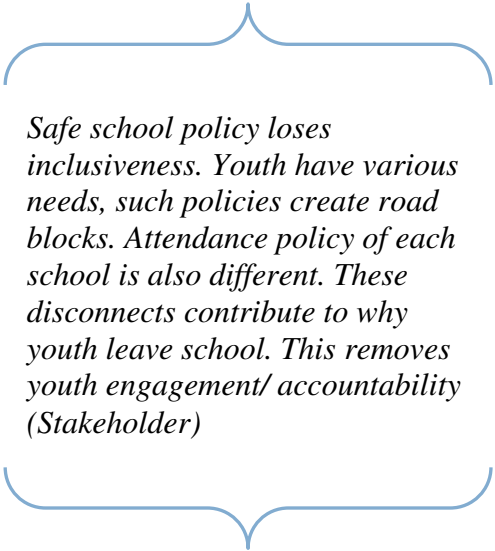
Second, without an overarching youth policy framework, decisions on program activity, funding and attention were largely based on reaction to visible, high-profile issues for which short-term solutions were sought and implemented. These flash points included disengaged youth, youth violence, media reports, etc. This is not to suggest that the decisions were always inappropriate, rather that they were the result of a reactive decision-making process, that done frequently, could create further disconnects between policy decisions and programmatic responses. Stakeholders often spoke about how this type of process created challenges in their ability to respond to the needs of youth in an effective and timely manner. Furthermore, immediate responses to acute issues led to diversion of financial resources away from long-term, positive youth development programs.

Third, reactive policy environments created a number of phenomena that are discussed in more detailed elsewhere in this report. These included promulgation of multiple theoretical perspectives in working with youth, organizations working as silos, lack of appropriate programming as well as lack of long term funding models.

Fourth, in order to survive, each organization made decisions to ensure its ongoing viability, which included tight control of intellectual knowledge sharing and/or selective partnerships with other organizations or groups where mutual benefits were assured. Such partnerships have not always worked well as they required investments of time, cohesive vision and mutual trust.

Lastly, a number of issue-specific networks were established to coordinate work and create some level of synergy. This type of activity also included coordinated efforts to create youth policy framework for segments of the youth population. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2006) has led an extensive process of development of a mental health policy framework for youth.

An integrated and overarching youth policy framework can provide much needed coordination, collaboration, synergy and a clearer understanding and framework of accountability. It was noted that the system required effective methods of evaluating its progress in meeting youth needs. The few system indicators available (e.g., youth leavers from school, youth involved in the



Safe school policy loses inclusiveness. Youth have various needs, such policies create road blocks. Attendance policy of each school is also different. These disconnects contribute to why youth leave school. This removes youth engagement/ accountability (Stakeholder)

criminal justice system) for evaluating progress were not necessarily aligned with an integrated framework of programs and resources. A provincial youth score-card based on an integrated youth policy framework could lead to a coordinated effort to meeting youth needs.

A range of suggestions was provided by stakeholders on how to move towards a youth policy framework. This included the need for sustained and credible leadership as well as one or more recognized champions. Several stakeholders spoke of Fraser Mustard’s role as a champion for the “zero to six” policy framework⁶ based on the early years study published in 1999 (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Various stakeholders indicated that a multi-stakeholder council, structure or “wrap around” council could ensure multiple perspectives and take into account the diverse needs of youth and cross-sector considerations. Lastly, the policy framework needed to be closely linked to key strategic directions that had a long-term focus of ten to fifteen years.

Various issue-specific policies or strategies have already been undertaken, and these should be leveraged in efforts to move towards integration. Some examples include the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2006), *A shared responsibility: Ontario’s policy framework for child and youth mental health*; and, Strong Neighbourhoods Taskforce (2005), *Strong neighbourhoods: a call to action*. Additionally, two provinces, British Columbia and Quebec, have undertaken a youth policy framework in different ways.

3. Working in Silos

Another commonly cited concern was the tendency of the sector to work in silos. Stakeholders noted that sectors such as education, employment, social services, justice, and recreation do not always work together in a collaborative manner and this often extends to organizations that work within the same sector. This is not to say that there were no efforts to collaborate; in fact, many examples were provided where such efforts were undertaken. It is important to note that this was a systemic issue and one that was not easily amended despite the efforts of many well-intentional individuals, groups, and initiatives.

