

LAB 02

**Indigenizing
Youth Work:
Towards a New
Relationship**



**Collaborative
Designing for
Youth Wellbeing**

The Story of Our Design Day
10.29.2016



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YouthREX

School of Social Work
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3
Fax: 416-650-3861
youthrex@yorku.ca
www.youthrex.com
www.exchange.youthrex.com

ABSTRACT

The Design Day brought together youth sector stakeholders – youth, youth workers, policy makers, researchers, funders and citizens – to collaboratively tackle four ‘thorny’ challenges, that youth and youth workers experience. This event was hosted in collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This report is a snapshot of this Design Day and focuses on the Indigenizing Youth Work: Towards a New Relationship Lab. It shares the two prototype pitches that participants co-developed in response to the challenges identified in the Lab. It also includes reflections on the collaborative process along with resources and case study examples that can inspire our youth work.

KEYWORDS

innovation, design, idea lab, collaboration, strategic planning, community-based design, participatory process, youth outcomes, youth development, systems change, rural youth, Indigenous youth, racialized LGBTTTQQ2SIA youth, youth work, collective self-care

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Foreword

The Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) at the Ontario Trillium Foundation eagerly accepted YouthREX's invitation to co-host a Design Day on October 29, 2016. Together, we tackled four 'thorny' challenges that Ontario youth and youth workers experience. This report is a snapshot of this Design Day. The report includes the four Idea Lab challenges that the Design Day focused on and the eight prototype pitches that participants co-developed in response to these challenges, along with resources and case study examples that can inspire our youth work.

The **Youth Opportunities Fund** is an annual program of the Government of Ontario, administered by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. YOF provides grants and capacity-building supports to youth-led grassroots groups and collaboratives serving young people. Funded initiatives improve outcomes for youth facing multiple barriers to economic and social wellbeing. Similar to YouthREX, our work is grounded in ***Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed***.

We recognize that in order to do our work effectively and responsively, we must take time to listen to and learn with and from, all youth sector stakeholders including youth, frontline youth workers, researchers, policy-makers and funders across Ontario. So often, we can end up working in silos or in pre-defined structures where engagement is confined to formal roles. YOF was pleased to co-host this Design Day with YouthREX to break down those walls, hear from each other, and connect deeply over what we can all agree we're working towards: improving the lives of youth.

Using design thinking to explore issues that matter:

We were also happy to share our own learnings with YouthREX, gleaned from hosting multiple YOF Ideas Lab days, where we welcome youth to use design thinking to explore issues that matter to them and bring their ideas to life, while also learning about the YOF. We find this approach to be engaging and meaningful both for us and the youth. Collaborating with YouthREX on this Design Day was an opportunity to experience the intersection of design thinking with youth sector challenges and wisdom in a nuanced way. It was also an opportunity to explore an issue we are particularly interested in: increasing our understanding and meeting the needs of rural Ontario youth (Lab 03).

As this report shows, very fruitful dialogue and ideas were shared and explored. Like youth work, there were moments of connection and tension, times when some of us broke away from the schedule or planned activities, and many valuable learning moments – both expected and unexpected.

We hope this report continues to breathe life into the important ideas that were seeded at this event. Thank you to everyone who participated or supported the execution of this day! We look forward to collaborating again.

Tabish Surani

Lead, Program Delivery, Youth Opportunities Fund
Ontario Trillium Foundation

**DESIGN DAY
PARTICIPANTS**

Adanna Anucha
Alexander Lovell
Amanda Capassit
Amr Abdul-Lafif
Berkha Gupta
Cassandra Erichsen
Chris Duff
Colleen Mitchell
Corliss Bean
Cyril Cromwell
Donna Richard
Dor Assia
Ed Rawana
Effy Min
Francis Jeffers
Graeme Lamb
Harjeet Badwall
Isioma Nathan Oconte
Jasmeen Chandij
Jason York-Best
Jennifer Hirnpa
Jessica Noble
Jordanna Laman
Julet Allen
Julie Klukas
Justin Wiebe
Katherine Kolodziej
Khadijah Kanji
Laura Mulrine
Mariam Khan
Marquez Ramsay
Nnali Simon
Omar Goodgame
Philip Meng
Rachel Paris
Richelle Johnson
Sarah Chiddy
Shauna Kechego-Nichols
Simren Sidhu
Stephanie Rattelade
Stephen Bediako
Tabish Surani
Tamar Brannigan
Tara Zimmerman
Tessa Molyneaux
Vincent Bolt
Yvonne Kelly
Xindy H

**DESIGN LAB
CONVERSATION
FACILITATORS**

Colleen Mitchell
Jenny Katz
Melanie-Rose Frappier
Poe Liberado
Sean Lessard
Sol Giwa
Tamon Scarlett

*YouthREX reached out to these individuals to facilitate the discussions in each Idea Lab. They helped to guide conversations and provide contextual information based on their extensive knowledge and experience, whether lived, practice and/or research-based.

