



**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS**

**Enabling Social and Economic Mobility for Youth through
Community-Based Programs**
Building Resilience and Community Support

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ABSTRACT

This research explores community-based programs that foster a sense of belonging among isolated youth in Montreal. These programs are a potential source of social capital, which is acquired by exposure to new environments. They also foster the development of new skills and strong relationships that provide youth with resources they may not have access to. This research also examines the implications of social capital for youth as a mechanism for inclusion and resilience-building within the current market economy. For the purposes of this project, the youth addressed were between 15-34 years old. Finally, programming and policy recommendations are made for various stakeholders, including but not limited to: government institutions, local youth organizations, private businesses, employers, and teachers.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace to remark on the expected mainstream trajectory of youth in Canada: young people grow up, graduate high school and then either pursue a post-secondary degree or enter directly into the workforce. This transition from adolescence to adulthood in a market-oriented economy can be attributed to the *knowledge economy*,¹ a result of significant socio-economic shifts in society. The knowledge economy is dependent on the quantity, quality and accessibility of information and expertise. The emergence of this system has caused us to measure the value of youth based on the amount of personal, social, cognitive and educational skills they possess.

However, the reality for youth today is that the path to social well-being and economic stability is not linear. For marginalized youth especially, the path is one full of systemic barriers, which makes gaining information and access to economic opportunities difficult. As of 2016, there are 9 million youth across Canada² and the youth unemployment rate was at a national average of 10.9 percent. While Quebec youth unemployment rate fared slightly better, it was still high at 10.5 percent.³

The issue I explored focuses on youth in Montreal and the kind of community support they receive in order to gain relationship skills, develop their self-esteem and gain access to economic opportunities. This issue requires serious attention because it is crucial that youth are given the support necessary to overcome the barriers they face when attempting to attain economic dignity in Canada. Youth are often seen as adults-in-the-making, whose value in society is only placed on them once they gain employment and

¹ McMurphy, Suzanne M. et al. "Cultivating Social Capital through Summer Employment Programs: Perspectives from Youth Participants." *Critical Social Work* 14, no. 2.

² Statistics Canada. "A Portrait of Canadian Youth." Statistics Canada. July 11, 2018.

³ "Labour Force Survey, January 2018." Statistics Canada. February 9, 2018.

contribute to the economy. In the absence of resources and market opportunities, it becomes difficult for youth to unlock their full potential. It is even more challenging for youth from underprivileged communities, Indigenous youth, recent immigrant youth, and young women. Organizations such as the African and Caribbean Synergic Inter-organizational Network of Canada (ACSioN) and the Girls Action Foundation (GAF) create spaces and services that are inclusive of these marginalized identities.

The purpose of this study is to show that communities are stronger when youth are given opportunities to successfully transition into adult society. When community-based programs provide youth with support, training, mentorship and equip them with skills, they contribute to their psychosocial and economic development. When youth are given spaces to develop relationship skills and build up social capital, it becomes easier for them to gain access to opportunities. The connections they access through these programs can provide them with knowledge and access to valuable resources. Also, they become instilled with the belief that they can be active participants and agents of change in their own communities as they gain confidence in their own capabilities.

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMMING

Despite facing economic and social barriers, young people are driven, creative and capable participants in their communities. With enough support and access to resources, young people can be connected, empowered and better positioned to improve their own lives and their communities. This support can be provided through programs and services that offer capacity-building and resilience-building activities. At its core, resilience is the

process of adapting in the face of adversity.⁴ The process can take many different forms, one of them being the forging of new relationships by becoming part of strong networks through community-based programs. When youth accept help from those who listen to them and support their needs, it strengthens their resilience.⁵ Being an active youth in community organizations, local groups and civic groups means that one has a strong source of social support, which contributes to community-building.

Creating programs and services specifically to support youth in becoming more resilient is key to their social well-being. In the "Measurement of Well-Being," James S. Larson theorizes that networks are the structures through which support is provided through quality social interactions.⁶ Community-based programs connect youth to a large network of actors such as other youth, professionals and employers. Program coordinators are aware that the quality of social interactions is vital, so they collaborate with stakeholders that also support youth empowerment. These stakeholders include employers, policymakers, provincial and territorial government services, local non-governmental organizations, and private companies. These stakeholders can often influence the access youth have to resources and opportunities.

In "Exclusion, Employment and Opportunity," Atkinson and Hills posit that the exclusion of certain people from economic opportunities is systemic and that the "nation" should be involved in fostering economic and social integration of under-privileged groups.⁷ When community organizations connect powerful institutions to youth, they are bridging the gap that limits young people from gaining exposure to environments and opportunities

⁴ "The Road to Resilience." Monitor on Psychology.