Factors contributing to the silo phenomenon included the lack of a coordinating framework. Stakeholders felt that a key contributing factor to the silo effect was the poor alignment of the three levels of governments with respect to overall direction for the youth-serving system. This sometimes resulted in duplication of services such as the programs created by both the federal and provincial governments to improve youth employment. Efforts made by municipalities to bring about coordinated social planning were seen as worthwhile. Although not well known amongst the broad range of stakeholders, it should be noted that the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services has also recognized the need for cooperation and coordination among children and youth services and

‘Hidden Homeless’ – Many youths share places or move from friend to friend and city to city... since there is no central intake, we would not know if youth who has left or has another bed or not (Stakeholder)

⁶ The seminal work of McCain and Mustard (1999) mapped out the neuroscience explanation of why young children entering the school system did well or not. They pointed to the pre-disposing success factors that were present in the early years (0 to 6) that were deciding factors on whether children succeeded or not in later life.

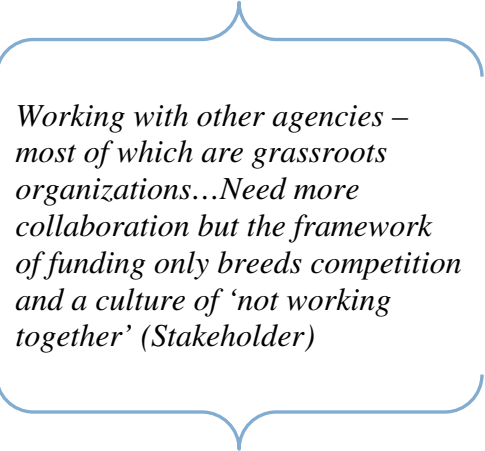
sectors. The Ministry has recently engaged a cross sector of Toronto stakeholders to establish a Children and Youth Services Planning and Alignment Council with the purpose of engaging them in planning an overarching citywide vision.

The lack of a centralized coordinating framework for policy, governance and administration of programs contributed to multiple strategy developments that were often addressed in isolation. Sectors and organizations within sectors have undertaken planning efforts within frameworks that were developed, at best, with some sector-wide stakeholder involvement but rarely with cross-sector involvement. Even when stakeholders were involved, the perspectives were narrowly defined and often not based on evidence-based approaches. Multiple strategies often resulted in programs targeted at the same youth groups; sometimes these appeared to be similar and possibly duplicative and at other times created confusion for parents and youth who were not familiar with sector differences. They only saw multiple programs tackling similar objectives with somewhat similar strategies.

Stakeholders had clear notions of what a coordinated framework would provide. Ideally, it was recognized that it would be important to have coordinated services for youth for the provision of holistic approaches based on a youth-centric model instead of a piecemeal approach. Pragmatic benefits identified by stakeholders included avoidance of duplication of effort; maximizing limited resources; avoiding unintended consequences when changes in one part of the system had a negative impact on another part of the system; providing services to a common base of youth that required intensive approaches rather than one-off referrals; ensuring sharing of information so youth do not have to repeat their story many times over and risk having concerns unaddressed; and lastly, sharing of promising practices so an entire sector could improve its services much more rapidly.

Stakeholders, however, spoke of the challenges in working toward an integrated system, such as the time required for cross-organizational and cross-sector communication. Examples were provided of various networks that have sprung up and are seen as valuable forums; but in reality, a lack of resources prevented full and appropriate participation in these networks. Also, bringing together people from different mindsets and with different ideas of youth, to agree on a common platform, has taken many meetings and lots of commitment from players to invest effort and capacity. The resulting discussions have often required stakeholders to let go of previously held values and/or practices. This type of transformation ideally requires government support and directives to create a steady and forward momentum. Nonetheless, there were small groups that were determined to move toward an integrated system even though there was recognition that there would not be quick fixes.

Short-term strategies suggested to address the silo effect included the establishment of a clearinghouse of evaluated promising practices; sharing of expertise and available resources such as toolkits, program ideas, etc.; and regular cross-sector conferences to share promising practices and engage in dialogue with youth on areas of



Working with other agencies – most of which are grassroots organizations...Need more collaboration but the framework of funding only breeds competition and a culture of ‘not working together’ (Stakeholder)

interest. Both the literature and the environmental scan pointed to a vast explosion of innovation in addressing youth development and youth-related issues. In the Toronto area, numerous innovative initiatives and approaches have been flourishing as a result of funding requirements as well as the autonomy enjoyed by youth serving organizations, particularly, the smaller organizations. It is therefore, important that a push toward integration attempts to ensure the inclusion of strategies that nurture positive innovation.

