

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Fostering Rural Youth Wellbeing

through Afterschool Programs

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Rural, health, wellbeing, afterschool programs, expanded learning opportunities, social determinants of health

POPULATION GROUP

Rural youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Academic article (peer-reviewed)

“Nurturing positive characteristics in families, schools and after-school programs may be a promising way to improve lifelong health.”

1. What is the research about?

Rural youth face challenges to their development, as evidenced by poorer health outcomes than their urban peers. Challenges to wellbeing emerge from a lack of social and economic investment, resources and opportunities. Rural youth often lack access to afterschool youth development programs.

This research is an exploration of the impact on rural youth wellbeing for participants in **Fusion Youth and Technology Centre (Fusion)** afterschool programs, from the perspective of adult stakeholders. Fusion offers diverse programs for youth from 12 – 18 years old ranging from: “art and music, leadership and social development, entrepreneurial and skill development, indoor and outdoor recreational fitness and sports, and a wide variety of technology activities including computer labs, computer recycling, photography, broadcasting media, and a recording studio.” Challenges youth in the area face include: bullying, stress, safety, and drug use.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in Ingersoll, a medium-sized town in rural Ontario that is located approximately 2 hours west of Toronto.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about the youth, age 12–18, who attend Fusion afterschool programs and who are from Ingersoll, as well as the surrounding areas.

4. How was the research done?

This research is a case study of youth wellbeing outcomes associated with participation in Fusion afterschool programs from the perspective of adult stakeholders. It builds on previous research on the same topic but from the perspective of youth program participants. The researchers began their study with a literature review of evolving conceptualizations of youth wellbeing and its relationship to health and associated outcomes. Next, they conducted an analysis of secondary relevant documents, observed programs, and completed in-depth interviews with adult staff and community members and a focus group to validate findings.

5. What are the key findings?

The researchers determined three key ways the youth centre contributed to increased well-being:

- 1. Engaging youth through a varied mix of programs and activities:** Youth benefit from the opportunity to try new activities and to develop new skills. Youth felt acknowledged for their accomplishments and were rewarded with increased leadership opportunities. Overall youth feel valued and gain confidence and life skills.
- 2. Building relationships and connections:** The relationships youth developed with staff and other youth led to increased wellbeing. Youth felt a positive sense of self and acceptance as a result of their relationships.
- 3. Providing a physical space for youth:** Creating a physical space for youth to meet that is safe and youth-friendly provides opportunities for socializing, learning, and engaging.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Programming that is designed to be responsive to the needs of rural youth is essential. Rural youth face increased challenges and risks to their wellbeing when compared to their urban peers, and purposeful afterschool programming can mitigate those risks.

The evaluation of Fusion provides valuable lessons in the development of rural youth programming. The research is careful to note that replicating Fusion may not be the answer for every rural community, but the following questions can be used as a guide in developing programming in rural areas.

- How can we facilitate the development of connections among youth and between youth and adults?
- How do we develop an approach to youth development in our community that is founded on positive youth development?
- How do we develop meaningful activities to engage youth that will allow them to utilize their free time productively while also meeting their diverse needs?
- How do we ensure that all youth have access to these opportunities?
- How do we create physically and emotionally safe places for youth to gather?

Designing programs guided by answers to these guiding questions will increase the likelihood that your program will serve the needs of youth in your community.



Cross, H., & Lauzon, A. (2015). Fostering Rural Youth Wellbeing through Afterschool Programs: The Case of Fusion Youth and Technology Centre, Ingersoll, Ontario. *Journal of Rural & Community Development*, 10(1), 145-170.