**YOUTHREX DESIGN
DAY ORGANIZERS**

Anita Sekharan
Rebecca Houser
Uzo Anucha
Yumi Numata

Thank you to everyone who participated in this Design Day. This report captures just a fraction of the wisdom that was shared; we are grateful for everyone who worked through the activities with a spirit of collaboration, patience, and a true commitment to youth wellbeing.

About the Design Day

OVERVIEW

The Design Day brought together youth sector stakeholders – youth, youth workers, policy makers, researchers, funders and citizens – to collaboratively tackle four ‘thorny’ challenges, or Idea Labs, that youth and youth workers experience. This event was hosted in collaboration with the Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Design Day participants were provided with ‘challenge briefs’ that provided participants with a summary of the context, key information, and suggested challenge questions to act as prompts for the day. Group of four to six individuals took on one of the Idea Lab challenges (two groups per challenge) and worked together to generate new ideas, or variations on existing innovations for advancing youth wellbeing on these issues. Everyone present was invested in the topic areas and had specific experience and knowledge to bring to the table, whether lived, practice or research-based.

This event was designed to provide participants with an opportunity to collaboratively work with peers from multiple vantage points in the sector to co-create recommendations on each Lab topic. The activities moved participants through developing a common understanding of the issue(s) at hand, ideation and prototyping solutions/recommendations. At the end of the day, each of the eight groups shared, or ‘pitched’ their idea/prototype to the larger group.

YouthREX committed to sharing the solutions and recommendations from the Design Day widely within the youth sector through a knowledge mobilization strategy crafted around the contributions and outcomes of each Ideas Lab. This report is part of this strategy.

DESIGN DAY GOALS

- Share knowledge
- Learn from other perspectives
- Collaborate to design uniquely tangible recommendations or solutions for advancing youth wellbeing

PROPOSED OUTCOMES

- Increased collaboration amongst diverse youth sector stakeholders around a ‘thorny’ issue
- Develop a common understanding of the problem
- Design and prototype solutions

IDEA LAB TOPICS

LAB 01 // Bringing Our Whole Selves: Inclusive Programs With And For Racialized LGTBTTQQ2SIA Youth

LAB 02 // Indigenizing Youth Work: Towards A New Relationship

LAB 03 // Far And Farther: Equitable Access To Programs, Services, And Opportunities For Youth Living In Rural And Remote Communities

LAB 04 // Beyond The Individual: Community/ Collective Approaches To Youth Worker Wellbeing

MaRS Solutions Lab facilitated this event, guiding participants through a collaborative process of discovery that included: problem framing, ideation, and prototyping of solutions. This approach, which included issues and stakeholder mapping, enabled participants to identify and design strategies and interventions for change.

Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation collaborated on this event with YouthREX, co-planning, engaging stakeholders to participate, hosting Idea Lab 03, *Far And Farther: Equitable Access To Programs, Services, And Opportunities For Youth Living In Rural And Remote Communities*, and participating throughout the day.

The Agenda

10 AM

Welcome + Introduction

Welcome by YouthREX and YOF
Introduction: The What & How of Design Jams
by MaRS Solution Lab (MSL)



10:15 AM

Icebreaker

Visualizing the Social Safety Net activity
by Youth Philanthropy Initiative



11:00 AM

Understanding the Problem: Mapping the Challenge



12:45 PM

Networking lunch

1:15 PM

Ideation

Generating ideas for interventions



2:15 PM

Break

2:30 PM

Prototyping

Building the pitches



3:20 PM



Idea Lab Pitches

Each of group had five minutes to present their prototype to the room and answer the following questions: What is the problem? What is the idea? How does your prototype change the user experience of your persona?

3:50 PM

Closing Remarks and Next Steps



4:00 PM

Close



01 // ICEBREAKER

Visualizing the Social Safety Net hosted by Rachel Paris, Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI)

To start the day off, everyone gathered in a big circle to participate in an icebreaker called ‘Visualizing the Social Safety Net’. Participants were assigned a badge representing one of the following: 1) social institution, 2) type of social service, or 3) marginalized group/ social issue. They took turns tossing a ball of yarn across the circle, identifying relationships between people and parts of the system, while holding their section of yarn to create a visual trail or ‘net’ to represent those connections.