Funding

1. Funding for Youth Programs and Services

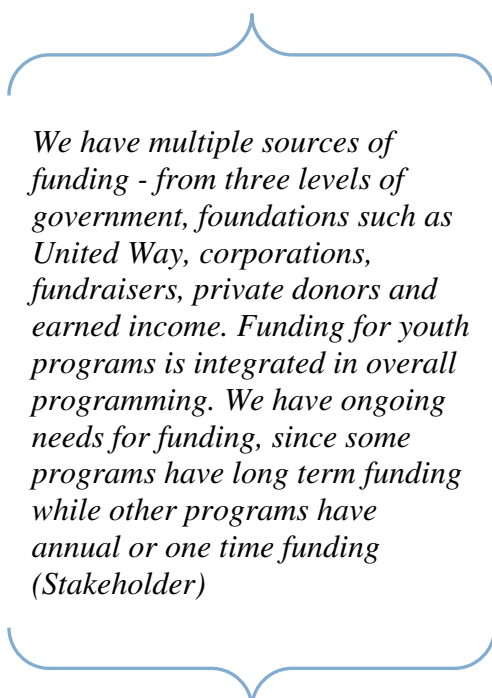
Funding has followed the same pattern as policy formulation; that is, funding has come from a variety of government sources (federal, provincial and municipal) and non-governmental sources (private and charitable foundations). Many individual organizations have also conducted their own annual or periodic fundraising within the community they serve. Increasingly, programs have been provided on a user fee basis or shared cost arrangements. The close tie between policy and funding means that the legislated programs have core or sustainable funding; although, non-governmental foundations are also increasingly providing core funding for specific programs due to unmet needs. It also means that changes in policy direction inevitably has an impact on programmatic funding resulting in a constant shifting of program offerings. Therefore, organizations have had to be quick to change their approaches to suit the next wave of policy and funding changes.

2. Environment of Competition

Funding structures were identified by stakeholders as the main reason for the environment of competition within the youth serving system in the Toronto area. Specifically, the ongoing competition for short-term, project-based funding has pitted organizations against one another for the funds available through various “Calls for Proposal.” Organizations that did not have core funding had a huge stake in winning such bids. Organizations invested significant time and resources in preparing proposals and subsequently documenting to comply with accountability requirements. Organizations with few resources found they had to take away resources from their service/program provision in order to write proposals and maintain the accountability requirements.

In recent years, funders’ tendency to focus on very specific target areas has created yet another layer of complexity. Organizations or programs that did not fit these new criteria found their funding sources have become increasingly scarce. Some organizations have responded by repackaging their programs to fit new funding call criteria so that they could continue to have resources for their existing programs.

Several stakeholders commented on the differences in the



We have multiple sources of funding - from three levels of government, foundations such as United Way, corporations, fundraisers, private donors and earned income. Funding for youth programs is integrated in overall programming. We have ongoing needs for funding, since some programs have long term funding while other programs have annual or one time funding (Stakeholder)

needs of neighbourhoods and communities in Toronto. Recent funding to address “guns and gangs” has meant that other needs were not being addressed. Moreover, there has been greater focus/attention on intervention programs rather than a balanced approach with prevention initiatives.

The “Calls for Proposal” were usually competitive in nature and required organizations to offer well-thought-out, innovative approaches to address specific issues. For example, there could be calls for specific employment projects, or youth engagement resources, etc. Organizations, therefore, have had an interest in ensuring that their intellectual property was well protected and competitive. This environment encourages organizations to “protect their turf” in order to have an edge over other organizations. This is a well-documented effect in competitive market economies (Cacciatori, 2005).

Funding is not sufficient – we have to cut on types of services and hire under qualified staff. Also I think that other provincial organizations should be involved in providing access to their services. E.g. Ministry of Health, Corrections, Education, Culture and Heritage, etc (Stakeholder)

Stakeholders were clear that they did value sharing and collaborative activity. In fact, in some instances, strategic collaboration had given partners a competitive edge in their proposals. Collaborative activities have been particularly effective in pooling resources and conducting research and advocacy that generated a win-win situation for all involved (Karabanow, 2004).

An environment of competition required organizations to provide “added value” at the lowest price. Hence, proposals tended to have very competitive budgets. Moreover, funders expected to get a lot more than the price could realistically cover, and bidders resorted to cutting costs, including finding the cheapest labour. Therefore, stakeholders spoke of the difficulty of attracting highly skilled staff because of the low salaries and benefits that they could afford to provide. Furthermore, short-term, non-sustainable funding meant that the cycle of competition was repeated over and over again. It was not clear whether economic analysis validated these views; however, stakeholders in all sectors were in general agreement in their conclusion that funding structures were the root causes of the environment of competition.