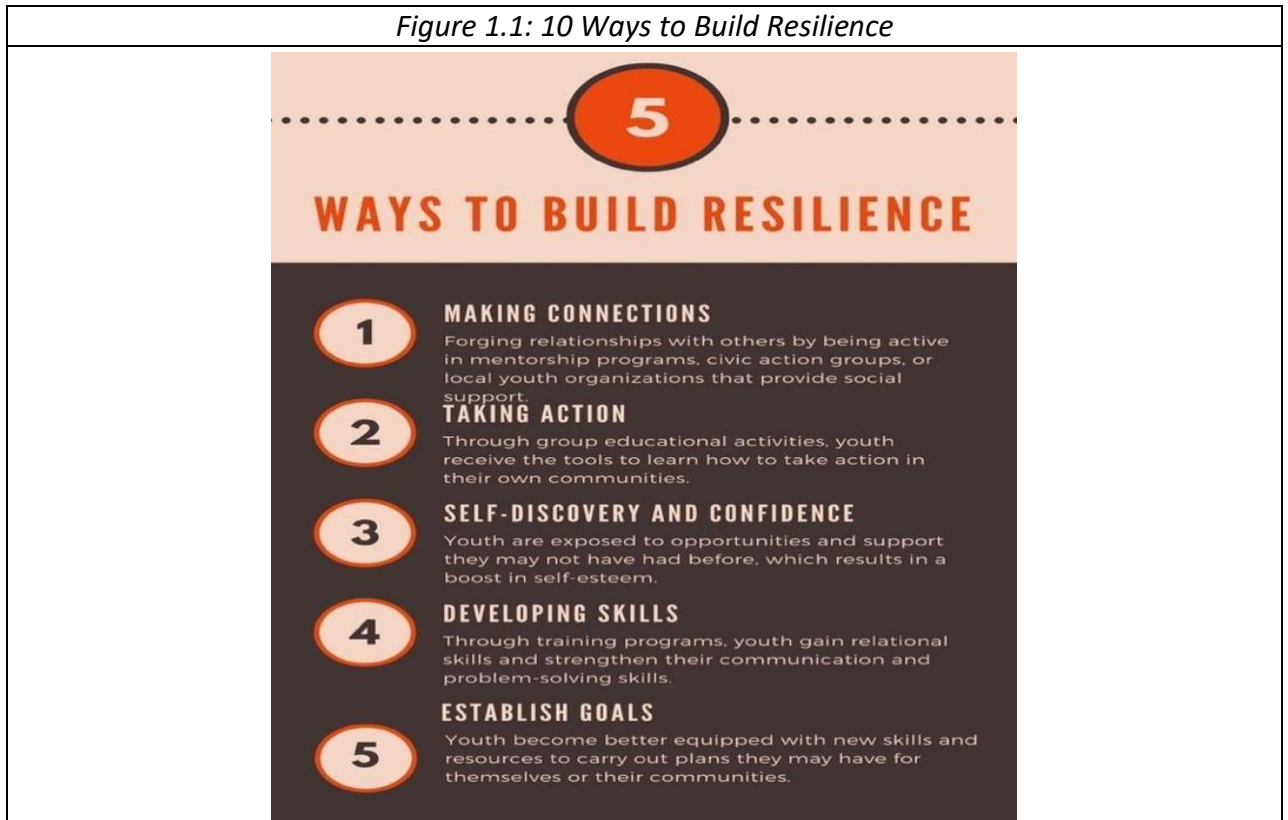
⁵ Ungar, Michael, PhD. "Enhancing the Development of Resilience in Early Adolescents: Literature Review." *The Learning Partnership: Champions of Public Education Across Canada*, December 2012.

⁶ Larson, James S. "The Measurement of Social Well-being." Page 288.

⁷ Atkinson, Tony, and John Hills. "Exclusion, Employment and Opportunity."

that they may not have access to through traditional means. This is one way to ensure that young people are no longer isolated from opportunities, allowing social security and connectedness to be achieved.

Figure 1.1: 10 Ways to Build Resilience



This table is based on the American Psychological Association’s 10 Ways to Build Resilience. It highlights the ways in which community-based programs help youth become more resilient.⁸

SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A SOURCE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND WELL-BEING

Social capital is a sociological concept that describes the “intangible resources that emerge from our social interactions and relationships.”⁹ These interactions are often formed within networks. The main factors of building such relationships require trust and intentionality. Consequently, being “rich in social capital” enhances one’s well-being because they are supported by their friends, mentors and community.

⁸ "The Road to Resilience." Monitor on Psychology.

⁹ TedxWilmington. September 08, 2014.

