

APRIL 2017

YouthREX Project Update

“The Ministry of Children and Youth Services shares YouthREX’s unwavering commitment to the wellbeing of at-risk youth and supports your vision of an Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth.”

– HONOURABLE MICHAEL COTEAU
MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

“We’re very proud of the innovative work the Youth Research & Evaluation eXchange is accomplishing for Ontario’s young people and the youth sector. By supporting projects like YouthREX, we’re sharing tried and tested ideas to provide the right opportunities to help youth make positive choices and reach their full potential.”

– HONOURABLE TRACY MACCHARLES
MINISTER OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES
(2014 – 2016)

For most non-profit organizations, the dates March 31 and April 01 mark the end and beginning of a new fiscal year - a sort of December 31 and January 01 for our sector.

For YouthREX, this year’s March 31 was also the end of our two and half year contract in our partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) – a partnership driven by our vision of *“an Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth”*.

As we begin a new three year contract in this partnership with MCYS, we would like to take a moment to thank everyone who has been part of the YouthREX story, reflect on the highlights of the past two and half years, and share beginning thoughts about our plans for the next three years, which we are calling “YouthREX 2.0”.

Our Gratitude

First, we owe deep thanks to all who have been part of the YouthREX journey over the last two and half years. We are especially grateful to:

MCYS for not only providing us with the opportunity to be part of Ontario’s youth sector ecosystem but for fully supporting us to take the deliverables of our contract and make them responsive to Ontario’s youth sector realities.

YouthREX’s institutional homes – York University (our provincial base), Carleton University, King’s University College at Western University, Lakehead University, and Laurentian University, our regional hub hosts. We thank our five partner universities for their extensive in-kind

contributions that make it possible for YouthREX to take on a wide range of programs. We are especially thankful to our provincial home, the **School of Social Work** and the **Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies** at York University for their full support of YouthREX.

YouthREX's Advisory Committees that help ground our work in lived experience, local realities and practice-based expertise. Thank you to our Youth Advisory Council members, Provincial Advisory Committee Members, and Regional Advisory Committee Members at our five regional hubs.

YouthREX's Staff, Research Assistants and Interns

– both past and present at our five regional hubs and provincial office. Everything we do at YouthREX is a collaborative effort – every one of you is an important piece of the puzzle without which the puzzle could not be whole! Thank you for contributing to the strong foundation that we have built by bringing your unique perspectives and experiences.

YouthREX's Academic Directors for their leadership and commitment to community-engaged scholarship. YouthREX is a really great example of how academics and community stakeholders can work together for social good.

Most importantly, we would like to thank you – all of our stakeholders who engaged with our work in different ways – our webinar attendees, event participants, CES partners, NOISE fellows, social media followers, eXchange online youth hub visitors, certificate learners, and more.

Thank you for allowing us to learn with and from you, for your willingness to engage with evaluation and research, and your openness to the opportunities that we have offered.

Your deep commitment to youth wellbeing is truly inspiring. It has informed our work and pushed us to learn and do better.

As we plan for YouthREX 2.0, we are delighted that we continue to observe excitement and eagerness from our stakeholders to engage with YouthREX. We look forward to continuing to create spaces for sharing knowledge from research, practice and lived experience to strengthen our communities with you.

YouthREX 1.0 in Review November 2014 to March 2017

As we look back at the last two and half years, we are proud that we successfully accomplished (and in some areas, exceeded) the deliverables of our contract with MCYS. We are particularly proud that we approached our contractual deliverables with thoughtful and intentional planning that allowed us to be responsive to what we were learning about Ontario's youth sector. We look forward to sharing a report of the past two and half years, including an evaluation report, in July. For now, we would like to highlight five accomplishments that are noteworthy:

1. The eXchange for Youth Work
2. Evaluation Leadership:
YouthREX Evaluation Framework /
Customized Evaluation Supports /
Beyond Measure? Study
3. YouthREX ED Certificates
Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing
Critical Youth Work: Bridging Theory and Action
4. Youth Voice /
Youth Leadership /
Youth Engagement
5. The Youth. The Work. The System:
Knowledge to Action eXchange

Keep scrolling to see the section, **YouthREX 1.0 in Review** for more details on these five accomplishments!