Organizations, Programs and Services

1. Difficulty Accessing Programs

A wide range of programs and services were available in Toronto but they were not necessarily available or easily accessible in every neighbourhood or part of the city. Part of the problem is linked with the demographic changes occurring in Toronto and the difficulty in keeping pace with changing needs. Accessibility is affected by factors such as transportation, time to travel and awareness of programs as well as challenges in linking youth with the programs. Stakeholders also talked about a number of factors that impact on access – restrictions on age category for program (e.g. foster care) (Collins, 2004), perception by youth of youth friendliness of programs, awareness of program, etc. Multiple approaches to programming also demonstrated the availability of services and programs that varied in type, intensity, specialization and mode of delivery as well as the target audience for the programs.

Involvement of youth in program planning and implementation seemed to be limited. Good examples of youth involvement included representation on boards, committees, advisory committees, implementation, research and marketing/dissemination of information. It was noted that youth involvement was a challenge for a number of reasons. It was not always clear what was the best way to engage youth. Some have resorted to asking youth how they wish to be engaged, which has been found to be helpful to some extent. Developing youth capacity for meaningful involvement was noted as a strong requirement. This meant establishing relationships, willingness to have a flexible approach, providing leadership opportunities and training, mentorship and addressing barriers to engagement such as providing support for transportation and honoraria as well as ensuring a genuine interest by both parties.

Various stakeholders noted that there were not enough youth who were willing to invest time and energy in creating longer-term partnerships with initiatives. They noted that the same youth tended to be involved at multiple planning tables, events, round tables, etc. These youth found they enjoyed the work they were doing but they were also “stretched too thin” at times. This issue was echoed by adult stakeholders. There was a need to create greater capacity or pathways for youth to take on leadership roles.

To engage youth in programming, many agencies either hired outreach workers, partnered with grassroots organizations that could reach youth or continued to use traditional methods of raising awareness of their programs through marketing tactics, word of mouth, referral sources, etc. Some organizations used all the above methods. Stakeholders spoke about not having enough resources available for outreach to connect youth to programs. They spoke about using their personal connections developed over the years with the community as successful outreach strategies.

The use of grassroots organizations in outreach work, although found to be beneficial, had some perceived difficulties. Grassroots organizations reported some level of resentment as there was little, if any, financial support for their role in the partnership. They noted that involvement of grassroots organizations looked good on proposals to funders but the relationships were not always equitable.

Raising awareness and knowledge of services and programs was generally challenging. The shelf life of some programs was short because of project-based funding. It was noted that youth took time to engage with programs and that removal of programs created distrust between youth and program staff as well as demoralized staff. Moreover, by the time word got around about good programs, these programs were often wrapping up because of time-limited funding. Besides project-based funding, increased user fee for usage of public space previously available for community programming has resulted in the closer of a number of youth clubs as they were unable to pay the service fees (Fitzpatrick and SPACE Coalition, 2002).

Information dissemination posed another challenge. Social service workers found that they received daily information on new programs through word of mouth, emails or flyers. They spoke about the difficulty of managing the information that came their way; with the result that they were often not aware of many programs. When asked about their use of the 211 phone line, they agreed that it was a good resource and they had been promoting its use with their staff;

however, they have found that the information was not always current. Additionally, new and short run programs were not added to 211 resources. Despite the availability of a 211 section for youth services and programs, there was difficulty in sorting through the plethora of programs, many of which looked similar in their offering.

Stakeholders spoke of their continual concern that positive youth programs such as recreational programs were among the first to be cut during budget shortfalls. This sent a clear message that preventative and positive youth development programs were ‘nice to have’ programs rather than necessary programs. They also noted that lack of space, isolated location of their offices, transportation needs, safety concerns and the need to use multiple ways of providing access to programs and services (e.g. drop in, referral, outreach, etc.), all required resources. User based programs posed an additional barrier to youth who could not afford these programs.