Also, social capital creates opportunity. For youth that do not yet know how to use their capabilities, or who are isolated from their immediate networks, building social relationships outside of their community gives them access to knowledge and helpful resources.¹⁰ For instance, community organizers who offer mentorship programs introduce youth to spaces where they can forge relationships with older professionals. Mentors help youth strengthen their social and emotional skills, build confidence, learn to communicate their goals, and provide them with resources to achieve said goals, such as writing resumes and preparing for interviews. Essentially, one's social capital can expose youth to new opportunities and spaces that foster learning and connection.

Programs that help foster these healthier and happier relationships among youth are critical for youth to succeed.¹¹ They emphasize the fact that well-being and success is a result of strong relationships and networks. They teach youth that the best way to support each other is through building community and showing up for one another.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on literature reviews, document reviews and qualitative field research conducted in Montreal throughout a period of four months.¹² All interviewees gave their consent and all of the interviews were conducted in French and/or English.

Interviews were conducted with five program coordinators and community organizers from various organizations. Most of the organizations provided mentorship as

¹⁰ TedxYouth@Hewitt. February 05, 2016.

¹¹ TedxWilmington. September 08, 2014.

¹² "Describing Qualitative Data." Lumen: Boundless Statistics.

well as educational and skills training services to youth. The goal was to understand their approach in providing youth with support, how their programs fostered connectedness and what challenges they faced. While their services and community-spaces are not accessible to all youth (e.g., youth in rural areas, youth with disabilities, at-risk youth), their work in community organizing has been crucial in the lives of many, and their diverse approaches to community building can inform policies and programs. All consulted organizations and program coordinators were aiming to create a safe, inclusive and supportive space for young people based on their needs. Finally, interviews were also conducted with two young people who used the services provided by the consulted community organizations.

Profiles on the Local Organizations

ACSioN: A non-profit organization that was created in Montreal in 2004 by Black students who attended various educational institutions. Their goal was to bridge the gap between Black immigrant youth and the job opportunities in the city. Their main approach is to empower youth by helping them build leadership skills through mentorship programs and skills training. They focus mainly on youth employment and career development.

Apathy is Boring: Founded in 2004 with a mission to engage youth in actively participating in Canada's democracy. Through art and technology, they create campaigns that teach and engage youth in political discourse and empower them to be active in their communities.

Black Students' Network: This is a service at McGill University that does community work to sensitize the school community to the challenges that Black students face, but also to support Black students on campus and in the greater Montreal area.

Girls Action Foundation: A national organization that supports the empowerment and healthy development of girls and young women. It is grounded in community-based

research that reflects the girls' lived experiences, concerns and needs. Their programs combine creative expression, knowledge and skill-building activities.

Head & Hands: This 50-year-old organization emerged from the "free clinic" movement in the 1970s. It serves many youth, including at-risk youth and has a holistic approach to community engagement and organizing.

CURRENT STATE OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND ENGAGEMENT IN CANADA

To understand the current state of affairs regarding youth in Canada, this research draws from the data collected from Government Canada, and documents such as the Youth Employment Strategy (YES) and the *2030 Quebec Youth Policy*. Currently, Canada has no existing youth policy.¹³

Canada faces major economic challenges that have an impact on youth engagement and participation. The most pressing issues are labour productivity growth and dealing with a shrinking labour force resulting from the retirement of Baby Boomers.¹⁴ Productivity growth is crucial to Canada's economy as it contributes to the living standard and well-being of all Canadians. As economic changes arise, so do demographic changes. As of 2017, approximately 7.6 million immigrants lived in Canada, representing one in five of the total population.¹⁵ Additionally, the Indigenous working population has grown by 42 percent from 2001-2017.¹⁶ As more Indigenous peoples and racialized groups move into urban centers, they need to gain access to educational and economic opportunities to achieve

¹³ Dougherty, Ilona. "Why Canada Needs a National Youth Policy." Policy Options. September 29, 2016.

¹⁴ "Unlocking the Potential of Marginalized Youth." Horizons. September 29, 2017.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Indigenous Education and Employment Trends in Selected Cities, 2011."

social and economic mobility.^{17,18} Unfortunately, they experience discrimination and systemic barriers that limit their involvement in society. Consequently, various stakeholders must invest in providing marginalized youth with the support and resources that will help them engage and participate in the knowledge economy, improve their well-being and access opportunities to develop themselves.

Context in Quebec

Quebec is the only province to have a concrete youth policy.¹⁹ The *2030 Quebec Youth Policy: Working Together for Current & Future Generations* (QYP) addresses youth empowerment, engagement and integration into the Quebec economy. Its initiatives require coordination among numerous government services and community organizations. The main objectives are to offer young people “stimulating, healthy, safe, open living and other environments,” and to “support the learning, initiatives and life projects of young people.”²⁰ The fact that young people are active members of society who have their own aspirations is recognized, as this policy aims to equip them with the necessary tools to own their lives and futures.

