

Partners:

Adventure 4 Change
African Family Revival
Organization
Bridges to Belonging
Canadian Aweil Youth
Association
Eritrean Islamic Association
Family and Children's Services
Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery
Levant
Muslim Social Services
Women's Crisis Services

Funded by:

Fairmont Foundation

YOUTH RESILIENCE PROJECT REPORT 2020





DEFINING THE SCOPE

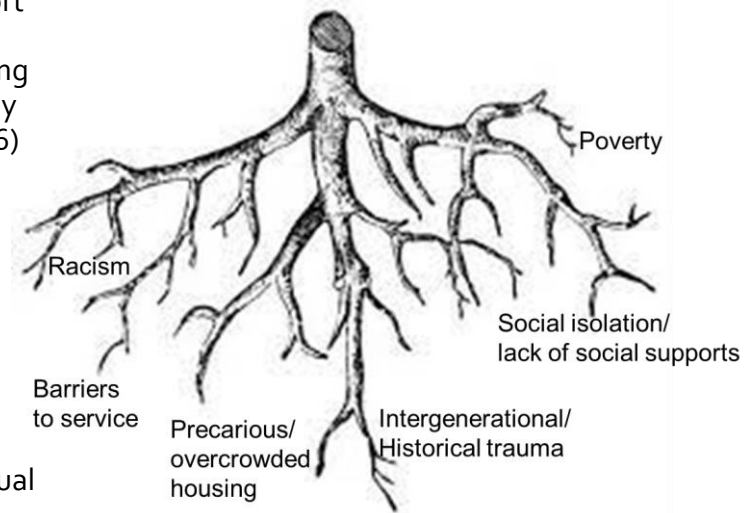
The Need to Promote Resilience

Root Causes

Knowing well that the gateway to any individual's ability to thrive is a connection to their community since 2017, Resilience Project Partners have been working together using collective impact approach to reduce barriers in receiving services and support to promote resilience in the Waterloo Region. Starting from a place of wanting to heal from, and prevent, child abuse and neglect, we looked to the research occurring around the globe have done that tells us that many factors that contribute to family stress often result from systemic inequities (Stoddart, Trocme, Fallon & Fluke, 2016)

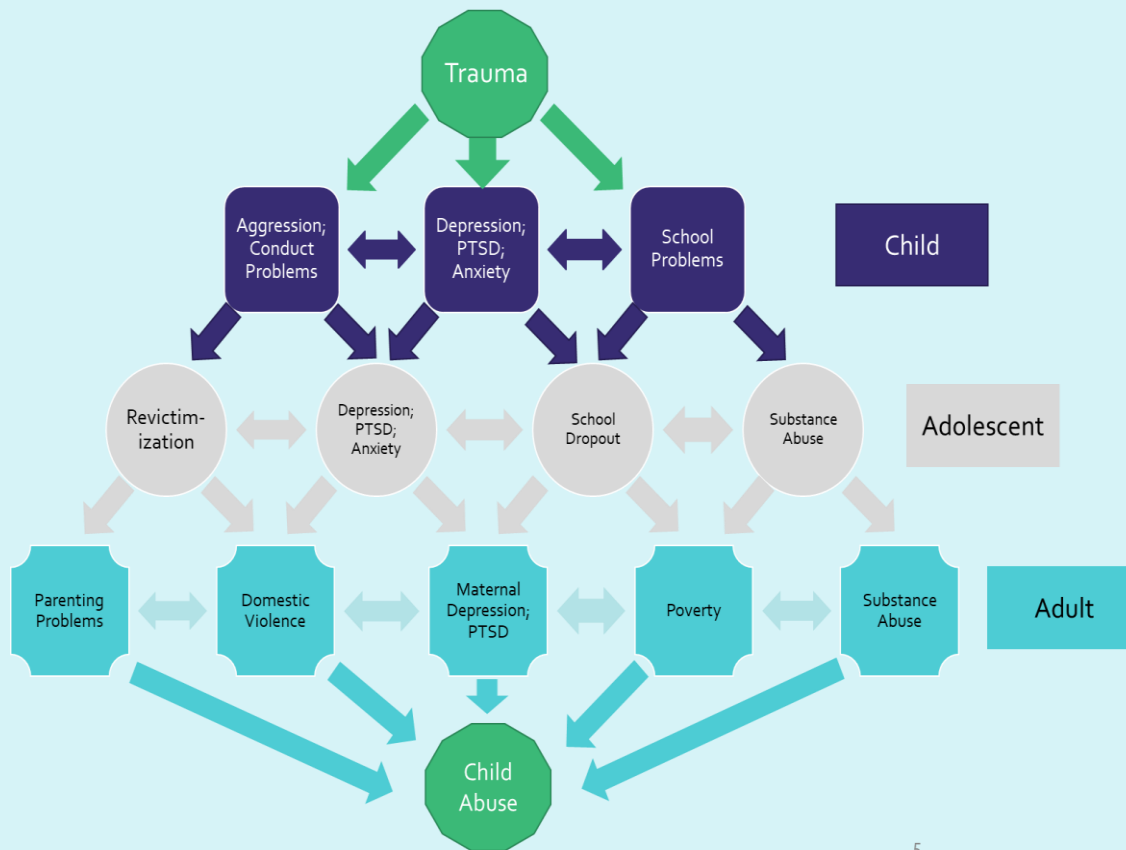
- **Social Isolation****
- Poverty
- Unstable/overcrowded housing
- Child functioning concerns (emotional/mental and cognitive/physical)

