Youth-Friendly North Shore

Youth Services Evaluation Instrument and Guide

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Acknowledgements

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1│Introduction

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The Youth-Friendly North Shore (YFNS) initiative is a three-year program designed to cultivate healthy communities where youth can flourish while reducing their risk of gang or organized crime involvement. Building on the community's existing strengths, YFNS prioritizes (1) the creation of youth-friendly spaces through active engagement with youth and (2) the enhancement of the youth care system across the North Shore.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

This evaluation instrument was developed to support an assessment of municipally-funded youth services, including recreation, literacy and social support services. Its development was guided by evidence-based best practices in program evaluation, with a focus on fostering positive youth development and crime prevention through community organizations. Key components were selected to reflect areas indicative of effective programming, such as setting characteristics, participant demographics, program attributes, and implementation strategies.

A core components approach was adopted to help identify "what works" in supporting best practices, promoting replication, and guiding policy and practice implications.[1] This approach allows flexibility in adapting programs and strategies to drive change, continuously improve organizational processes, and translate evaluation findings into actionable policy and practice.[1]

The evaluation instrument was informed by theoretical frameworks relevant to youth programming, enabling a deeper understanding of the effectiveness and impact of community-based programs and services targeting youth. These are explained in Section 3.

Evaluation Scale

A strengths-based scale was employed to assess the stage at which each organization was in implementing key competencies. The scale includes three levels:

- **Emerging:** The organization recognizes the importance of the area of focus and is working to build internal support for the competency.
- **Developing:** The organization is actively working to strengthen both organizational and individual capacity to sustain the competency.
- **Transforming:** The organization has fully integrated the competency into its operations and continually evaluates its sustainability.

Statements were crafted and refined to represent the practices, beliefs, and actions associated with each stage—emerging, developing, and transforming. Interview questions were also developed to assess which stage each organization's practices aligned with. These questions were based on both the evaluation rubric and the evidence base related to competencies and theoretical frameworks.

2 | A How-To Guide

This evaluation can be used by any organization serving youth to understand how to improve service delivery.

Choose a Facilitator

Organizations may opt to task a dedicated staff member to facilitate this exercise, or choose an external facilitator to support them. If choosing a staff member, we recommend choosing someone who is not directly involved in the work and will be able to keep the discussions on track, rather than someone who is more involved and may want to contribute to the discussion.

Identify participants

Identify all the staff across your organization who should be part of the evaluation. We recommend having a combination of staff in leadership or management roles, as well as staff responsible for specific youth programs and services. For example:

- Service organizations may wish to include their Executive Director, head of the youth department, as well as youth services program staff
- Library-based organizations may wish to include their executive director, teen librarian or other youth services staff, and select circulation or front desk staff (e.g. who may be working weeknights or weekends)

Identify who the key staff are that need to be involved in prioritizing and implementing recommendations from this process.

Schedule time(s) for evaluation discussion

Arrange for at least one 90-minute session for all participants to meet and discuss the self-evaluation. If the group is large or your organization has lots of different youth programs, consider scheduling multiple sessions to allow adequate time for discussion.

Prepare participants

Explain the objectives of the evaluation and invite participants to prepare for the evaluation meeting. Provide the conditions for professional safety by ensuring staff understand that this is not an assessment of their individual performance, and share how the findings will be used to make changes in the organization's operations.

Share the evaluation rubric and/or questions for reflection with all participants a few days in advance of your scheduled meeting time. Invite participants to think about their work and make an assessment of where they think the organization falls within each domain of the evaluation rubric.

Meet as a group

Start with the first core component (Organizational Setting) and invite staff to share their assessment for one domain at a time. For each domain, seek to understand where and why staff made a particular assessment. Use the discussion to work towards consensus. If staff are struggling to assess a domain, use the interview guide to pose a broader question that prompts a discussion. Then revisit the related statements associated with that domain to see if the emerging, developing or transforming statements fit best. To move from one stage to the next, all the conditions in the previous stage must be met.

A notetaker should capture the final ranking, along with any ideas on how the organization could move to the next stage. It is encouraged that participant voices and justification are reported in the aggregate to support each ranking.

Pause and schedule additional time as needed. Staff may need more breaks or more time for discussion that you anticipated. Be patient.

Prioritize Recommendations

Once all the domains have been discussed, review the recommendations that have emerged. Consider refining recommendations to make them realistic, timely, specific, targeted and simple.

Consider prioritizing actions that cut across several domains, or those that are easily achievable within existing constraints. No organization has endless resources and implementing change takes time.

Next Steps

Following the meeting, thank all participants for their contributions.

Share your organization's plan of action, including the activities, personnel, resources and timeline for implementation with participants.

3 | Evaluation Rubric

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Organization Climate and Culture		Our organization has defined overall guiding values for working with youth.	Our guiding values for working with youth are known to all our staff and applied in their work.	All staff actively embody the guiding values for working with youth, and this is part of their ongoing performance evaluation.	
Youth as a Priority Population		Youth are a priority in youth-related programming and service delivery.	Our organization has youth-specific services, and some of our other programs welcome youth	Our organization has a holistic model of care, and youth are prioritized and fully integrated into more than just youth-specific services.	
Physical Space - Youth Friendliness		Our staff recognize the importance of creating physical spaces that are youth-friendly.	Our staff aim to create inviting spaces that they think would be friendly for youth.	Our staff actively engage youth clients to understand how spaces can be more youth-friendly and work with management to implement these changes. Our youth-specific spaces have some flexible elements; youth are encouraged to shape the space as they desire.	
Physical Space - Accessibility	All of our physical spaces comply with accessibility legislation.	Our organization is aware that removing barriers for some youth makes spaces accessible for all.	We have started a process to meet the standards of universal design.	Our program spaces follow universal design principles and are regularly maintained to support the diverse needs and abilities of our youth clients. All of our spaces meet universal design standards, and all future building projects and renovations are required to meet universal design standards.	