The QYP’s main strategic priorities are commitment to culture and entry into labour market. The former refers to a commitment to encourage civic engagement with the goal being to “integrate youth into the community, establish a sense of belonging and an

¹⁷ Racialization refers to the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life. See <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-race-and-racism-fact-sheet>

¹⁸ Hwang, Priscilla. "\$27.7B. That's the Value of Canada's 'under-utilized' Indigenous Workforce, Says Report.". CBC News.

¹⁹ "Canada | Factsheets." Youth Policy. September 30, 2014.

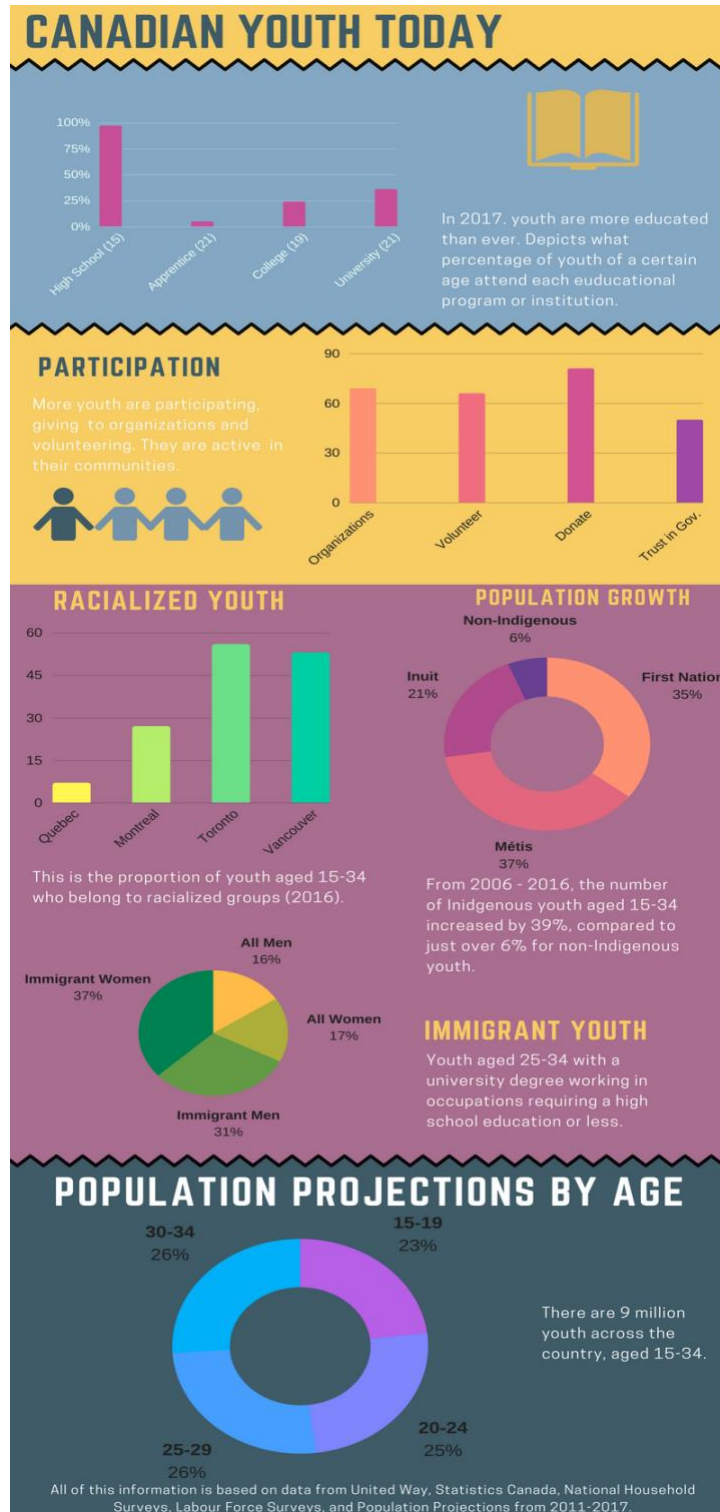
²⁰ *The 2030 Quebec Youth Policy: Working Together for Current and Future Generations*. Quebec, 2016.

awareness of what can be achieved when individuals get involved in the community.”²¹ The latter strategic priority, entry into the labour market, aims to “study the dynamic of employment among young people to pinpoint possible injustices and establish the means to end them.”²² This means that the Quebec government plans to break down the institutional mechanisms that have contributed to forming the gap between youth and access to resources. Their services would have to centre marginalized youth and foster job mobility for them to reduce the risk of poverty and isolation.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Figure 2.1: Key Factors Affecting Today's Youth



This infographic is a portrayal of the various factors affecting youth today. The data for these charts and graphs came from Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011; 2006-2016 Population Census; 2016 Census; Education Indicators in Canada 2017; General Social Survey on Social Engagement; Elections Canada; General Social Survey on Social Identity 2003.