Many of these inequities have been illuminated for all society to see during the pandemic. It does not make sense then to try to solve these inequities with individual solutions. We have been exploring how we can come together as a community to neutralize some of the stressors that impact families, and how our work together can have positive impacts on us all as individuals, organizations and communities.



Interruption of Intergenerational Trauma Transmission

4



- Youth we work with have experienced trauma (e.g., exposure to domestic violence, war and genocide, child abuse and neglect, poverty, forced migration, resettlement trauma, racial trauma etc.). The project aims to disrupt the transmission of intergenerational trauma (Putnam & Harris, 2008) by targeting trauma symptoms experienced in the adolescence stage that can continue to impact people as they transition to adulthood and become parents themselves. By placing the healing of youth at the center of our programming, we are investing into our collective futures.



*When a flower
doesn't bloom
you fix the
environment in
which it grows,
not the flower*

*-Alexander Den
Heijer*

To define or not resilience?

- The most well know definition of resilience centers resilience within the individual:

"the ability to overcome adversities (traumatic events or conditions, hardships or suffering). People and communities who have developed resilience can...resist the effects of hardship or bounce back and return to, or even excel, level of functioning."

- As we began our work together back in 2014, we started with the most common western definitions of Resilience. These definitions frame resilience as an interaction between individual characteristics or traits along with external factors that influence families and communities (the environment around an individual) that work together to help people "overcome adversity". While it is clear to us that there is an element of individual resilience needed for a person to move forward, it has become abundantly clear that there is more to recovery than what meets the eye...

- For instance, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (citation) laid the foundation for understanding of adversities and their impact on adult outcomes. While thinking about Adverse Childhood Experiences was helpful when we started our work, we have moved beyond this and our understanding of resilience has also grown. Grown from framing resilience as individual recovery from adversity to understanding resilience as the strength of a collective community.



“Hidden” Resilience

- Making do with the strengths youth must cope in a ‘risky environment’ (neglect, abuse, conflict, lack of opportunity, violence, etc.).
- Defiance, avoidance, aggression, depression, self-harm, etc., may be all ways **of trying to evoke** from environment (others or self) the resources needed to cope.
- When environment lacks the pathways to resources of resilience, youth will navigate toward what is most within reach. i.e., associate with peers / risky behaviours that compensate for lack of meaningful relationships, lack of power and identity / sense of justice / etc.
- Thus, it is key that we challenge ourselves on what we consider if resilience, and value the behaviours of youth in communicating to us a need and/or a strength.