Imagining YouthREX 2.0 April 2017 to March 2020

Although we are proud of what we accomplished over the past two and half years, we are not satisfied! We want to continue improving to better support Ontario's youth programs.

- We look forward to adding new curated and created resources/tools to **the eXchange** while also improving the platform to make it more accessible.
- We will build on our efforts to create 'spaces' for professional development for youth workers such as our two certificates, workshops, and Community of Practice gatherings.
- We will expand our partnerships and presence in more communities across Ontario by creating a Youth Work Ambassadors Network and an expanded Academic Network.
- We will offer more virtual learning and sharing opportunities that can further extend our reach across Ontario.

More importantly, YouthREX looks forward to exploring with our stakeholders, what small role we can play to address the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the structural inequities of a legacy of colonialism that Indigenous youth and their communities experience. To begin our process of thinking through how we can contribute to supporting the implementation of the TRC recommendations in Ontario's youth sector, we held a **Design Lab** in October as part of our **Knowledge to Action eXchange**. At this Design Day, groups engaged with the question:

"How might the youth sector work "in a good way" with others to address the legacy of residential schools, close gaps and remove barriers, support Indigenous culture, and reconcile relationships with Indigenous people"?

We are also looking forward to supporting the newly launched Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (OBYAP) that will address the racial and structural inequities that Black youth and communities in Ontario experience and the resulting disparities in wellbeing for Black youth.

Read our thoughts about OBYAP here.

YouthREX is fully committed to supporting the implementation of the OBYAP so that programs and services for Black youth in Ontario can be built on the best available knowledge and evidence from research, practice, and lived experiences.

Exploring how YouthREX can contribute to reconciliation and the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan will be front and centre of our agenda for YouthREX 2.0.

Spring 2017 Plans

To prepare for YouthREX 2.0, we will be 'pausing' this spring to review and learn from our evaluation of the past two and half years, reflect on all the feedback you've shared with us, and have thoughtful conversations with community partners.

As we solidify this next phase of YouthREX, **our five Regional Hubs** across Ontario that ground our work in the local realities of Ontario's communities will be on a break. If you have questions about YouthREX's work in these regions, please contact the Academic Directors at each of our **regional hubs**.

We are currently wait-listing applications for **Customized Evaluation Supports (CES)**, our free one-on-one evaluation supports so that we can revise and strengthen this service. Since launching CES in August 2015, over 90 Ontario grassroots youth organizations have

embarked on an evaluation of their programs with support from our Regional Hubs. Check out these [CES Spotlights](#) to learn more about some of these organizations and how evaluation informed their work.

During our 'pause', check out the resources we've created and curated to support evaluation in a youth sector context, including our [Evaluation Toolkit](#), our [Evaluation Framework for Youth Wellbeing](#), [Inventory of Evaluation Measures](#) and our [archived webinars](#) on evaluation-related topics.

The Importance of Pause

Pause is Selah,
an adjunct in a Psalm

Pause is a musical note
where you hear the silence
between woven strings
as it shapes the cadence
and refreshes rhythm

Pause is an imperative
to smell the scent of dawn

Pause is therapy for dusk
and the restless midnight

Pause is rest for the soul
before spirit escapes flesh

Pause, and the world won't skip

The world will wait for you!

by *Akin Taiwo*

Upcoming Opportunities and Initiatives

- **NOISE @ York University and NOISE @ FYI** will be holding a Spring Festival of Learning on April 20. [Check here for more info.](#)
- **Webinars:** Join us on April 25, 2017 at 2pm for our next free webinar, A New Paradigm for Youth Justice: Exploring Restorative Approaches. Register now at youthrex.com
- **Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing Certificate:** We will offer this online evaluation certificate in Fall 2017.
- **Ontario Youth Compass:** YouthREX will be launching our youth data book in late summer to provide Ontario's youth sector with data on the wellbeing of Ontario youth from diverse secondary data sets.

Please [subscribe to our newsletter](#) for updates on these opportunities.