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Physical Space – Inclusion		Our organization recognizes the importance of creating inclusive spaces for our participating youth.	We ensure that there are visible representations and resources that reflect the intersectional attributes of the youth we serve.	Our staff reflect the intersectional attributes of the youth we serve. We review and adapt our work to reflect the evolving diversity of our young clients.	
Digital Spaces – Youth friendliness		Our organization recognizes the importance of providing information for youth in online spaces (e.g., website, social media).	We create youth-friendly digital spaces with information on multiple platforms (e.g., text, audio, image, video). Our content is in plain language and is designed to engage youth.	We conduct periodic communication audits to track youth interactions with our digital spaces and adapt our practices to improve youth engagement.	
Digital Spaces – Accessibility		Our organization is aware of digital accessibility guidelines. Most people can use and understand our online spaces.	Our online spaces aim to meet with digital accessibility guidelines and provide information on youth-specific programs and services.	Our online spaces follow universal design principles. They are regularly updated to ensure compliance with digital accessibility guidelines and with features to support the diverse needs and abilities of our youth clients. Detailed information about our youth programs is easily discoverable in our online spaces.	
Digital Spaces – Inclusion		Our organization understands the need to create inclusive digital spaces and welcome diverse youth.	We create inclusive online spaces that represent diverse, intersectional attributes.	Our digital spaces go beyond diverse, representative visual content. We use the principles of intercultural communication to guide the design of our online content. Our digital spaces allow visitors to select from multiple language options.	

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Program Awareness and Visibility		We share information about our youth-related services on our communication channels, including our website and social media.	We enhance our communication using specific channels that are popular with our target youth population.	We regularly engage with users of our communication channels to solicit feedback to inform our communication efforts to raise program awareness and visibility for our target population.	
Barriers to Access our Services		We are aware that youth face barriers in accessing our organization.	We have taken steps to understand the barriers that youth in our community experience when accessing our organization.	We are taking action and have committed resources to address the barriers that youth have identified about accessing our organization.	
Wayfinding	We believe youth can easily locate our organization, both physically and digitally.	We know that some youth may struggle with navigating our physical and digital spaces.	We have clear signage in our physical spaces and a clear navigation menu on our website to enable youth to navigate our organization and get the resources.	We routinely review our physical and digital spaces to identify navigation barriers for our youth clients. We revise signage and navigation menus to continually meet the needs of our clients.	
Prevention Efforts		Our organization attempts to contribute to prevention efforts by providing youth community-based programs.	Our organization facilitates prevention efforts by offering support to youth who seek to strengthen or contribute to protective factors.	Our youth programs actively contribute to prevention efforts in our community by promoting individual and community protective factors through our programming.	
Experiences of Risk Among Youth		All of our staff are aware that some youth may experience risks.	Some of our staff seek to understand the risks experienced by some youth in our community. They work to address these risks through our programs and services.	We seek to understand the static and dynamic risks experienced by youth in our community. We make active, ongoing attempts to engage at-risk youth through our programs and support them to mitigate the impacts of these risks on their lives.	

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Youth-specific Programming		Youth are part of our programs and services.	We offer youth-specific programs and services. We actively build and maintain positive interactions with our young participants and tailor our programs to the needs of these youth.	We offer youth-specific programs that are tailored to the individualized needs of youth. We seek feedback from participant youth to improve our services.	
Evidence-based Programming		Our youth programs would benefit from an update.	Our youth programs are periodically reviewed and updated to incorporate current best practices and research evidence.	Our organization considers the lived experiences and social locations of our youth clients in addition to current best practice and research evidence. We have processes in place to periodically update our youth programs based on both the evidence and the needs and abilities of our youth.	
Developmentally Appropriate programs		We understand the importance of providing programs that are appropriate for youth at each stage of their development.	Our youth programs offer support for youth at each stage of adolescent development.	Our youth programs account for each stage of adolescent development. We customize our programs based on the needs, abilities and preferences of our youth participants.	
Community engagement and sense of belonging		Our youth programs have defined goals.	Staff are aware of the goals that guide our youth programs.	Staff ensure program activities are aligned with the intended program goals.	
Promoting competencies among youth		We are aware of the importance for youth to build competencies.	We try to promote competency building among youth by focusing on skill development in a few some domains.	We actively support competency building among youth by promoting skill development across several domains.	

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Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Supporting confidence development		We recognize the importance of instilling confidence in youth.	We ask youth about their strengths.	We support confidence-building by taking a strengths-based approach to help youth embrace their self-worth and focus on building future orientation among youth.	
Character development		We recognize the need for youth to be held accountable for their actions.	Our programs try to foster a sense of responsibility and integrity among youth to support their development.	Our programs include components that promote growth among youth, celebrate individual identities, and intentionally encourage youth to exercise their autonomy and agency.	
Facilitating connection and relationship		Our programs allow youth to build connections with other youth.	Our programs facilitate peer relationship building and staff try to develop positive relationships with youth.	Our programs promote intentional relationships among youth with peers, positive and reciprocal relationships with staff, and connection to the community.	
Creating caring youth		We understand the importance of developing respect, empathy, and sympathy within youth.	We talk to youth about respect, empathy and sympathy.	We actively model and encourage values of sympathy, empathy and respect among youth and in their interactions through our services.	
Promoting contribution among youth		We encourage youth to find opportunities to become engaged in their community.	We make youth aware of the importance of civic engagement and provide youth with examples of how they become more involved in the community.	We intentionally promote the importance of civic engagement among youth and facilitate opportunities for youth to be involved in our organization and the broader community.	

IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Program Oversight		We recognize the need to include youth voices in program planning and delivery.	We include youth voices in service planning and delivery by interacting with youth to understand their experiences and needs and other monitoring mechanisms.	We seek input from youth and youth workers to improve program delivery and measure program alignment with the needs of youth.	
Involve Youth in Decision-Making		Program decisions are made with youth in mind.	Youth are valued and sometimes consulted as decision-makers in our organization.	Youth are valued and consulted as decision-makers throughout the processes of creation, updates, or modification of programs.	
Gather and Incorporate Feedback from Youth		We occasionally gather anecdotal feedback from youth participants. However, we lack formal evaluation procedures for our youth programs.	We collect self-reported measures from youth to understand how our programs meet their needs. This input may not always be used to improve our programs.	We have comprehensive evaluation processes that include both internal and external reviews, fidelity checks, and periodic self-reported measures from youth to continuously improve our youth programs and efficiently meet their needs.	
Resource Allocation		We are aware of a few resource barriers that we face in our youth programs.	We face a few resource barriers but are actively working to eliminate these barriers.	We face a few resource barriers, but streamlined processes are in place to reduce the resource barriers faced by youth programs.	
Staff Training		Not all staff receive youth-specific training.	Our staff receive some youth-specific training (especially for youth programs).	Our staff receive regular training and are encouraged to attend additional training as it pertains to their work and the changing needs of youth.	

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Accessibility – Appropriateness		We take a universal approach to serve all youth in our community.	We seek to understand the needs of the youth we serve and adapt our approach to serve the youth in our community.	We understand the community-wide needs of youth and recognize that these needs change over time, even within the same neighbourhood. We adapt our approach based on these needs and customize our programs to address these needs for the youth we serve.	
Accessibility – Acceptability		We are aware that our services need to meet the needs of the youth we serve.	We create inclusive youth programs by establishing a respectful code of conduct, providing adaptations for participants, and offering translation or interpretation services for youth who need them.	We customize our programs to meet the needs of diverse youth in our community, with regular staff training to ensure inclusivity in program design and implementation. We actively seek and incorporate participant feedback to enhance inclusion in our services.	
Accessibility – Affordability		We recognize direct and indirect costs as a barrier to access and offer low-cost programs for youth.	In addition to low-cost youth programs, we offer subsidies for youth for whom any cost may be a barrier. This information is posted in our physical and digital spaces.	All programs and services are free for youth, OR We actively raise funds to offer subsidies for youth. Our staff actively engage youth at-risk to raise awareness of subsidies, and support youth to complete funding-related paperwork.	

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Accessibility – Availability and Accommodation		We recognize the importance of providing youth programs at times and locations that are convenient for youth and do so whenever possible.	Our youth programs are held at times and in locations that are conveniently accessible for youth (e.g., weeknights, weekends). We offer transportation and/or cover transportation costs when youth may need to travel to access our programs (e.g., field trips, camps).	In addition to running youth programs at times and locations that are conveniently accessible for youth, we actively engage youth to ensure our services are accommodating the needs of diverse youth populations. Program staff work closely with management to ensure adequate resources can be allocated to accommodate these needs.	
Accessibility – Approachability		Information about our youth programs is available on invitations, posters and digital resources, including our website.	Information about our youth programs is available in multiple locations and our organization is aware of potential barriers for youth who try to access our program information.	Our organization actively reaches out to our community to distribute program information. We offer information sessions and provide assistance (a contact to reach out to) to improve access to program information and reduce barriers faced by youth accessing our program information. We do not assume that all youth have mobile devices or reliable access to the internet from home.	
Outreach (to overcome barriers to access)		We recognize the need for outreach and promoting our services outside of the location.	We offer some outreach and advertise youth programs in nearby schools through posters, social media, and direct invitations.	Our youth program staff actively promote our services by engaging with schools and families, and we have established referral mechanisms to offer integrated services.	

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Referrals and Coordinated Care		Our staff look up other community organizations when we are working with youth who need services beyond what our organization offers.	Our staff are somewhat familiar with other organizations in the community that offer services that we do not. They are able to make these referrals easily when the youth we serve need them.	Our staff have positive relationships and/or collaborations with other community organizations who offer services we do not. Our programs offer a holistic model of care, and when referrals are made, staff are responsible for making sure that the youth client has a smooth handoff.	
Youth Retention in Programs and Services		Our programs cater to diverse needs and youth sometimes come back for other programs and services.	Youth are encouraged to come back to access other programs and services we offer as needed. We attempt to stay engaged with youth participants after they've completed a program.	We seek to engage youth in a continued-care model of service delivery. We encourage youth to engage in multiple programs and services as they transition to adulthood. We make stringent efforts through our processes to keep youth engaged in programs and services that can benefit them.	

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Component	Stage 0: Not Aware	Stage One: Emerging	Stage Two: Developing	Stage Three: Transforming	N/A
Demographics of Youth Participants		Our programs are open to all youth regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, etc.	All youth are welcome in our programs. However, we are aware that the demographics of our program participants may not reflect our community's diversity.	All youth are welcome in our programs. We know that the demographics of our program participants do not reflect our community's diversity. We actively seek to reach underrepresented groups to raise awareness and lower their barriers to access for diverse youth populations.	
Understanding of Youth Population		We have only observational data about the backgrounds and social location[1] of youth in our programs.	We collect self-reported data about the background and social location of most youth participants.	We collect self-reported data about the background and social location of youth participants. We use these insights to tailor programs to meet youth needs.	
Understanding of Reach		Our organization is more focused on what services we offer rather than who is accessing these services.	Our organization makes an effort to understand the population of youth who access our services.	Our organization understands the youth who access our services in the context of the broader community population. We tailor our awareness and outreach activities to reach underrepresented, vulnerable youth.	
Understanding of Gaps in Reach		Our organization focuses more on supporting the youth who attend our programs rather than those that don't.	We have made some efforts to understand which youth we are not reaching through our outreach and data collection.	We understand which youth we are not reaching through our outreach efforts and have processes and strategies in place to improve our reach and visibility to access hard-to-reach youth.	