(Ungar, 2008. National Dialogue on Resilience and Youth)

Collective Impact Approach

The collective impact approach involves working together on a common goal with common measures - in our case that is resilience. While we may take varied approaches for the different individuals and communities we are working with, by working together and communicating our collaborative work we are able to amplify our impact.

The key to engaging in promoting resilience is ordinary magic, and one's own community is at the centre of that magic. The Resilience Project relates to multiple grassroot organizations with global lived experiences that support their capacity to engage diverse communities.

"Resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways." (2004, Ungar).



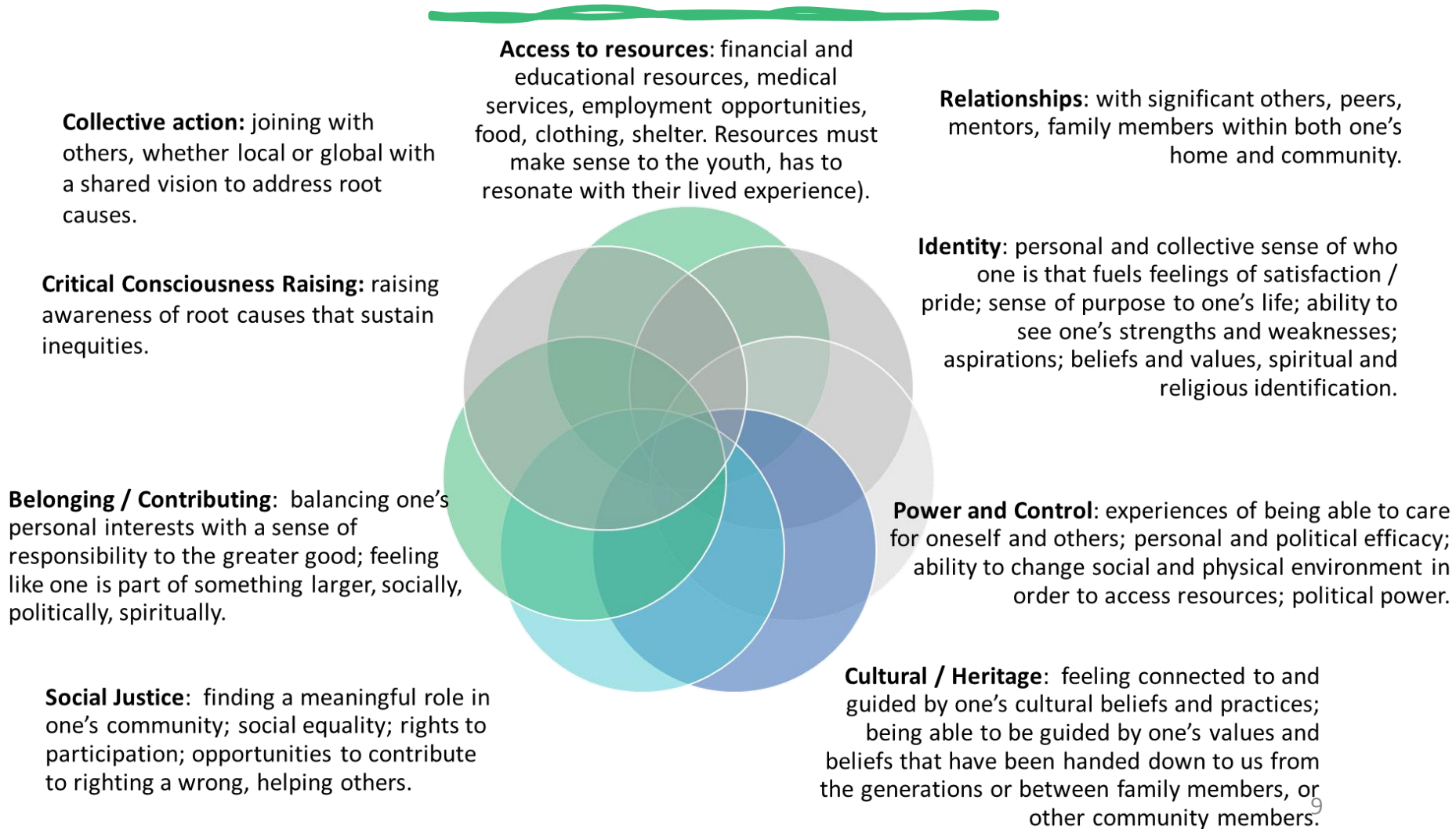
Resilience is Interconnected



PROGRAM PLANNING

Promoting Resilience in our Future

9 Resources / Tensions that must be kept in balance when Promoting Youth Resilience:





Provide opportunities for power and control

Hope and life purpose

Encourage sense of culture and historical roots

Strengthen relationships

- positive attachment bonds with caregivers
- Positive relationships with other nurturing adults
- Friends/positive peer relationships