Finally, we encourage you to visit [the eXchange](#), our online youth development hub to explore the [Library for Youth Work](#), read some Youth Perspectives in the [eXchange blog](#), check out our [Youth Measures Inventory](#) and our [Evaluation Toolkit](#). While you are there, would you please take a moment and share or recommend resources for us to feature? Thank you!

Collegially,



Uzo Anucha, MSW, PhD
Provincial Academic Director, YouthREX
Associate Professor, School of Social Work
York University



YouthREX 1.0 in Review

Five Key Accomplishments

NOVEMBER 2014 - MARCH 2017



YOUTHREX
Research &
Evaluation eXchange

“This initiative – and the innovative space that it occupies – is very much due to the advocacy of the grassroots groups and youth leaders on the frontlines calling for a new way of doing business...

The stakes are high. Research tell us that every moment, every interaction we have with young people can have an impact on their developmental trajectories. Our vision for YouthREX is something that is grounded, practical and that makes evaluation a part of the everyday work that we do, because we owe it to those young people to work with them to improve their outcomes.”

- SEAN TWYFORD
DIRECTOR OF THE YOUTH STRATEGIES BRANCH
MINISTRY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

01

the eXchange for Youth Work

ONE OF OUR MOST EXCITING accomplishments is *the eXchange for Youth Wellbeing* that we launched on March 31, 2016! *the eXchange* is an online hub that brings youth development knowledge from research, practice and lived experiences together in one online space, and in accessible formats making it easier for the youth sector to connect shared knowledge to their work with young people across Ontario. *the eXchange* includes: A searchable **Library for Youth Work**, an **Evaluation Toolkit** and a growing online **Learning Community**.

the eXchange is an extension of YouthREX's efforts and commitment towards enhancing youth wellbeing in Ontario by supporting the work of grassroots youth stakeholders and actively helping them to connect shared knowledge to youth work.



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!
exchange.youthrex.com



02

Evaluation Leadership

WE ARE COMMITTED TO PROVIDING the youth sector with the support, incentives, resources and opportunities to learn about evaluation, ask questions that matter, and use evaluation findings for decision-making and action that improves youth outcomes. Here are three ways that we have approached this commitment over the last two and half years:

YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/our-evaluation-framework

YouthREX developed this framework to guide our evaluation work with grassroots youth programs. The framework serves as the foundation of our evaluation activities and resources such as Customized Evaluation Supports and our Evaluation Toolkit. It summarizes and organizes the key elements of evaluation into a three-phase seven-step model specific to the youth program context

The framework also emphasizes three lenses that are better suited for informing program evaluation within a grassroots sector youth context:

1. A Youth-Engaged Lens;
2. A Contextualized Methods Lens; and
3. A Learning Focused Lens.

Customized Evaluation Supports (CES)



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/ces-welcome

One of our signature offerings, CES allows us to provide free one-on-one program evaluation supports for Ontario grassroots youth organizations. Across our five hubs combined, we have had the opportunity to work with over 90 youth programs, helping organizations to better understand, track, measure and share the impact of their work with youth. YouthREX's *Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing* guides the CES process, though we remain flexible and responsive to the needs, capacities, and strengths of each organization we work with. Throughout the past two and a half years, we have made sure to continuously refine our processes to ensure accessibility while also staying true to the principles of the framework.

Beyond Measure?