It is widely recognized that programming for youth must cover the full range of programs addressing mental health, violence, racism, general well-being and support systems as well as leisure activities, organized sports, music, etc. The breadth of programs and services reported by stakeholders in the Toronto area were reflected in the literature as appropriate for youth. Many of the programs could also be labelled as “state of the art” or “promising practices.” It should be noted, however, that a key gap in the programs reflected in both the literature and program availability in Toronto was the minimal involvement of parents. There is sufficient evidence that parent involvement whether in school, in extracurricular activities, mental health, or addiction is an important element in youth success (Ballon et al, 2004; Sandefur et al, 2006). Reasons for minimal parental involvement included lack of opportunity to be involved, lack of awareness of how to be involved, as well as lack of time/capacity to get involved. Examples included long working days for parents that prevented their participation in school related events or lack of financial resources to support youth activities.

Groups that continued to be perceived as falling through the cracks or needing more supports were youth involved with the criminal justice system, youth with mental health issues (the issue was more of access than availability), Aboriginal youth, homeless youth, young women – especially those with children, African Canadian youth, other ethnic groups – Somali, Portuguese, Spanish; newcomers, middle-year children (age 11 to 15); and youth involved in “hard core” gangs. The literature also pointed to other potentially vulnerable segments including pregnant youth, youth in transition homes, youth in care and disconnected youth (Ontario Minister of Labour, 2007).

Lastly, stakeholders perceived a recent trend for policy-makers and funders to pay more attention to, community safety, employment issues, and youth-led initiatives/youth engagement. Although the stakeholders did not disagree with these directions, they noted that greater emphasis continued to be placed on intervention-based initiatives versus prevention; the exception being some of the recent youth led/engagement initiatives. However, many stakeholders also raised concerns about the sustainability of these youth-led initiatives because of the short term funding structures, and lack of supports to assist youth through various leadership transitions that are inevitable as youth move on to other phases in their lives.

2. Challenges in Providing Holistic Responses

Stakeholders stated that comprehensive approaches using multi-dimensional/multi-faceted or holistic responses were ideal programming for youth (Metcalf, 2003). They spoke of how youth required attention to multiple needs. For example, youth attending recreational programming benefited from positive role models, mentoring, advice and other informational resources such as health information, and educational advice as well as counselling on issues such as bullying or discrimination (DuBois et al, 2002).

Any integrated approach that helps the holistic needs of the youth community is a promising practice (Stakeholder)

Successful responses occurred successfully when they were comprehensive school-based programs or involved the school(s) in an integrated manner (Metcalf, 2003). Such responses had to address the full range of determinants of well-being: housing, nutrition, developmental well-being, education, employment, safety and sense of inclusion. Provision of programs through the entire youth age range that addressed prevention, intervention and positive youth development were also cited as important (Lakin and Mahoney, 2006). Often, to provide such holistic approaches, comprehensive assessments were required with well-trained staff as well as effective case management for youth faced with multiple challenges (Peake et al, 2006).

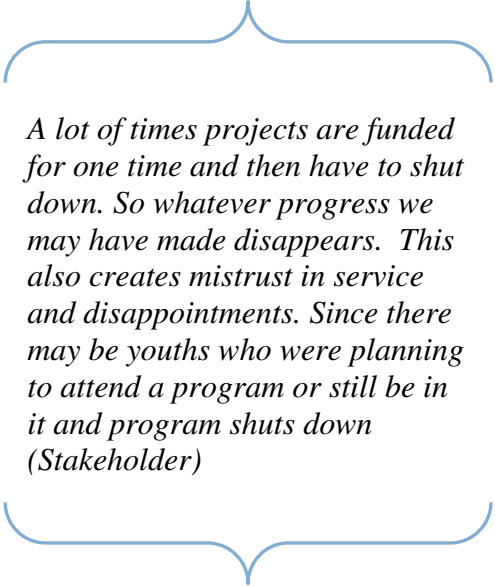
Academic supports, particularly for disadvantaged youth, were commonly cited as important elements of a holistic response. This included supporting youth with appropriate curriculum, homework help, tutorial assistance, post-secondary education selection, career planning supports as well as youth leadership skill development and mentoring. Ensuring that these academic supports were integrated in the core curriculum for youth in order to protect these programs from potential cutbacks was discussed as a key strategy for sustainability.

It was recognized that a large investment took place for youth in the education sector for the academic development of youth; however, there was a significant gap in integrating the non-academic youth development requirements. A policy framework that integrates both the academic and other youth needs would result in a more comprehensive and holistic approach to serving youth and provide evaluation of youth outcomes in an integrated manner.