BARRIERS TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND MOBILITY

Education

With the emergence of the knowledge economy, this generation of youth is often told that the best way to achieve social and economic mobility is through education. Despite initiatives and policies to make education and skills development training more accessible to youth, many are still excluded. According to a Canadian *Expert Panel on Youth Employment*, youth experience high levels of anxiety due to “uncertainty about work,”²³ it can increase feelings of depression, frustration and anger. Access to quality education for youth is a crucial factor in increasing well-being and reducing marginalization.

There are various determinants that contribute to the barriers faced by youth. For instance, there are socio-cultural factors such as language.²⁴ In Montreal, there has been a surge of immigrant youth who emigrate from non-Francophone countries, which makes their transition into the market difficult. As Dwight Best of ACSioN explains, “many qualified Black immigrants arrived here and then moved to Toronto because they were not fluent in English and found it challenging to pierce the job market.”²⁵

Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Discrimination

Marginalized youth experience prejudice, discrimination and racism due to harmful stereotypes. Discrimination influences the daily lives of youth in the areas of employment, self-esteem, access to education and adequate healthcare.

²³ "Understanding the Realities: Interim Report of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment, 2016." Canada.ca. December 30, 2016.

²⁴ Dwight Best, Executive Director. ACSioN Network. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

²⁵ Ibid.

In 2015, when ACSioN conducted surveys with employers, they found that employers were not concerned with diversity and did not see the value in hiring people with different backgrounds and perspectives. Recruiters “did not know how to engage with this demographic [Black immigrants] ... our value was overlooked and as a result, we were last hired and first fired.”²⁶ Their limited mentality set negative prospects for employment of young Black immigrants.

For Indigenous youth living in poverty, discrimination has an influence on housing opportunities, their safety and their mental health. There is a stigma toward homeless youth which causes them to become even more excluded. A common misconception is that homeless Indigenous youth are lazy, dysfunctional, mentally ill, and/or abusing drugs. In reality, homelessness is much more complex than that; there are policies in place that prevent youth from leaving the streets. This stereotype has grave consequences for youth who go on to experience isolation, depression and harassment from police through strip searches.²⁷

Systemic Barriers to Opportunities

Discrimination against marginalized groups is a symptom of a much larger systemic issue where policies and practices entrenched in institutions work to keep certain groups excluded. The discrimination that homeless Indigenous youth face through policies blocks them from gaining access to the job market and to adequate housing. For instance, the law that requires an adult to co-sign a person’s lease is a barrier.²⁸ When a child turns 18, they

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Head & Hands. Montreal, QC.

²⁸ Ibid.

are often presented with a list of homeless shelters because they have nowhere to go. It is important to note that 57.8 percent of homeless youth in Canada were at some point in the child-protection system.²⁹ Liz Singh of Head & Hands explains that, “kids who with the right support could work their way out of this degree of instability and have the will and determination to do it, are not able to because the system is broken.”³⁰

Additionally, systemic gender discrimination creates barriers that prevent girls and young women from accessing opportunities. Institutions are informed by the patriarchal culture that is entrenched in our society. From a young age, girls are taught to “hold back” and this affects the development of their self-esteem and confidence.³¹ In the workplace, this sexist and exclusionary culture takes place in many forms: sexual harassment, criticisms of women being “too bossy” and the silencing and undermining of women’s capabilities.

Isolation and Despair

Social isolation is increasingly a problem for all communities. Isolation in youth occurs in different forms and for various reasons. One major reason is due to a lack of intergenerational support or presence. Many young people do not have family or role models in their lives. For racialized immigrant youth, feelings of loneliness are common when they become physically disconnected from their culture and language. So, who shows up for the people who do not have a family, for those who do not have anyone to take care of them?

²⁹ Gaetz, Stephen et al. *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey*. Report no. 14. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2016. Page 9.

³⁰ Elizabeth Singh. Street Work Program Coordinator at Head & Hands. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

³¹ *Why Girls? Leadership*. Issue brief. Girls Action Foundation. Montreal, Pages 1-8.