The State of Evaluation and Action in Ontario's Youth Sector

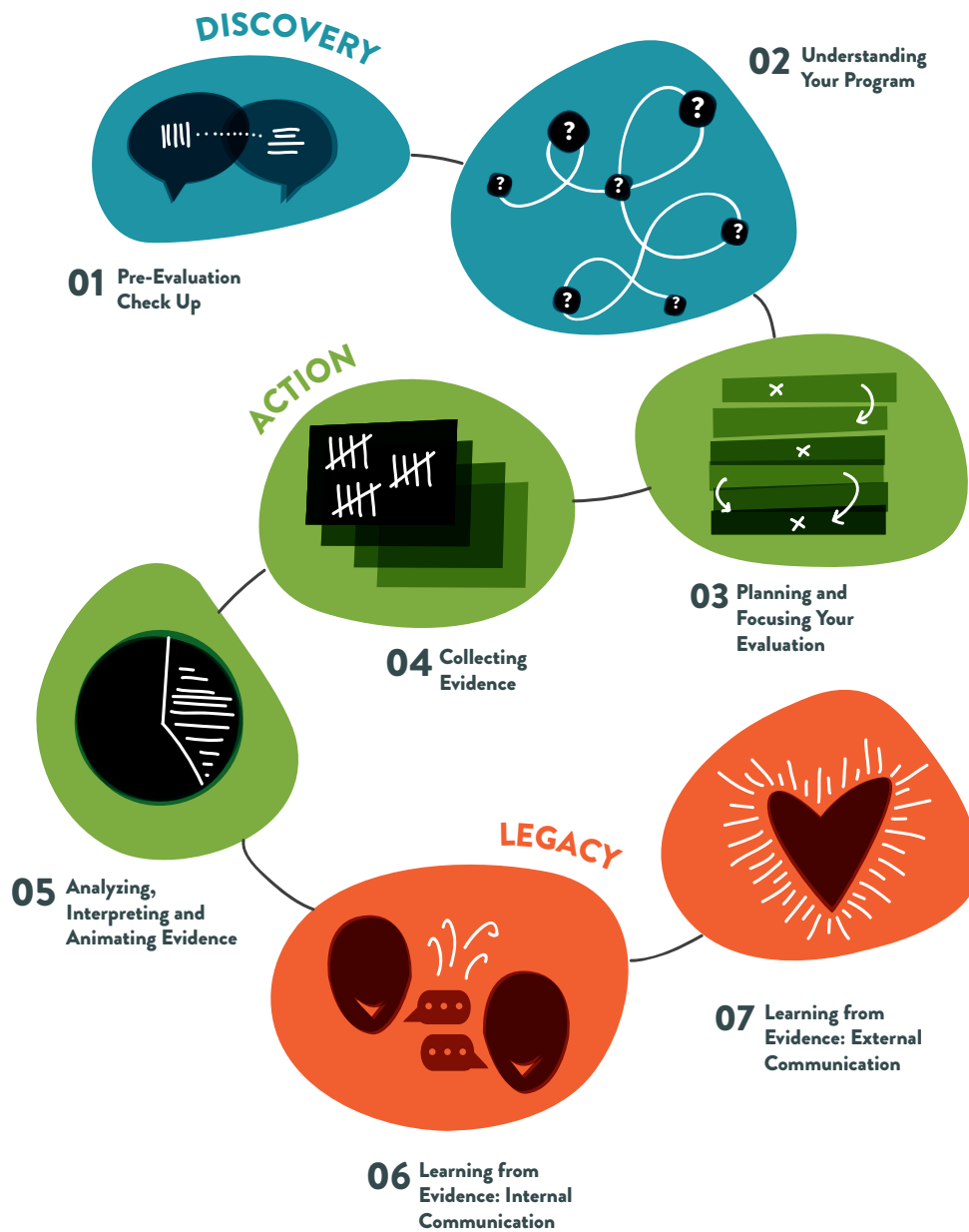


CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/beyond-measure

In order to inform the development of our services and to have a greater understanding of the current evaluation capacity of the youth sector, YouthREX undertook a province-wide survey early in 2015. This study examined the experiences of youth-serving agencies with conducting evaluation of their programs and services.

The report provides a 'point-in-time' description and analysis of evaluation issues in the youth sector, including current practices, barriers, capacities, perceptions and aspirations related to evaluation. It includes ten recommendations on how the youth sector can develop responsive evaluation processes and practices that are uniquely suited to the organizational, social and political realities of grassroots youth programs.



YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing

The YouthREX Framework for Evaluating Youth Wellbeing offers a youth program a simple three-phase seven-step process for developing an evaluation plan, implementing the plan and using the findings to improve the program and promote the wellbeing of youth participants.