As mandatory programs tend to receive sustainable funding, stakeholders were interested in pursuing avenues whereby programs and services that were necessary for positive youth development became part of mandatory programs for youth – a model similar to the recent work done in the public health sector. This strategy would require consensus on what constitutes “necessary programs” within defined standards that were appropriate for youth programs and services as

We have challenges and obstacles in serving youth population due to very few holistic programs - most are fragmented. Not including family in programs is a short coming as well as lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness of target issues. We tend to forget the realities of poverty in our programming, the need for recreational opportunities and, residential addiction treatment programs (Stakeholder)

well as translated into measurable outcomes. The purpose of standards was to set out the minimum requirements for youth programs and services with the aim to meet specified outcomes. Such standards would need to reflect broad aspirations for all Ontario youth and reflect the role of governing bodies in providing and/or ensuring relevant youth programs and services.



*A lot of times projects are funded for one time and then have to shut down. So whatever progress we may have made disappears. This also creates mistrust in service and disappointments. Since there may be youths who were planning to attend a program or still be in it and program shuts down
(Stakeholder)*

Although stakeholders spoke of the many benefits of providing multi-dimensional and holistic responses, they also said they were unable to provide everything to every youth due to limited resources and capacity. Referrals have been a common strategy to link youth to specialized or need-specific programs and/or organizations. The challenge was that there were no

general referral banks; hence, they worked on a case-by-case basis looking for agencies that had available services and “slots” to accept the youth being referred. Maintaining ongoing and positive relationships with agencies where referrals were directed was cited as an important strategy to ensure youth received the programs they needed and did not fall through the cracks. All of this required tremendous horizontal or cross-sector collaboration and coordination.

3. Fun Not Seen as Important

A theme that was echoed time and time again was the need to provide an environment that allows youth to play, have fun, and provide creative outlets and opportunities to develop through positive interaction with their peers. Stakeholders repeatedly commented on the lack of recreational activity at school, after school and in the wider community even though the benefits of recreational are well documented (National Children’s Alliance, 2002). Access to a diverse set of recreational activities should be available in safe environments, supervised by adult mentors and coaches, and provide choices for both genders in culturally sensitive approaches (Molnar et al, 2005; Perkins et al, 2007). Several stakeholders found that hiring youth as summer counsellors or youth leaders for programs for younger children was not only beneficial for the children but allowed the youth themselves to experience activities they would not have otherwise have experienced. Some youth, for example, had never learned to swim, attended a camp or gone to a museum. Employing youth in recreational programs was therefore seen as beneficial all round.

A significant amount of evidence has been available to support the positive outcomes associated with participation in recreation (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 1997; Canadian Policy Research Network, 2001). Benefits of recreation can be broken into personal (physical and fitness, balance, quality of life, leisure, etc.), social (leadership development, reducing alienation and loneliness, increased sense of belonging and community involvement, etc.), economic (catalyst for tourism, business relocation and expansion, etc.) and environmental (environmental protection and rehabilitation, etc.).

4. Decentralization and Centralization of Youth Serving Organizations

In spite of factors such as the environment of competition, the lack of an overarching policy framework, concerns about duplication of efforts and the burgeoning number of organizations serving youth, stakeholders reported that efficiencies could be achieved through centralizing some organizational functions (research, advocacy, referrals) while keeping other functions decentralized (financial control, service delivery). One example of centralizing activity is the formation of networks such as Youth Servicing Agencies' Network (YSAN), which states among its objectives "to collaborate and coordinate new initiatives, prevent and reduce duplication, use resources strategically, ensure representation of YSAN on appropriate community boards and committees" (www.ysan.ca).

The increasing number of networks for various youth serving organizations (Grassroots Youth Collaborative, Youth Shelter Inter-Agency Network, Toronto Drop-In Network, etc), was a push to centralize certain functions while maintaining autonomy by ensuring that key activities remained decentralized and within the purview of the individual organization. Some stakeholders have gone on to say that this trend in centralizing functions was a natural process in the evolution of youth-serving organizations. Others mentioned that there were expectations for cost savings in centralizing some functions but it was important to maintain the "on the ground reality" for effective implementation and community engagement.

Another area of discussion amongst youth system stakeholders was the establishment of centralized entities that provided function-specific support to youth-led programs and activities. This model of support would allow youth-led programs to receive organizational support in non-service or non-programmatic content areas such as human resource management, financial and bookkeeping management functions, report writing, etc. Such support functions were already being used in partnership arrangements where youth-led initiatives entered into a trusteeship relationship with an established organization.