“If you are lucky enough to find a space in which you’re surrounded by people with a similar culture and background, then this place can feel like a place of unity for you because you can easily connect and relate.” – Delali Egyima, BSN³²

Youth are also isolated from opportunities due to inaccessibility. Pursuing educational and employment endeavours or attending mentorship and training services requires resources that youth do not always have to access to. Many of these services only cater to middle-class youth. Youth living in poverty usually have less leisure time to commit to community activities because they are busy trying to survive.³³ Consequently, community organizations and spaces that foster togetherness have become inaccessible for those who need it most.

Social media has also played a role in isolating youth. There is a depth that is often reached in face-to-face human interactions that is much harder to achieve online. Online, depression and mental health are popular topics of discussion among youth – memes and jokes are constantly being made about it. However, this sort of engagement does nothing to address the issue. Liking and commenting on depression meme jokes is not a healthy way to provide support to friends; there’s nothing positive about the fact that “sadness is trending.”³⁴

For homeless youth, despair is often accompanied with their isolation. They often have feelings of hopelessness while facing adversity and use drugs to cope. Avoiding despair is one of the hardest parts about being homeless and usually the opposite of addiction is connection. Homeless youth often lack human connection as they are frequently ignored

³² Delali Egyima, BSN. Education Coordinator for the Black Students' Network. McGill University. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

³³ Head & Hands. Montreal, QC.

³⁴ Elizabeth Singh. Street Work Program Coordinator at Head & Hands. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

and stigmatized.

“There’s a young man whose street name is One. He most often feels unseen when people purposely ignore him on the street. He has a dog named Zero, which has saved him. Whenever he begins to feel hopeless, he remembers that Zero comes before One, and it gives him a reason to stay.”³⁵ – Liz Singh, Head & Hands

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

Mentorship and Skills Training Programs

Community organizers wanted to address the issue of inaccessibility into the job market for students, so their approach was to focus on career development. The goal was to build programs that reflected the needs of the youth they were serving.

For instance, ACSioN executives invited Black students to take part in focus group meetings and express their needs. They also conducted surveys with employers and found that they did not prioritize diversity. Additionally, they engaged in a “private and public partnership”³⁶ with two organizations: the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation (CEDEC) and the Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC). These organizations already had the technical tools and financial capacity to hold training workshops for youth. This approach continued as they began to host “Career Days” in collaboration with Deloitte Montreal. Young people would register to attend the all-day workshop which was mainly conducted by Black professionals at Deloitte. In the words of Dwight Best, their goal “was to make Montreal a viable option for young Africans and recent

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Dwight Best, Executive Director. ACSioN Network. Montreal, QC. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

Canadians to start their career. Now when people graduate, they see the possibility of living and happily working in this city.”

“I was paired with a young black male Deloitte professional who I routinely met up with to discuss career goals and aspirations. These meetings were extremely beneficial to me as I am entering the final year of my undergraduate degree and I am trying to seek advice and guidance in order to determine a clearer vision of my career path.” - Chidera Ihejirika³⁷

The Girls Action Foundation also provides mentorship and skills-training programs. Their main program is the week-long *Young Girls Leadership Program* targeting girls and young women between the ages of 19-30. Facilitators and program coordinators provide them with new tools and resources through activities. They use these to pitch ideas that are of interest to them and their communities, and learn how to implement them. The girls develop self-confidence, improve their critical-thinking skills, and experience a sense of connectedness after working closely with each other. Natasha Harvey of GAF highlights that, “a lot of them know what needs to be done, a lot of them have all these amazing ideas and are full of potential and have ambition and all they need is just that little nudge to get them going.”³⁸ This approach has worked for both of these organizations by empowering youth. Program coordinators act as a catalyst by providing them with these resources and supporting youth to take action in their own communities.

³⁷ Chidera Ihejirika, a young Black woman who used a mentorship program implemented by ACSioN and Deloitte. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

³⁸ Program Coordinator at Girls Action Foundation. Montreal, QC.

Intergenerational Connection and Inclusion of Culture in Community Initiatives

The Black Students' Network (BSN) has supported Black students at McGill and in the greater Montreal area. They have created scholarships and internship opportunities, and held educational workshops. *Youth Day*, their biggest event, happens during Black History Month and brings Black high-school students to university to spend time with and learn from BSN constituents, volunteers from around Montreal and alumni. The activities are primarily educational and contain aspects of Black culture. This approach of connecting the old and the young is done intentionally. Delali Egyima of BSN elaborates on this idea further, saying that "when you bring young students into this space, you make them see themselves here. They see themselves in the Black medical, engineering, and law students, as well as the young Black documentary filmmaker or the yoga instructor."³⁹

Creating a space like this, in which intergenerational ties are visible, can cultivate new expectations and opportunities for youth⁴⁰ and motivate them to think actively about their aspirations. Simply seeing that there is someone who looks like you and has a fulfilling career and life can empower Black youth, who often face a lot of negative stereotypes vis-à-vis their possibility of success. There is power in representation and celebrating the different ways in which success can look like for Black people. Furthermore, BSN collaborates with the McGill Black Students Alumni Association, which allows current students to foster long-term relationships with alumni through networking and mentorship.