Encouraging powerful identities

- Self-esteem
- Self-efficacy (mastery)
- Self-regulation
- Skill development

Strengthen sense of belonging

- Family
- Community
- Schools/organizations
- Culture

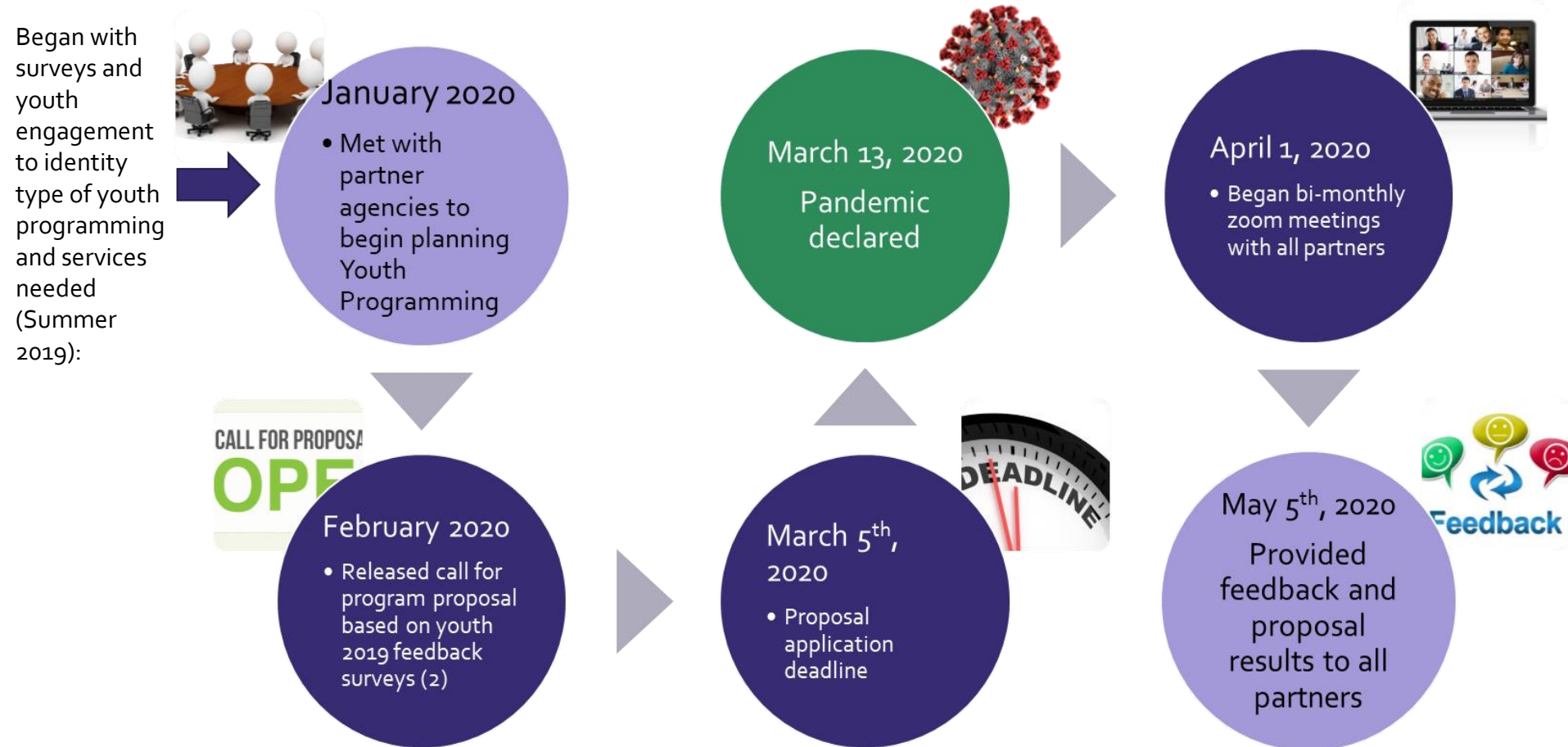
Promote social justice

- Service to others
- Responsibility for others
- Equity
- Empathy

Promoting Resilience in our Future

- Using previous research, we provide programs designed to promote relationships through strengthening relationships, encouraging powerful identities, strengthening sense of belonging, promoting social justice, hope, and life, as well encouraging sense of culture and historical roots (Masten, 2010; Search Institute, 2018; Stoddart & Wilson 2016; Ungar, 2018)

Consultation and Collaborative Planning Process



Summary of Proposals Received & Funded

Art Programming – KWAG, Creative Space, FCS

Recreation/Sports Programming – Eritrean, Levant, A4C, CAYA

I AM – Youth Relationships – WCS, FCS

Empowerment for Girls – AFRO, FCS, A4C

Youth Mentorship/Social Justice – Resilient Rebels - FACS

Cooking 101 – Levant, FACS

LINKS Program – Bridges to Belonging

Crafting Your Own Story – FACS, FACS Foundation

Experience Based Programs – A4C, FACS

Teen Grief – Hummingbird Centre, Bereaved Families

Tutoring – Eritrean Association

- 20 program proposals
- 12 partner organizations
 - Eritrean Association of KW
 - African Family Revival Organization (AFRO)
 - Women's Crisis Services (WCSWR)
 - Adventure 4 Change (A4C)– Waterloo
 - Levant
 - KW Art Gallery (KWAG)
 - Bridges to Belonging
 - Hummingbird Centre for Hope
 - Bereaved Families of Ontario – WR
 - Canadian Aweil Youth Association (CAYA)



PROGRAM IMPACT