Synthesis of Findings and Overall Conclusions



The themes discussed above describe a system that has gaps and demonstrates fragmentation in approaches, services and programs as well as youth and parental engagement. Examples of fragmentation were provided across all the sectors serving youth; although, it is not clear if fragmentation is experienced equally or whether there is differential impact of some gaps on youth. In order to determine priority or focus of initial attention, priority setting criteria such as risk, volume, impact and sustainability could be used (Adams & Corrigan, 2003). See Table 2 for application of criteria to prioritize action.

Table 2: Youth System Fragmentation: Criteria for Priority Setting Action

CATEGORY	CRITERIA
Risk	Immediacy/urgency of the need (acuity of circumstance resulting from fragmentation) The effect on the most marginalized (vulnerability created by fragmentation)
Volume	The number of youth affected (size of the impact that fragmentation is having)
Impact	The extent of impact of doing something to address the fragmentation (ability to reduce or eliminate fragmentation)
Sustainability	The long term impact (sustainability of impact)

The more recent responses to address fragmentation in the youth system has focused on the risk issues and to some degree volume issues; that is, the acuity and size of the problem as well as targeting the most vulnerable. The policies, however, are described as a patchwork resulting in poorly funded programs leaving youth who are either un-served or under served. Furthermore, the responses that could have the most impact in a sustainable manner require significant investments over a long period of time. There is a need to focus increasingly on interventions that have a long term and sustainable impact on youth outcomes.

The above findings were shared with four focus groups of stakeholders comprising of 27 individuals. By and large, there was agreement and strong support for the findings. Participants provided additional examples of the thematic conclusions as well as stressed specific themes. The following were the areas that were raised (in no particular order of importance):

- Funding structures prevented holistic approaches, resulted in working in silos, encouraged problem focused approaches and environment of competition.
 - Priority on youth needs to be set at all levels and matched with appropriate investments.
 - Youth involvement in decision making, policy formation and program planning was seen as important.
 - Supports are needed for advocacy, collaboration and ensuring that the voices of diverse youth, parents and grassroots organizations were heard.
 - There was disconnect between what was said by youth system decision makers and what was done. Prescriptive approaches, hierarchy of relationships between organizations and lack of core values of collaboration, trust and openness, existed in the youth serving system.
 - Need to support innovation and creativity at policy and programmatic levels with service providers/staff who were appropriately skilled, flexible and who could develop sustainable relationships with youth.
 - Support for research to establish grounding for best practices.
- 
- We need seamless system and sufficient supports within communities to engage in positive programming. We also need effective problem solving opportunities for youth. School curriculum should have two sides, formative education and wherever possible programs that nurture relationships (Stakeholder)*
- 

Overall, there were three main conclusions arising from the youth policy research project findings:

1. *Youth need to be taken seriously:* There is a substantial body of evidence that supports the need to maintain high priority on youth over a long term horizon, matched with significant time and resources including a meaningful collaboration between stakeholders, including youth and their parents.
2. *Systemic issues that create fragmentation need to be addressed:* Along with a clear vision and an overarching policy framework, the sectors working with youth need to be reorganized with youth firmly planted at the centre. Using schools, where the majority of youth are found, is a good starting point while keeping in mind that not all youth are in schools. An oversight

infrastructure needs to be established that has authority in key roles such as coordination, supporting collaboration and monitoring system level indicators as well as ensuring essential services/programs are maintained in the system. The value and essence of community development and grassroots organizations' contributions need to be maintained in a significant and not a tokenistic manner.

3. *Best practices/research need to be consolidated and disseminated:* There are excellent pockets of best practices that remain hidden. Strategies are needed to harness these practices for sharing and cross sector learning.

Unanswered Questions

Several questions have emerged from the policy research project that needs to be addressed in subsequent steps:

1. What is the impact when funders provide short-term project-based funding? When is it desirable to have more sustained funding? What are the possible strategies for sustaining programs when short-term funding dries up?
2. What are the opportunities for similar organizations to join forces in serving youth in Toronto? What type of structures would be meaningful? Besides the network form, are there other structures within which organizations could join forces?
3. How can the youth serving system create standards or establish expectations for youth-serving organizations with a view to moving toward a clearer set of core programs?
4. What are the proven or evidence-based practices and how can these get disseminated with a view for broad system uptake?

Conclusions

The youth policy research project sought to understand the range of programs and services available for youth in the Toronto area, to explore the gaps and policy disconnects in the youth serving system and promising practices. The findings were discussed in thematic areas recognizing, however, that there were complex interactions and intersections between these themes. There is both a sense of complexity in addressing the fragments within the landscape of youth service system as well as hopefulness, as there is a tremendous readiness demonstrated by stakeholders to make strides towards a cohesive youth serving system.