[1]A young person's social location refers to the intersection of their various identities, including gender, race, class, age, ability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographical location, among others [2].

4 | Explanation of Core Concepts in the Evaluation Rubric

Core concepts in the evaluation rubric were drawn from the evidence-base on best practice in program evaluation research and from the underpinnings of the theoretical frameworks and empirical literature used to guide this work (i.e. positive youth development, risk and protective factors, and prevention and intervention programs). Core components were selected to assess several areas of "effective" programming in the community, including: setting characteristics, participant characteristics, program characteristics, and implementation characteristics.[1,3–5]

These broad areas help to provide insight into both practice and policy changes that may need to be included, revised, strengthened, or continued by an organization in program and service delivery.[3] The components included in this evaluation rubric brings awareness to several key indicators of program effectiveness. For example, through this evaluation rubric, an organization is able to assess critical activities of the program, connectedness of components to program goals and outcomes, implementation successes or barriers, organizational structure, appropriateness of programs, support for participants, inclusion and exclusion, resources and training, program outcomes and effectiveness, sustainability, outreach, and contributions to protective factors, adolescent development, positive youth development, and crime prevention.[3–6]

ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

Setting characteristics offer important context about the organization and location where services are being delivered. This may include site characteristics such as the organizational climate and culture, structure, leadership and guiding values, community characteristics as well as staff characteristics. Given the nature of this initiative, we focused on organizational climate, its physical and digital presence as well as the overall organizational awareness of their work as it relates to youth wellbeing.

Organization Climate and Culture

Organization climate and culture refers to the guiding values that underpin the organization's approach to working with youth. This domain assesses the extent to which staff embody and practice these values in their work to understand how the broader culture within the organization is reflected in work with youth.

The transition through adolescence to adulthood is a period of immense biological, physical, psychological and emotional change (see Appendix B). Organizations that serve this population must take this into account and ensure that all their staff who may have interactions with youth—whether at the front desk or behind closed doors—have direction that guides their work. A seemingly minor interaction for adults has the potential of life-changing implications for a youth.

Youth as a Priority Population

Youth as a priority population reflects how youth are centered and valued within an organization's broader operations. This domain evaluates the extent to which youth are considered a priority, which significantly impacts how supported and recognized youth feel within the organization.

Physical Space – Youth Friendliness

Creating youth-friendly physical spaces is key to ensuring that youth feel safe, welcome, and valued within an organization. This domain evaluates how well staff create such environments and how these spaces can be adapted to better suit the preferences and needs of youth.

Physical Space – Accessibility

An understanding of how accessible a physical space is at an organization is critical for ensuring that all youth, regardless of needs and abilities, are

able to access services effectively. This domain evaluates the extent to which organizations incorporate accessibility practices and universal design standards within their physical spaces. Key aspects include clear entrances and pathways, the presence of service navigators, visible signage in various formats (including Braille), and appropriate color contrast between elements.

Accessible design supports youth with diverse motor, visual, and cognitive disabilities, promoting a more inclusive environment and equitable access for all youth. For instance, unobstructed pathways and clear entrances facilitate navigation for individuals using mobility aids. Well-placed signage in multiple formats, such as Braille, and sufficient color contrast assist those with visual or cognitive impairments in finding their way independently. Service navigators provide personalized support, guiding youth through the organization's physical spaces. While this overview is not exhaustive, these elements serve as foundational practices for organizations working towards universal design standards. For further details on universal design standards, see below.

Universal Design

Universal design refers to principles that guide the design of environments, products and communications are now widely recognized to improve accessibility. While they are necessary for some people, they are helpful for all. First developed in 1997, the seven key principles of universal design include: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use.[7]

There are a number of guidelines for implementing Universal Design into digital spaces known as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines help organizations ensure that their digital spaces are accessible to all users. The guidelines are comprehensive and cover everything from audio and video best practices to ensuring webpage navigation is possible by mouse, keyboard, touchscreen, or with assistive technologies. More information about WCAG best practices can be found below:
- Government of BC – Guide to Creating Accessible Web Products [8]
- Government of BC – Accessibility Testing and Auditing [9]
- Web AIM – WCAG2 Accessibility Checklist [10]

Physical Space – Inclusion

Moving beyond meeting accessibility standards, how inclusive a space is may play a role in how welcome and included any one youth feels in the space. This domain assesses how an organization creates inclusive physical spaces that recognize and celebrate diversity and intersectional attributes of youth.

Digital Space – Youth Friendliness

Youth friendliness in digital spaces within an organization refers to how online spaces are created and designed in order to foster youth engagement. This domain is important for understanding youth engagement with an organization to facilitate meaningful contact with youth outside of their physical presence in an organization. Engaging youth online can often be a starting point for support or an additional source of support for youth.

Digital Space - Accessibility

This domain assesses the accessibility of an organization's online spaces to ensure they meet the diverse needs of youth and pertains to its compliance with the Web Content Accessibility 2.0 Guidelines (WCAG).[11] Organizations that prioritize accessibility create digital spaces that are inclusive, user–friendly, and accessible to everyone. Features such as text alternatives, customizable interfaces, and assistive technologies like screen readers enable youth of all abilities to fully engage with online content, including those with visual, auditory, or motor impairments. Our assessment focused on three key aspects:

- accessibility widgets (e.g., customizable text size, contrast, etc),
- alternative formats (e.g., Braille, audio, video), and
- clearly displayed information about the accessibility features of physical spaces.