³⁹ Delali Egyima. Education Coordinator for the Black Students' Network. McGill University. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

⁴⁰ Ginwright, Shawn A. "Black Youth Activism and the Role of Critical Social Capital in Black Community Organizations." *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 3 (November 1, 2007).

At Head & Hands, coordinators create a sense of cultural connection through their services. For instance, most of the coordinators who engage directly with young people are Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC). Similarly, the majority of young people that seek out their services are BIPOC youth. It creates an inclusive and space because young people are receiving support from people who can relate to some aspect of their identity. Liz Singh of Head & Hands explains that, “when young people talk to me about the racism they face, they often express how comfortable they are talking to me about it because I’m brown.”⁴¹

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is the approach that Apathy is Boring has built its framework around. It focuses on building and strengthening communities by engaging and educating youth in political discourse and action. Much like GAF, Apathy is Boring encourages youth to get involved in their communities in any way they can. By providing youth with information and knowledge on democracy and the inner workings of their governments, the organization is empowering a dynamic group of young people. As they become sensitized to political discourse, they have a clearer understanding of how their own personal challenges are politicized. Stephanie Jeremie of Apathy is Boring highlights that, “as the youth begin to take action in their communities, the political landscape of certain communities is changing and is becoming more reflective of their voices, concerns and needs.”⁴²

⁴¹ Elizabeth Singh. Street Work Program Coordinator at Head & Hands. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

⁴² Stephanie Jeremie. Programs Coordinator at Apathy is Boring. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

Street Work and Accessibility

Although many community organizations provide services that support youth, some are not easily accessible. Such is the case with Head & Hands. Their leadership programs target middle-class youth and often “lack concern with things like accessibility and mobility.”⁴³ Therefore, one way they increase accessibility is by providing services to youth through street work. Street work is complex and multi-faceted. The objective of a street worker is to connect directly with at-risk youth by going out into the downtown area, community centers and groups homes. Street workers offer counselling for young people and meet up with them to provide food and other services needed to survive Montreal’s harsh winters. They try to help youth access basic necessities. The approach involves “letting go of social norms, and meeting them where their needs are.”⁴⁴ The more a street worker can engage with a young person and build trust, the more it reinforces them as a reliable resource for the youth.

This sort of approach is inclusive of youth who do not seek leadership or training skills, but instead seek psychosocial support as they deal with day-to-day survival. They experience consistent instability, and it is crucial for them to have access to existing mechanisms to support them. The next step, however, is to help them build relationships with each other, rather than being isolated in urban centers. Liz Singh of Head & Hands provides an example of this, saying that, “an initiative I am working on is community dinner. As program coordinators, we aren’t enough, we can’t replace community...so it is crucial that they [youth] meet up and build relationships with each other.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Elizabeth Singh. Street Work Program Coordinator at Head & Hands. Personal interview with Carmella Munyuzangabo. Montreal, QC.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations from the study are summarized below:

The Federal Government

- Create a youth policy that includes the voices of isolated and marginalized youth.

There is a lack of consideration in traditional approaches that cater to white, middle-class, cisgender and literate youth. It is crucial that when making the country's first-ever youth policy, to think about how to amplify the concerns of youth with intersecting identities.

- Do more research on the needs and concerns of Indigenous youth, racialized youth, recent immigrant youth, youth with disabilities, girls and young women, youth living in poverty, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with mental illnesses.
 - Centre youth as participants and contributors to the policy's creation. They should be at the center of helping to develop, implement and evaluate the policies.
 - Create an accessible platform where more youth can express their ideas and concerns regarding the drafting of the first policy.
- Youth unemployment is a systemic issue that needs systemic solutions.
 - Review policies that systematically discriminate against youth, such as housing policies.
 - Regarding Indigenous youth, the government must provide them with equal opportunities by investing in infrastructure, education and mentorship programs.

The rhetoric of reconciliation and healing must be put into policies and action.

- The programs should integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and be led by Indigenous professionals and youth.

Quebec Government

- Expand infrastructure that supports community organizations by following up with the funding that is provided. This ensures accountability and also creates the opportunity to provide more support where necessary.
 - Fund projects that bridge gaps between existing services in order to ensure collaboration.