Voices of Youth, Caregivers, and Facilitators

PROGRAM IMPACT - YOUTH

Self-esteem/confidence

- “I don’t like how people control you to not be yourself; saying they are better - basically doing body language to tell you that you can’t be yourself outside of this group. The cool kids tell you that you can’t be yourself by their body language, but I don’t care because being weird means being me and that’s who I am and I don’t care if no one accepts that because it’s me and I can be crazy at times so.”

Social Competence

- “The group helps me come out of my shell and be social with other people I probably wouldn’t have known if it weren’t for this group or wouldn’t have talked to as much, since a lot of us are not in the same class.”

Belonging/Support

- “I like this group too because it is a place I can be open and there is other people that can relate with me with the stuff I am going through- and you can kind of let go of all that stuff here in this group for about an hour”

Opportunity

- “I look forward to seeing the program again. One thing that would be better if the competition would cover all of the city rather than half of it. That would open more opportunities and exposure. I am looking forward to seeing it again. “

PROGRAM IMPACT: YOUTH



Amanda's Story

A few years ago, a young girl named Amanda joined one of our weekly groups. Amanda was in grade 8 and having a rough time. How rough? Very. She had just been moved to a new foster home, got kicked out of school, had been caught smoking and was breaking other rules too. She would show up to the youth group in her pajamas and talk the whole way through instead of participating in the planned activities.