Accessibility widgets allow youth to customize their experience, supporting those with visual impairments or cognitive differences like dyslexia and ADHD. Providing clear information about physical spaces empowers youth with diverse abilities to independently access services and prepare for potential challenges.

Digital Space – Inclusion

Moving beyond meeting accessibility standards in digital spaces, how inclusive an online space is may play a role in how welcome and included any one youth feels. This domain assesses how an organization creates inclusive digital spaces that recognize and celebrate diversity and intersectional attributes of youth.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication moves beyond words alone. It seeks to preserve mutual respect among groups and minimize ambiguity when sharing meaningful information across cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication promotes the development of a shared understanding, requiring an appreciation for diversity in communication styles and norms across cultures.

Bringing in elements of universal design supports clear and effective communication by making the language used understandable for a broader audience. Ineffective messaging can result in mistrust and increased stigmatization of marginalized groups, decreasing the tendency to support one's community.

Incorporating the key principles from universal design in communication and intercultural crisis communication, two complementary bodies of knowledge, would greatly improve the status quo.
Universal design principles that guide the design of environments, products and communications are now widely recognized to improve accessibility. While they are necessary for some people, they are helpful for all. First developed in 1997, the seven key principles of universal design include: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use.[7]

Crisis communication recognizes that the consequences of ineffective messaging will be magnified in times of crisis, and results in the reluctance to seek help, increased mistrust, increased stigmatization of marginalized groups and decreased the tendency to support one's community.[12] Crisis communication principles aim to remedy this by overcoming the reluctance in help-seeking, reaching diverse populations through culturally competent means, reducing stress and fostering hope for recovery.[12] Intercultural communication moves beyond words alone and seeks to develop meaningful and unambiguous information across cultural boundaries, that preserves mutual respect and minimizes ambiguity.

Program Awareness and Visibility

Program awareness and visibility refers to how information is communicated about programs offered by an organization. This domain is important for understanding and assessing an organization's efforts in reaching their intended populations and ensuring that communication efforts are effective.

Barriers to Access our Services

This domain refers to the organization's understanding of the barriers that youth face in accessing services and support. Importantly, this domain assesses not only if an organization is aware of barriers, but also whether an organization takes steps in addressing barriers related to access. An understanding of barriers to access can help facilitate efforts to decrease barriers and connect with hard to reach populations of youth who are not currently accessing services or support from an organization.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding refers to the methods of determining a path from where one is located to a desired destination. In this case, we use wayfinding to describe navigation to youth services not just in a physical setting but also within an organization's digital setting (primarily their website).

Prevention Efforts

Prevention efforts refer to the efforts made to contribute to the prevention of youth crime within the community. At the organizational level, prevention efforts may seek to foster and encourage protective factors through services and support offered to youth. Contributing to prevention efforts not only impacts the young person's well-being and development, but also broader community safety.

Individual and community protective factors

Protective factors often mitigate the impact of risk factors experienced by youth and can lead to reduced criminal activity, deviance, and increase positive outcomes for youth. Protective factors are often categorized across several domains, including individual, peer, family, school, and community.[13] Through programming, it is important to address both dynamic and static protective factors. Of relevance to this report, individual and community protective factors[14,15] include, but are not limited to those listed in the table below.

Individual Protective Factors	Community Protective Factors
• Problem solving skills • Emotion regulation • Positive self-esteem • Healthy development • Engagement in cultural activities • Agency • Decision-making skills • Healthy coping skills • Positive friendships and peer relations • Commitment and attachment to school • Low impulsivity	• Attachment to the community • Accessibility/availability of services • Community engagement • Social connectedness • Opportunities for civic engagement • Partnerships between services

Experiences of Risk Among Youth

Experiences of risk among youth refers to and assesses staff's understanding of the static and dynamic risks that youth may experience across several domains. This domain is critical in supporting the positive development of youth and to encourage participation among at-risk youth in services and programs. Additionally, an awareness of the risks experienced by youth can help staff identify and address risks experienced by youth via programs and services.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Program characteristics focus on the actual services or intervention efforts offered by an organization. These characteristics provide information on what is offered in a program or service. Often, a reflection on program characteristics focuses on goals, practices used, feedback and monitoring, social support, and a review of the theories, activities, and elements that go into a program/service. For this initiative, we have incorporated domains that consider key components of the overarching frameworks guiding this work, including positive youth development, protective factors, and adolescent development. Elements of these frameworks include specific, intentional programming, the six C's of positive youth development, developmentally-appropriate programming, and developing a sense of belonging.

Youth-Specific Programming

Youth-specific programming as a domain represents whether an organization offers services and supports tailored specifically for youth, to meet their unique and individual needs. As youth have different developmental and well-being needs than other populations, specific services and programs are critical for healthy outcomes and community safety.

Evidence-Based Programming

Evidence-based programming refers to programs that are informed by current research on best practices and approaches proven to be effective in practice with youth. Importantly, evidence-based programming considers the unique experiences and social locations of youth which needs to be considered in the design and implementation of programs.

Developmentally Appropriate Programs

Although development occurs on a continuum, there are common developmental milestones, events, and experiences that youth go through that should be considered in programming. Developmentally appropriate programs refers to programs that address and consider the events that occur during developmental stages across adolescence. Developmentally appropriate programs are important for fostering positive outcomes and mitigating risk experienced by youth.