PHASE 1: DISCOVERY

STEP 01: PRE-EVALUATION CHECK UP

Where is your organization on your evaluation journey and what is your capacity to undertake this journey? What are your evaluation assets? What resources do you need to successfully complete this journey?

STEP 02: UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROGRAM USING LOGIC MODELING

What is your program theory? What are your program components and your intended outcomes? A logic model is a visual representation of your program and how it is intended to work.

PHASE 2: ACTION

STEP 03: FOCUSING AND PLANNING YOUR EVALUATION

Before you set off on your evaluation journey, gather your stakeholders and develop a roadmap (evaluation plan) for your evaluation journey.

STEP 04: COLLECTING EVIDENCE FOR A PROCESS & OUTCOME EVALUATION

Collect data + stories to answer your process and outcome evaluation questions.

STEP 05: ANALYZING, INTERPRETING AND ANIMATING EVIDENCE

Identify themes in your qualitative data, patterns or trends in your quantitative data and make sense of your findings.

PHASE 3: LEGACY

STEP 06: LEARNING FROM EVIDENCE: INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Turn the sense making into learning that strengthens your program and improves the wellbeing of your youth participants. Use your evaluation insights and findings to inform decisions that improve your program.

STEP 07: LEARNING FROM EVIDENCE: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Share your evaluation findings in a variety of oral and written formats tailored to different audiences to help stakeholders understand the REAL story about your program.

Our Guiding Lenses

A Learning Focused Lens

Will the evaluation produce insights and findings that can be used by the youth program to improve and promote youth wellbeing?

A Youth-Engaged Lens:

Does the evaluation meaningfully engage youth participants?

A Contextualized Methods Lens

Does the evaluation design+methods allow a youth program to tell rich stories of their processes and outcomes that acknowledge the complexity and dynamism of youth work?

03

YouthREX ED Certificates

THE THIRD KEY ACCOMPLISHMENT is the successful launch of two YouthREX ED certificates focused on building the capacity of youth sector stakeholders in Ontario.

Critical Youth Work Certificate



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/critical-youth-work-bridging-theory-and-practice

Our Critical Youth Work certificate is a three day face-to-face learning opportunity that provides youth workers with the space to engage in critical dialogue and learn about the political, social and economic realities that characterize youth work. Through diverse speakers and activities, we aimed to provide participants with the tools to critically analyze key youth work issues, and options for creative and viable forms of transformative practices that support and strengthen youth wellbeing.

We have offered this certificate six times to 125+ learners in six locations: Richmond Hill, Scarborough, North York, Mississauga, Peel, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.

Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing Online Certificate



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/program-eval

This online certificate provides youth sector stakeholders (especially youth sector organizations who are considering embarking on a program evaluation journey) with a foundational understanding of the main concepts, approaches and practices relevant to conducting evaluation of programs and initiatives within a youth sector context. The certificate is designed to support them to develop an evaluation plan, implement it and use the findings to improve their programs.

The certificate consists of 10 lessons that run over 10 weeks. Each weekly lesson includes narrated lectures, and other learning resources (videos, podcasts, readings, and tools). The certificate walks participants through how to develop an evaluation plan, implement it and use the findings to improve their programs and share their impact.

We have run this certificate three times since launching, receiving over 1500 applications and welcoming approximately 600 learners combined.



YOUTHREX ED

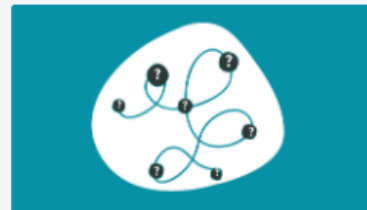
ONLINE CERTIFICATE

Understanding Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing



Youth REX
Module 01: Ontario's Evaluation
Context

[View Module](#)



Youth REX
Module 02: The Discovery Phase of
Evaluation

[View Module](#)



Youth REX
Module 03: The Action Phase of
Evaluation

[View Module](#)



Youth REX
Module 04: The Legacy Phase of
Evaluation

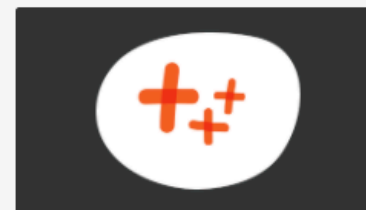
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Youth REX
Discussion Board

Join the Conversation!