For so many of the youth involved with Family and Children's Services, this type of behavior often ends up in them getting kicked out of groups or activities in the community. But at the youth groups run through the agency, the facilitators understand, and they were committed to her. The facilitators tried to help her feel and see that they believed in her and weren't going to give up on her.

When the group started up again after summer break, the facilitators were surprised that Amanda returned. This year, she suddenly became one of the most reliable and helpful participants, taking on important jobs within the group. This sense of responsibility, and the confidence to connect with her peer's while being her true self, were new experiences for her. Her foster parents said that Amanda was still facing challenges at school and at home, but this group was the one thing she really looked forward to.

Then COVID-19 happened. Suddenly, Amanda's regular visits with her birth family couldn't happen in person anymore. She couldn't get together with her sisters for their birthdays. She was missing them so much, even though they had virtual visits. For Amanda, it just wasn't enough. The group's facilitators worried that she'd quit the group – also meeting virtually – or get into trouble.

However, even with these added stresses, Amanda joined the group's Zoom calls every week, and shared her feelings with her friends and the staff. When her mother's birthday was approaching, though, she told the group that she was having a really difficult time. She wanted to see her mom – and not just on a screen! As the birthday got closer, Amanda told the group members: "I don't care about these rules! I am going to run away and go see my mom." She hadn't been much for following rules before, but the group had seen how much progress Amanda had made. They kept encouraging her. And she kept showing up, every week.

When her mom's birthday arrived, Amanda found a creative solution. She bought flowers and a birthday cake and took them to her mom's house. Then she sat in the driveway while her mom stayed at the front door. And they could talk in person, outdoors, two metres apart. Seeing her mom on her birthday was hugely important for her. Having the group's support made it possible for Amanda to express those feelings, and ultimately find a way to achieve her goal – without breaking the rules and increasing the risk to her mother. Thanks to donations from our community, these groups will continue through the pandemic, even if virtually. And for teens facing big challenges, knowing that they can count on this support, no matter what, makes such a difference.

PROGRAM IMPACT: CAREGIVERS

- This group has been beneficial to my family in several ways, my family was in a bad spot. My daughter was making bad decisions and was struggling with everything that was and had been going on and was in need of help, she didn't have a safe healthy outlet Other then myself which I was a mess struggling and trying to find answers and help so she was turning to making bad decisions bad choices to which I needed help to prevent. This group was her safety net, it gave her a safe place to rethink rebuild rebound and grow. In the beginning she wasn't sure – in fact, probably hated that I was making her do this but it was this or something else bad.*
- She's been in this group for a lot of years and has asked even begged to be allowed to go back every year, we have watched it grow bigger and better. This is the real only youth group that is available to teens which is structured and allows growth, rebuilding relationships both with home and friends as well as community which a lot of teens and youth have little to no ties too... it's safe and gives teens a healthy outlet, which to my daughter - has been a godsend.....Helping, guiding and teaching these teens new things, new friends, new skills, new adventures... She has done so many new things within this group I could never have gotten her to see - let alone do, and has developed some really amazing skills that more teens should get to experience. I just wish it was available more days a week for more hours and with a variety of opportunities - that some of the teens wouldn't get to experience at home or school...*