Local Community Organizations

- Organizations with similar mandates and target groups should coordinate, in order to avoid conflict and also share information to help identify and bridge existing gaps in providing skills training and mentorship.
- Offer support in both French and English to help recent immigrant youth gain access to your programs.
- Collaborate with schools in rural areas as a way to engage with youth who are not able to access urban centers.
- Program coordinators and facilitators who provide youth with support and run programs should know how to do so effectively, and with humility and respect.
 - There should be mandatory sensitivity training for all street workers and facilitators.
- Create a mechanism to better monitor and evaluate work and progress, so as to have a concrete way to monitor progress and results to donors.

- Create spaces designated for Black, Indigenous and people of color. Opportunities for youth to share with people who understand their experiences regarding racism and discrimination can lead to healing and belonging.

Private Businesses and Employers

- Companies should re-evaluate hiring systems and pipelines for new hires. Recognize the value in diversity and hiring people with varying experiences that can contribute to the workplace and the bottom line.
- Work with community organizations to implement innovative and technical ways to support and empower youth.
- When providing funding, recognize how the needs of youth change frequently. Expectations of a program should not be too restricting, and sometimes progress will not be present in the form of “clean success stories.” In short, definitions of success for programs should be broadened.

Schools

- Teachers or school counsellors should reach out to community organizations they believe would help their students gain skills and connections that cannot be found within their own communities or schools.
 - Work on projects with their students that directly benefit the community.
 - For example, the BSN’s “Youth Day” promotes positive identity development in Black teenagers. Programs such as this one increases a young person’s confidence and sense of civic responsibility by connecting them with older generations. Collaborative engagement with supportive adults is empowering and affirming.

- For example, Girls Action Foundation's leadership program involves girls learning about community concerns, identifying key issues that they would like to address, and then developing and implementing a group service project related to the issues.

IMPACT

The findings in this research prove just how much strength youth possess and how hard they are willing to work to make a difference in their communities, gain skills and improve their lives. They also prove that it is unwise, both for the Canadian economy and for the well-being and cohesion of society, for the capabilities of youth to be ignored and/or under-utilized. We can all have an impact on youth through the cultivation of social relationships. Whether the nature of the relationship is based on mentorship, or training, the exchange of information, or simply talking about ideas and issues while sharing a meal – we can all contribute to making disconnected youth feel like we see them and that they matter. Personally, I have used my connections to other Rwandan youth in Montreal to create a platform for other Rwandan young immigrants to connect with Rwandan professionals and adults who immigrated to Montreal decades ago. In the future, I plan to mentor young Black students through BSN's mentorship program, as a way to give back to the community that gave me a safe space on an all too often isolating campus. Those of us that have the opportunity to use our social capital to support others should use it – we can make a real difference. This is how we prop each other up, lend each other a hand, close gaps and ensure that the future is inclusive for youth of all identities and aspirations.

As for SCSC, there are many ways in which we can make an impact in the lives of youth in Montreal. One crucial issue that must be addressed is how Canadian youth have been contributing their ideas to build the country's first youth policy. Although the government has ensured youth participation in this process through online surveys and roundtable discussions across the country, they have not been able to target youth who may not have online access to get involved. Organizations like SCSC could collaborate with community organizations and youth-led organizations in Montreal and host local roundtables for them to be informed of the youth policy and discuss their ideas. They would be ongoing for as long as the policy process is happening. The discussion would inform the government and Youth Council of the ideas, questions and crucial concerns of marginalized youth who need equitable policies to support them.

Furthermore, SCSC can work with community organizations to host workshops for youth. Activities could include workshops for understanding youth policies. They can include printed materials with easy-to-read versions of policies that youth can refer to later or share with others. Also, there could be workshops conducted to bridge intergenerational gaps or learn about financial literacy. It is important that the programming comes from those in the community. Perhaps SCSC and collaborators could host an open forum where youth could discuss what workshops are most needed, and in this way, the youth would be involved in planning the programs. This would be a more inclusive approach to implementing practical programs.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the barriers that prevent youth from feeling socially and economically secure, they are still resilient, passionate and driven. Although Quebec has made

unprecedented strides with its third youth policy and Montreal has become a hub of community organizing, existing programs and services for youth can still be improved and become more holistic.

In order to ensure the well-being of youth, programs must implement and enforce robust mechanisms to address the needs of the youth they serve. The implementation of these mechanisms required support from donors, federal and provincial government agencies, employment services, educational programs, and other relevant stakeholders. There must be a common understanding that there is no one magic solution to socially and economically integrating marginalized youth, especially when dealing with the diverse demographic of youth that Canada represents.

The issues that youth deal with are complex and vary greatly based on their intersecting identities and backgrounds. Going forward, the conversation about building resilience among youth must include youth with disabilities, youth in rural and Northern communities and queer and transgender youth. It must also emphasize the importance of meeting youth exactly where they are regarding their realities and what they might need to feel safe, seen, supported, and empowered.

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