Stages of Adolescent Development

Stages of adolescent development through early, middle, and late adolescence may include changes to emotional, physical, cognitive, social development.[16] An important caveat to note when considering adolescent development is that although these stages seem linear and rigid, there is much fluidity between these stages.[17] Developmental milestones may occur at different ages depending on the young person.[16] Transitions through developmental stages may also be influenced and impacted by cultural and context-specific factors and experiences.[16,17] Nonetheless, there are common developmental experiences, milestones, and events that youth will experience through their transitions through adolescence, detailed below.[16,18] These events and milestones may lead to both positive or negative outcomes or experiences for youth, depending on what happens during each of these stages based on individual differences, adaptability, development, and context.[16]

For more details on developmental maps that explain events, milestones, and experiences across adolescence and related supports, see the following resource from the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Youth Development Committee[18]: Stepping Stones, 2021.

Early Adolescence *approx. 10–13 years*	Middle Adolescence *approx. 14–17 years*	Late Adolescence *approx. 17–19 years*
• Biological changes occur, pubertal development • Brain functioning increases • Brain processing speed increases • Risk-taking increases • Difficulties with emotion and impulse regulation • Emotions experienced more intensely • Development of personal identity begins • Social group identity emerges • Gender identity and roles become more important • Self-efficacy may decrease • Poor decision-making skills • Self-esteem may decrease and become less stable • Importance of peer relationships increase, while importance of family decreases • Moral reasoning based on peer acceptance • Puberty produces different physical changes • Sense of body image emerges • Beginning of complex thinking processes	• Puberty changes continue • Interest in romantic relationships • Identity is continuously explored • Cognitive and emotional maturity increases • Development of logical thinking • Gender roles increase in flexibility • Brain development and changes – frontal lobes continue to mature • Ability to assess risks and rewards increases • Abstract thinking • Emotion and impulse regulation increase, but still require attention • Importance of romantic peers increases • Empathy continues to develop • Exploration of cultural-identity may increase • Self-esteem may decrease • Self-efficacy increases • Understanding of different perspectives • Importance of peer relationships is maintained and weigh heavily on identity • Eating and sleeping changes occur • Future planning begins • Memory strategies and processes increase • Depressive symptoms may emerge	• Strong sense of individuality and autonomy • Stable perception on interests • Concern for future increases • Friendships and romantic relationships may become more stable • Emotionally and physically separated from parents, but establish an adult relationship with parents • Ability to control emotion and impulses continues to improve • Brain functioning continues to increase • Abstract thinking continues to mature • Logical thinking skills improve and mature • Working memory improves • Self-regulation increases and motivation is internalized • Sense of identity solidifies • Social and gender identities are more stable • Cultural-identities may be more internalized • Self-esteem improves • Eating and sleeping changes continue

Clarity of Program Goals and Alignment

Clarity of program goals refers to an organization having clear goals that guide program approaches and activities. Staff should be aware of goals and use approaches that seek to facilitate fullment of these goals and outcomes for youth. This domain is important for ensuring that programs have overarching goals that benefit youth and to ensure that staff are aligned in their practice when working with youth.

Community Engagement and Sense of Belonging

This domain refers to whether the services and programs offered to youth in an organization encourage engagement in the broader community to contribute to a sense of belonging in both programming and in the community. Community engagement and sense of belonging both can contribute to youth feeling safe and welcome in their community.

Positive Youth Development Framework

Positive youth development (PYD) is both a theoretical and intervention framework that views youth as assets to be developed through efforts aimed at supporting youth achieve their full potential.[19,20] PYD is rooted in the fields of developmental psychology, developmental systems theories, evolutionary biology, community psychology, and through gathering practice-based perspectives from youth workers. The intention of a PYD framework is to help youth thrive in their environments.[21] Given the plasticity of human development, a focus on strengths of youth can help facilitate change across their development.[22] This framework focuses on encouraging youth's positive self-identity, capacity, agency, decision-making, social connectedness, and social, emotional, academic, and vocational competencies.[23] PYD supports the promotion of developmental competencies that youth need at both individual and system levels. [24]

Outcomes and competencies of PYD include the "6 Cs" including character, connection, confidence, competence, caring and as a result of the accumulation of these Cs, contribution. Lerner et al[22] adopted working definitions of these Cs from Lerner and Roth & Brooks-Gunn[20] that have been widely adopted by others in the field and include:

- **Competence:** Positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational.
- **Confidence:** An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.
- **Connection:** Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship.

- **Character:** Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviours, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
- **Caring and Compassion:** A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

When these five Cs are fostered within a youth, the sixth C of contribution should emerge:
- **Contribution:** Inclusive of the behaviours of the 5 Cs by contributing to self, family, community, and civil society. Contributions take on both an action and ideological component.

Key ingredients in fostering the 6 Cs through programs and other efforts include positive and continuous adult-youth relationships, skill-building activities, involving youth in decision-making, and providing youth with different opportunities for civic engagement and leadership.[21] Thus, the goals of youth development programs should seek to promote positive development among youth, even while seeking to prevent or mitigate risks and problem behaviours.[20] This framework provides a solid foundation for developmentally appropriate practice.[23] PYD-oriented programs should target both individual and interpersonal assets and skills.[23]

Promoting Youth Competencies Among Youth

This domain refers to an organization's effort to promote skill development across several domains (e.g. social, academic, cognitive, vocational) that facilitate the positive development of youth. This is important to ensure that programs offered by organizations include skill building in their approach to supporting youth. This type of skill development aligns with positive youth development and promoting competent youth.

Supporting Confidence Development

This domain assesses the extent to which organizations take strength-based approaches in their programs to support confidence building among youth to foster future orientation. Supporting confidence development among youth is aligned with positive youth development and supports a focus on their strengths, assets, and skills. This domain also contributes to promoting and encouraging youth to recognize their self-worth and self-efficacy so that they can thrive in different environments.

Character Development

Character development refers to whether a program provides space and opportunities for youth to grow as a young person. This domain promotes fostering and exercising responsibility, agency, autonomy, and identity among youth. This domain aligns with a positive youth development approach and fosters a sense of character among youth that promotes a sense of integrity and morality.