This activity gave participants a visual, thought-provoking, and hands-on way to explore how the social services system works. It was an interactive way to visually see and reflect on who, why, and how diverse members of the community may be served/underserved/not served by the system, how connections can be built, and where we can support youth to engage within this system.

Design Day Activities: A Step-by-Step Snapshot of the Day



02 // UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM: MAPPING THE CHALLENGE

Issues Map

Participants brainstormed issues and challenges associated with the challenge outlined in their Idea Lab brief.

The Stakeholder Map

This activity gave participants the opportunity to think through all the stakeholders involved in the issue outlined in the Idea Lab challenge at hand.

Experience Map

This activity had participants focusing on the experience of the key user/stakeholder they were designing for. The activity helped participants empathetically think through the issues and feelings of the user they were designing for, who this user interacts with, and what they experience/do when dealing with the challenge at hand.



03 // IDEATION: GENERATING IDEAS FOR INTERVENTIONS

Prioritizing Ideas

Participants brainstormed ideas for interventions on Post-It Notes and then mapped out all their ideas on a matrix based on feasibility and impact. This allowed them to see what ideas would have high impact and be feasible, versus those that were low impact and not very feasible.

04 // PROTOTYPING: BUILDING YOUR IDEA

The Prototype Idea sheet aided participants in thinking through key elements of the one idea they ended up choosing to prototype. The sheet outlines the idea, the user, the key problem, and how the creators could test the idea out. The second prototype sheet is a feedback sheet that gives space for the creators to write down useful feedback, assumptions, and potential changes to their idea.

Please see the Appendix for all worksheets.

LAB 02

**Indigenizing
Youth Work:
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Relationship**



“[There must be] a **change in perspective** about the way in which Aboriginal peoples would be engaged with Canadian society in the quest for reconciliation.. [We cannot] perpetuate the paternalistic concept that only Aboriginal peoples are in need of healing...The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but **both groups require healing...** How can a conversation about reconciliation take place if all involved do not adopt an attitude of **humility and respect?** ... We all have **stories to tell** and in order to grow in tolerance and understanding we must listen to the **stories of others.**”

– REVEREND STAN MCKAY,
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVOR



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Truth and reconciliation are interrelated processes. First truth needs to be shared, received and understood, then we move to reconciliation. There are many truths to be shared, among them: there is an urgent need within the youth sector for non-Indigenous members to understand the role we can play in undertaking the shared work of reconciliation. Presently, the Indigenous population of Canada is very young: 42% are under 24 years old.³ Historical and present actions have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences. Indigenous communities are still working to recover from the 60’s scoop, the legacy of the residential school system, and range of historic injustices.

Not unrelatedly, First Nations youth are 5-7 times more likely than non-first nations youth to take their own lives.⁴ 76% of on-reserve First Nations youth surveyed perceived alcohol and drug abuse to be the main challenge currently facing their community.⁵ Indigenous young people are vastly over-represented in the Child Welfare system and the Criminal Justice system. Note the word “system”, as these are not the result of solely individual mistakes or failings. An ecological systems approach to youth development understands that youth development is embedded in overlapping and reinforcing contexts; it implicates us all in these systemic failings. We will all benefit from participation in truth and reconciliation.

a. Background

THE CONTEXT

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes reconciliation as the ongoing commitment to building and renewing healthy relationships that are based on honesty, mutual respect, and an understanding of identity. In order to improve outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth living on Turtle Island, youth sector stakeholders need to participate in the restorative work of truth and reconciliation. Non-Indigenous members of the youth sector need to ask what our role is in remedying injustices and establishing relationships grounded in the principles of reconciliation.

³ Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011

⁴ Health Canada, 2006

⁵ Ontario Regional Health Survey, 2008/10

THE CHALLENGE

One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action suggests a direction for youth work. The TRC calls for federal and sustainable funding to support “community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices.” Given this call, we ask, how might we take up truth and reconciliation in youth work?

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How might the work of truth and reconciliation unsettle dominant youth sector structures and practices?

How might we learn from and integrate Indigenous experience, history, theory and worldviews into youth work practice?

How might youth sector stakeholders contribute to the development of community-driven and -delivered, holistic prevention-based youth services?

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?

How might we reimagine a youth sector that actively learns from and integrates Indigenous experience and knowledge to better meet the needs of all youth?

b. Exploring the Issue

Mapping the Challenge for Interventions

Each group had noticed or experienced a lack of Indigenous youth voice in program development, policy and decision-making. They also shared experiences within mainstream processes and services, such as the education system, that embody colonial logics, assumptions, and structures, and need to be changed in order to move toward truth and reconciliation. In terms of truth and reconciliation within the youth sector, both groups agreed that Indigenous youth must be at the centre. Their “truths”, voices, and perspectives must be heard, valued, and responded to.