PROGRAM IMPACT: FACILITATORS

"I think of another youth, I think its really kind of a sad story, but she came into our program probably two years ago, had come into care and it was kind of a nasty apprehension and police were involved and big big feelings and then she heard about a police officer in our group and she was like I can't be here and kind of like a very big reaction and fast forward two and half years later, this youth reaches out to the police officer on her own when she is struggling, through email, reaches out, checks in with [police officer], she was going through some situations in her own life in terms of legal stuff reached out to him because she had questions, and concerns and worries about what to expect, what happens when I go to the police station and they are asking me this and they are asking me that, and what does that look like – he was able to help her through that stuff, right – and I'm like that is a huge success – this is a huge – that literally was like F'ing police, no way I am gonna do it, I can't do it to emailing him and text messaging him and feeling like she has a place where she can go to get support and I feel like that is amazing. That's amazing that she keeps coming back to group, this is also a youth that for the most part sometimes won't go to school or do what she is supposed to do and her care provider has said that this is the only good thing for her right now, and if that's not a success story, I don't know what is."



members at picnic



children at picnic



discussion about the

kids playing soccer



a group photo after the presentation





The
Resilience
Project
presents

MOMENTUM

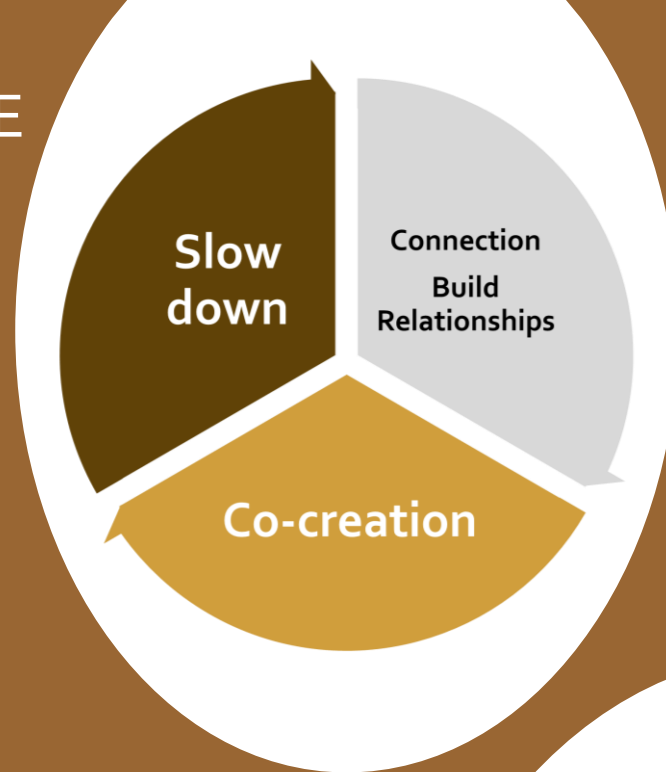
The Power of Collective Resilience

RESILIENCE SUMMIT

Spotlighting Youth Presenter Voices

SUMMIT RESULTS: SPOTLIGHTING YOUTH VOICE


2021 SUMMIT RESULTS



One goal of the Resilience Project is to learn and grow together. As part of that we hosted our 2nd Resilience Summit in February, 2021. The purpose of the Summit was to share our learning with others and deepen our own understanding of the power of collective resilience. We wish to share the qualitative analysis of the discourses the summit ignited, as well as thematic analysis of jam boards that were used in the beginning and end of sessions meant to harvest knowledge.

The overall message from the summit when considering collective resilience is the importance of slowing down, connecting and building relationships, and co-creating. The next few pages focus on these concepts through the youth participants' lens.