Facilitating Connection and Relationship

Facilitating connection and relationship refers to positive relationship building. This domain aligns with a positive youth development approach and promotes positive relationship building between a young person and their peers, family, and community, beneficial for all parties involved. This domain assesses whether an organization encourages connections among peers, family, school, and the community to foster positive bonds for a young person.

Creating Caring Youth

Creating caring youth refers to building a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. This domain assesses whether an organization both models and encourages empathy, sympathy and respect for others. This domain is important for promoting positive youth development.

Promoting Contribution Among Youth

Promoting contribution among youth refers to the encouragement of civic engagement in the broader community. This domain aligns with positive youth development and also includes contribution to self, family, and society. Community organizations can promote contribution through programs by providing resources and opportunities for youth to participate in civic engagement. This domain assesses the extent to which an organization promotes contribution across community, self, family, and society in their programs.

IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS

Implementation and process characteristics provide an overview of how programs and services are delivered. Assessing implementation and process characteristics typically includes a focus on fidelity, reach of program, program appropriateness, resource allocation, and training. In addition to these domains, our efforts also focused on how youth are included in the decision-making processes and implementation of programs and services offered by different organizations, as youth voice is critical in ensuring that programs are effective for their overall well-being and development.

Program Oversight

Program oversight refers to who is involved in planning and reviewing service delivery to ensure programs are appropriately meeting youth needs. This domain assesses whether an organization does this with the inclusion of youth voice and youth workers. Youth voice is critical in program oversight to ensure their lived experiences are being meaningfully considered in program and service delivery.

Involve Youth in Decision-Making

This domain considers an organization's efforts to include and value youth as decision-makers, including their voices in updating, creating, and changing programs. This domain is important for organizations so that programs are meeting the changing needs of youth and to uphold youths' rights as agentic decision makers.

Gather and Incorporate Feedback from Youth

This domain refers to whether and how organizations gather and incorporate feedback from youth with the intention of ensuring program effectiveness. This means that feedback from youth is gathered, but also incorporated into reviews and measures of programs to ensure that programming is meeting youth needs.

Resource Allocation

Resource allocation refers to the resources that are given to youth-specific programs and the barriers to resource allocation and access facing youth programs at an organization. This domain assesses awareness of how resources are allocated and barriers to allocation, and whether an organization has processes in place to mitigate these barriers in service delivery.

Staff Training

Staff training considers what type of training staff receive before and during their practice with youth. Staff training should include both regular training and youth-specific training to ensure that appropriate approaches are taken in work with youth. This domain is important for assessing whether staff training considers the changing needs (social, emotional, developmental, etc.) of youth to be explored and embedded in service delivery.

Accessibility in Service Navigation

Service navigation refers to the process of finding and accessing support services. Being able to navigate through services plays a crucial role in a young person's ability to successfully receive those services. There are five known areas of accessibility barriers to service navigation: appropriateness, acceptability, availability and accommodation, affordability and approachability.

For more information, refer to Tamarack Institute - Improving Youth Service Navigation: A Guide For Community Organizations[25]

Accessibility – Appropriateness

Appropriateness refers to the idea that service delivery and implementation of programs are tailored to the evolving needs of the community. This domain assesses the extent to which programs and delivery are reflective of the community in order to evaluate the processes that are in place to customize programs to meet these changing and evolving needs.

Accessibility – Acceptability

Acceptability refers to processes in place during implementation to ensure that programs are inclusive and welcoming to youth who assume different, intersectional social locations and identities. This domain assesses efforts to foster inclusion throughout an organization's processes through training and feedback to promote programs that reflect the identities of youth in the community. Acceptability rates are often lower regarding mental health and in culturally and economically diverse communities.

Accessibility – Affordability

Affordability refers to consideration of cost for youth to access programs. This domain assesses accessibility as it pertains to affordability of programs through an organization's awareness and acknowledgement of cost as a barrier to participation in programs. This domain is important as

organizations should seek to reduce barriers related to affordability through supporting grant initiatives, low or no-cost programs, or opportunities for subsidies for youth to access programs.

Accessibility – Availability and Accommodation

Availability and accommodation refers to programs that are accessible to youth when they are available through the day and when programs would be most easily-accessible to them. This includes a consideration of both location of where a program is offered and how a young person may actually reach a physical space (e.g. transportation access, transportation costs), and the time at which a program runs (e.g. weeknights, weekends). An awareness of youth needs in terms of time and location for accessing programs is important for staff to be able to modify and accommodate youth so that they can access services. This domain can also assess the extent to which youth, staff, and management work together to allocate resources to accommodate the needs of youth.

Accessibility – Approachability

Approachability refers to how a youth may access program information. To increase accessibility for obtaining program information, this domain assumes various methods of providing program information and takes into consideration potential barriers that some youth may face in obtaining program information. Importantly, organizations should also make efforts to mitigate potential barriers by centering approachability in their distribution strategies. Approachability is directly related to an organization's efforts to distribute programming information through outreach, posters, flyers, and direct invitations in both physical and digital locations.

Outreach to Overcome Barriers to Access

To overcome barriers to access that some youth experience, outreach initiatives should be multi-faceted and promote service integration. This domain considers how organizations overcome barriers through outreach initiatives that include families, schools, or other community partners. Evolving, on-going outreach strategies should be a part of implementation and oversight processes within an organization.

Referrals and Coordinated Care

Referrals and coordinated care refers to the extent to which an organization promotes holistic, through care for youth. This includes providing referrals to other organizations for youth to access programs and services that their organization does not offer and collaborations with other community partners. Referrals and collaborations are facilitated through positive

relationships between organizations. This domain is important for ensuring effective implementation of services and delivery that center the needs and best interests of youth.