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Youth REX
Learn More

Free

Find Additional Resources and Tools

[View Module](#)

04

Youth Voice / Youth Leadership / Youth Engagement

WE ARE PROUD THAT we have paid attention to youth voice, youth leadership, and youth engagement in all areas of our work. We understand that for YouthREX to respond to the needs of small grassroots organizations, youth-led initiatives and the wider youth-serving sector, it is absolutely critical that youth voice and experiences drive our research and evaluation processes. This has therefore been a core value that shapes YouthREX's work with Ontario's youth sector - a commitment to continue exploring more meaningful ways to fully engage youth in our work.

We strongly believe that engaging youth in the evaluation of youth programs has the potential to benefit them in many ways. For example, it provides them with opportunities for skill development, relationship building, and improves the overall quality of the research and evaluation processes. YouthREX evaluation processes, like all YouthREX activities has included recruiting, hiring and training youth as peer interviewers and involving them in knowledge mobilization and communication activities.

Our Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) is one example of our youth engagement activities. The YAC is entirely made up of youth and is co-chaired by two youth who sit on the Provincial Advisory Committee (PAC). The YAC ensures that youth have a 'safe-space' to caucus and then raise issues at the PAC. The YAC is made up of nine youth and is supported by two youth coordinators and an adult ally (a YouthREX full-time staff). In Year Two, they undertook their own keystone project - a documentary: *Youth Leading Change Documentary: Stories from Across Ontario*. The documentary celebrates the voices and agency of youth from the province of Ontario who are leading, and creating platforms for change.



Another example is **New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement (NOISE)**, our collaborative youth innovation space. NOISE is a research-informed model for enhancing the academic success of youth through engaged learning opportunities that energize and support their civic engagement and psychosocial wellbeing. Founded at York University, NOISE began by engaging youth from the Jane-Finch community and provides opportunities for them to learn together with our social work students. Since the launch of YouthREX, we have run NOISE not only in our Central Hub at York University, but also our Eastern Hub at Carleton University, Southwestern Hub at King's University College, and Northeastern Hub.

The NOISE model provides us with an opportunity to connect knowledge to action in a concrete way that improves youth wellbeing while encourage youth to create positive social change in their local communities.



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!

www.youthrex.com/about-us/youth-advisory-council-documentary

www.youthrex.com/what-we-do/noise-2

05

Knowledge to Action Exchange (#KtA2016)

October 27 - October 29, 2016

THE MOVEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION requires opportunities for people to come together and learn with and from each other.

With this in mind, YouthREX held a Knowledge to Action (KtA) Exchange, *The Youth. The Work. The System*, on October 27-29, 2016. The goal of this KtA was to bring youth sector stakeholders from across the province of Ontario together to share and engage with practice-relevant knowledge from research, youth work practice and lived experiences. Over three days, the KtA Exchange for Youth Wellbeing offered a learning space to approximately 300 stakeholders, facilitating the movement of knowledge into action to support and improve youth wellbeing.



CHECK IT OUT ONLINE!
www.youthrex.com/exchange-2016



#KTA2016 Learning and Networking Opportunities:

October 27, 2016

#KTA2016 started off with three full-day workshops for 60 youth workers from across the province.

October 28, 2016

The main event was a full day experience for 200 youth sector stakeholders featuring two inspiring keystone speakers, four panellists, 10 concurrent workshops and more than 25 spotlight presentations, performances, posters etc.

October 29, 2016

#KtA2016 wrapped up with our Design Day. Applying design thinking, 60 youth sector stakeholders tackled four challenges, or 'Idea Labs' that youth workers experience. Participants engaged in a full day of collaboration, dialogue, and critical thinking that resulted in eight prototypes for youth wellbeing. Click [here](#) for a report of our Design Day.



YouthREX is primarily funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services with extensive contributions from York University and the four partner universities: Carleton University; King's College University at Western University; Laurentian University and Lakehead University.

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