**“If you want to go fast, go
alone. If you want to go far,
go together.”**
African Proverb

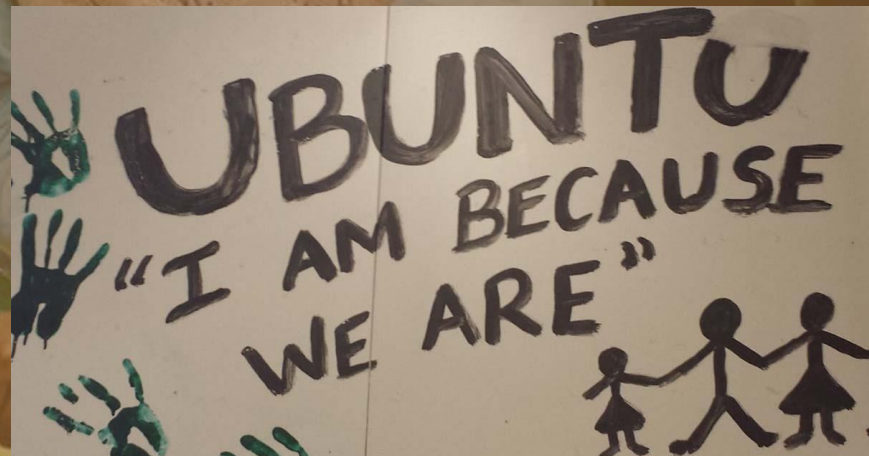
Slow down

- Youth participants made it clear, they need the adults around them to slow down before jumping into action. One youth mentioned that often she has been given resources without asking her which resources she needs. Another youth commented that adults have connections to resources, can they make these available to youth. Thus, this idea of slowing down, checking in to see what is needed, what barriers youth are experiencing in connecting to resources, and using such “adult connections” to support youth in their vision and goals.

SUMMIT RESULTS:
SPOTLIGHTING YOUTH VOICE

Connection & Building Relationships

- From the beginning of the project, we have been aware of the importance of connection and building relationships with one another as partners. However, the youth participants highlighted the need to have adult allies, those who believe in the vision of youth, and are willing to support from behind. As well as the need for intentional mentorship from adult to youth.
- Across each youth's discussion, connection and building relationships was front and center. In fact, it seems there is no collective resilience if connections or relationships are not established.
- In order to foster collective resilience, we need to enter genuine reciprocal relationships, conversation, which requires intentionally slowing down and nurturing our relationships with one another.



SUMMIT RESULTS:
SPOTLIGHTING YOUTH VOICE

SUMMIT RESULTS: SPOTLIGHTING YOUTH VOICE



Co-Creation

- Coming together to develop a common understanding of our history and vision of the future is another central piece to collective resilience. The concept of ubuntu says “I am because we are,” tells us we are not one without others, to co-create we need to slow down, build relationships, need to invite everyone in the community to be part of the solution. And this is what our youth told us we needed to do.
- Co-creation is the concept of nothing about us without us. The youth were clear with us that they wanted programs, activities, services to center and raise the voice of youth.
- The youth created a call to action – and the adults committed to:
 - hearing their voice,
 - really removing barriers for youth to led. Including providing mentorship,
 - questioning if there are shared resource that are possible “do we have more than we need?”,
 - and being intentional about meaningful opportunities for co-collaboration and co-creation.



SUMMARY

Thoughts on Collaboration & Next Steps

Next Steps

- The Resilience Project has received unrestricted operational funding for the next 3 years to strengthen the collaboration and sustainability of project.
- We endeavour to disrupt inequities created by systems charged with servicing the population.
- We will continue to seek the voice of youth & youth-led organizations to inform our program planning and implementation.



Resilience Project – **1 of 3 collaboratives** invited to be considered for a Hallman Foundation's General Operating Support(GOS) grant



3-year term



Unrestricted funding to cover organizational expenses



<https://www.lshallmanfdn.org/Pilot-Projects.htm>



Will include collaborative learning with other projects and Hallman and their consultant

A background image showing several hands of different skin tones gently holding small green seedlings with soil. The hands are arranged in a circular pattern, symbolizing collective care and growth.

Conclusion

The Resilience Project started from a place of wanting to heal from, and prevent, child abuse and neglect. Using a systems approach we are taking a collective stance to address political, economic, and social inequities that exist in our society.

We are only in the beginning of witnessing the power of collective resilience. We have begun to experience healing through stories of adversity and resilience to mobilize into action. We will continue to grow together into the future.

In our world we believe in the phrase – growing together... Overtime our interconnectedness has strengthened our resolve to build and blossom together, a process that is best reflected by the rooting system found underneath any garden.



Growing Together.

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