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Appendix A- Sampling of Government Policy and Program Areas With a Specific Focus on Youth

These are some policy and program areas that are intended to have a direct impact on youth.

Federal

- Canadian Heritage
 - Citizenship & Identity
 - Multiculturalism and Diversity
 - Employment – summer jobs and internships targeting use of second language, Aboriginal projects, parks and recreation
- Canada Immigration Services
 - Settlement services
- Health Canada
 - Comprehensive school health strategy
 - Healthy living strategy
- Human Resources and Social Development Canada
 - Youth employment strategy -Employment training, Apprenticeship
 - Aboriginal human resource development Strategy
 - National literacy
 - Canada Education Savings Grant
 - Registered Education Savings Plan
 - Canada Students Loans and Grants
 - Universal Child Care Benefit
 - Canada Child Tax Benefit
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
 - Education – scholarships, bursaries, awards; special education programs
 - Employment strategy
 - Promotion of arts, history, culture
- Justice Canada
 - Youth Criminal Justice Act
 - Youth justice renewal strategy
 - Standards of care for youth in justice
 - Child advocates
 - Family violence prevention
- Parks Canada
 - Cultural heritage
- Public Health Agency
 - Healthy public policy – access to alcohol, tobacco to youth, seat belts, graduated driver’s licence
 - Youth engagement
 - Physical activity
 - Reproductive health
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
 - Restorative justice
 - Youth liaison – positive image, prevention
 - Enforcement

Provincial

- Children & Youth
 - Youth Opportunities Strategy – internships, summer employment, apprenticeship, summer company, job connect, etc
 - Child protection
 - Youth in transition
 - Mental health services framework
 - Youth engagement programs e.g. Youth Challenge Fund initiatives
- Community Social Services
 - Affordable housing
 - Ontario Works
 - Targeted programs for specific age groups
- Education
 - Academic curriculum, Alternative schools,
 - Combining middle years with high school students
 - Ontario Student Assistant Plan
 - Improving educational outcomes: class size cap to 20, advancing policy, attendance policy
 - Mandatory community service hours
 - Special education for children with special needs
- Health
 - Physical activity
 - Removal of junk food from school cafeterias
 - Mental health services
- Health Promotion
 - Tobacco reduction
 - Youth engagement – e.g. Youth Voices/Youth Engagement Unit
- Justice
 - School based prevention/diversion
 - Community safety
 - Safe Streets Act

Municipal

- Community safety and crisis response
- Employment, apprenticeship
- Housing
- Public health –sexually transmitted disease prevention, reproductive health
- Recreation for youth and youth spaces
- Strong neighbourhood strategy
- Social planning table
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- Youth engagement programs

Appendix B – Sampling of Youth Programs and Services in Toronto

The following sampling of types of youth programs and services were identified by stakeholders interviewed in the project. The programs have been categorized for ease of review; therefore, some programs can be categorized under more than one heading.

Education: These programs support the educational infrastructure, supports and special assistance to youth and their communities.

- Schools, Alternative schools
- Educational granting/loan programs
- English as a second language
- Homework help
- Career counseling

Employment: Employment programs assist youth in gaining employment with or without post-secondary educational preparation. Some internship programs allow for special skill development, exposure to defined areas of need related to policy (e.g. promoting English/French language skills), market (e.g. technology) and youth engagement .

- Youth employment centres
- Apprenticeship programs
- Other skill development programs
- Internships

Health: Outside of traditional health services that are accessible to the general population, the following are some specific health services that youth are more likely to access or require.

- Community centres
- Community mental health organizations
- Traditional – hospitals, family doctors, walk in clinics
- Sexual health clinics
- Detoxification programs

Community Safety and Justice: Specific programs for youth who are in conflict with the law or those at risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

- Probation system
- Diversion programs
- Anti-violence programs
- Community crisis response
- Police-youth relations programs

Recreation: A diverse range of recreational programs address the different interests of youth. Some include the following:

- Youth-led programs/Initiatives
- Sports – clubs
- Recreation centres
- Music/Dance/Arts

Social Support: Community based social programs that offer an extensive range of social supports.

- Parenting Classes
- Anger management/conflict resolution programs
- Peace truce initiatives
- Social skills and life skills development
- Youth spaces/Drop-in centres
- Street outreach
- Newcomer support
- Education supports and after school programs
- Mentoring programs and peer to peer supports

Youth-led initiatives

- Some are incorporated in above
- Youth entrepreneurship programs



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