Youth Retention in Programs

Youth retention in programs follows a continued-care model of program delivery for youth. This approach promotes retention in programs through engaging youth in multiple programs across their development. This domain also assesses whether an organization offers programs that youth can continue into once they have completed other programs at the organization. Providing support across development and to meet different needs is important for fostering protective factors and positive development among youth.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

An awareness of participant demographics can help organizations have a grasp on which populations of youth are and which are not accessing their services and programs to extend their reach, tailor their programs to meet individualized youth need, and to address risk factors and promote protective factors specific to these needs. Participant demographics focus on who is accessing services and programs across organizations.

Demographics of Youth Participants

Demographics of youth participants refers to the makeup of the population of the youth who access the support and services at an organization. An assessment of the demographics of youth participants also accounts for an awareness of youth who are not accessing the organization and whether the organization takes efforts to engage under-reached youth in their programs.

Understanding of Youth Population

An understanding of youth population refers to whether the organization collects data on background and social locations of youth, or if their understanding of the youth population is driven from only observation and anecdotal perspectives. An understanding of the youth population who accesses the organization is critical for tailoring programs to meet the lived experiences of youth in programs and services.

Understanding of Reach

This domain assesses an organization's understanding of their reach and which youth access their services. Reach is a measure of participation, referring to the percentage and characteristics of youth who are affected by a program or service. This understanding builds on other demographic-based domains and compares them to the broader community's demographics. When an organization clearly identifies who is accessing their services, they can tailor their programs to better meet the specific needs of their participants in the broader social and cultural context of the community. This understanding of reach also helps identify gaps in service delivery and barriers faced by underrepresented youth. This domain can facilitate efforts to ensure that an organization's outreach effectively engages at-risk or vulnerable youth.

Understanding of Gaps in Reach

This domain builds on the other demographic-based domains and assesses an organization's awareness of the gaps in their outreach in engaging youth who do not access their organization. This domain also assesses whether an organization makes an effort to increase outreach to vulnerable or at-risk youth.

5 | Question Guide

Setting Characteristics

1. In your roles as key decision-makers who set priorities and allocate resources, can you describe where youth fit in your organization?
   - Guiding values for working with youth
   - Work of only dedicated staff or whole org (incl. Management, Board)

2. Tell us about the physical spaces you use for your programs. How are these spaces welcoming, inclusive and accessible for youth?
   - Youth friendliness
   - Accessibility
   - Inclusive
   - Exclusive use or shared space – how does this impact your ability to make the space welcoming, inclusive and accessible for youth?

3. Can you tell us more about your online presence, including your website, social media and any other things you use? How are these spaces welcoming, inclusive and accessible for youth?
   - Youth friendliness
   - Accessibility
   - Inclusive

4. Can you share any steps you take to ensure youth are able to easily navigate your organization, both in your physical and digital setting?

5. Can you describe the focus of your youth programs and services? Are there particular risk and protective factors that you are trying to address?
   - Prevention at individual vs. community level
   - Understanding of static and dynamic risk and protective factors

6. Can you describe how your programs reach their target population?
   - Raise awareness and visibility
   - Understand and reduce barriers to access
   - Service navigation (from entry to exit)

7. Board-Specific Questions
   - Can you share how board members are recruited?
   - Can you help us understand (financial, human) resources are allocated for youth and how these discussions play out around the board table?
   - Do board members regularly receive youth-specific updates?
   - Probe/follow-up: how are youth brought into the center of your conversations at the board level?
   - How does your board receive or include youth voice in decision making?

Participant Demographics

1. Can you describe the population of youth your organization reaches?

    – Does it reflect the diverse youth in our community?
    – Gaps in reach
    – What steps have you taken to reach youth who may not be connected to your organization but can benefit from services you offer?
    – Data collection (comparison?)

Program Characteristics

1. How would you describe the work that you do with youth?

2. Can you help us understand how you plan your youth programs and services? What informs your program activities?

    – Youth needs

    – Evidence-base

    – Age and developmentally appropriate

    – Developing a sense of belonging

3. Can you share how the activities you lead within your programs fit into program goals?

    Some of you may be familiar with the Positive Youth Development framework. There are 6 Cs in the PYD framework: competency, confidence, character development, connection, caring and contribution. Some of this might sound familiar because you're already doing this without calling it PYD.

4. Does this sound familiar? Whether informally or formally, can you share some examples of how your program activities address the 6 Cs?

    Probe for only the ones they don't cover

    – Build youth skills (competency)

    – Help youth build confidence (confidence)

    – Support character development (character)

    – Facilitate connection and relationships (connection)

    – Create caring youth (caring)

    – Encourage youth to give back or get involved in the community (contribution)

Implementation and Process Characteristics

1. Can you describe if/how youth inform the development of program activities or other important decisions in your organization?
   - Feedback
   - Decision-making
   - Oversight

2. Once youth complete your program, do you continue to stay connected with them in any way?
   - Encourage access to other services or programs at your organization
   - Handoff to other organizations (referral/coordinated care)
   - Retention

3. Can you help us understand how your organization supports you to do your work?
   - Training
   - Resource allocation

We want to now switch to talking about some different aspect of accessibility, and known barriers to access. We'd like to understand how your team works to overcome some of these barriers.

4. Approachability is the idea that people know about the services that exist which they can go to and receive. Can you share an example of how your programs are approachable?

5. Can you describe what you do to make sure that your programs are affordable and available at a time and place that works for youth?

6. Acceptability is the idea that services are socially and culturally accessible for people. Appropriateness refers to the idea that programs and services offered meet the needs of youth. Can you talk about how you address acceptability and appropriateness in the way you plan your activities?

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