Both groups imagined opportunities, platforms, and initiatives that will amplify the perspectives and knowledge of Indigenous youth as leaders in creating a youth sector that embodies the values of truth and reconciliation. Education was at the heart of both of the groups’ ideas and the youth were positioned as teachers and knowledge keepers. Moreover, the groups saw knowledge from lived experience as critical. In order to work toward truth and reconciliation in the youth sector, settlers (non-Indigenous Canadians) need to learn from Indigenous youth experiences, perspectives, worldviews, histories, and narratives. Structures and resources should be put in place to support the creation or expansion of opportunities for learning from Indigenous youth across the youth sector.

c. Ideation

ISSUES

Colonization and assimilation

- Education system
- Lack of knowledge due to colonization

Indigenous youth exclusion from program development, policy, and decision-making

- Lack of aboriginal youth voices and perspectives
- Lack of accountability
- Lack of long term commitments

Sovereignty challenge = regional government and different levels of power

- Can't "Apply All"
- Numbers game
- Rush to "culture"
- Lack of youth voices

Physical barriers - lack of transit from reservation to services

- Western paradigm is pervasive
- Top-down strategies
- Reductionist frameworks

IDEAS

Youth as co-creators, partners in reconciliation

Create education resources to support reconciliation

Peer mentorship - Indigenous youth and non-Indigenous youth allies

Teach Indigenous culture within government and schools, and to teachers and youth workers

Gather Indigenous youth voices to help guide the future of youth services that includes elements of truth and reconciliation using a participatory approach

Integrate Indigenous worldviews into the education system and youth work practice

Incorporate mandatory truth and reconciliation history and outcomes in the social services and humanities studies

d. Prototyping & Pitches



PITCH ONE

INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK

How might we learn from and integrate Indigenous experience, history, theory and worldviews into youth work practice?

THE PROBLEM

Often youth work functions within a reductionist framework and one-size-fits all, generic models are foisted onto Indigenous and other communities. This approach is without connection to places and people. Top-down, “apply all”, approaches work in opposition to traditionally relational Indigenous worldviews. This group, therefore, considered how to ‘begin in a different way’ that is careful to not reproduce the colonial logics that inform many youth programs and practices.

Members of the group noted that models of working in a grounded and respectful ways already do exist, or have existed in the past, but perhaps because they were not adequately supported, we haven’t been able to learn about their full potential. The group considered what existing ideas and models could respond to our question and go further with proper

support. The group prioritized designs, models, and practices that are responsive and accountable to communities, first and foremost. The group identified some guiding principles for youth work and programs that wish to integrate Indigenous experiences, history, theory and worldviews. They are:

- Co-composed, rooted in places, ways, stories, histories
- Relational, ethical
- Contextualized; knowledge is situated in particular places and experiences

The group looked for an approach that will create processes and spaces that “animate life” by telling “small stories” and “in-between” stories rather than subscribing to overarching and metanarratives about who youth are and what they need.

One of the challenges that this group had with the processes and templates of the Idea Lab concerned the assumption that a disparate group of people, each

from different places and experiences, any many without direct Indigenous experience, could create a generalized and dis-placed solution. Moreover, the nature of this challenge inherently relied on a non-colonial approach and yet the group felt that the Idea Lab structure often worked against a relational, grounded, and experiential process. For example, the Idea Lab structure demanded focus on a particular area and the production of “outcomes” before moving on to the next activity. The activities started from “idea” and not from experience. The group identified the processes themselves as enacting a displaced and disembodied orientation to solution-forming.

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE SCENARIO

The group discussed a particular scenario where an organization seeks to offer services and supports to Indigenous 2-Spirited Youth but is having a hard time engaging them. Not only is the service off-reservation and public transportation is infrequent and unreliable, but a key program facilitator who had relationships with many of the youth had left because funding ended. At the same time, the organization is facing demands similar to many in the sector: its funding is tied to “numbers” and evidence of impact. In order to engage youth, the organization invests in reaching out to important knowledge keepers including: youth, elders, friends, teachers, allies, family, social workers, and teachers as well as institutions like friendship centres and schools for insights on how to design a program that Indigenous 2-spirited youth will benefit from. The organization committed to moving slowly despite the significant pressures, and invested in building relationships. The organization moved from seeing youth as service recipients to seeing them as important co-creators of the program.

THE PITCH

This group asked, ‘how might we design youth programs in a different way?’ They concluded that Indigenous youth are essential partners in the journey of truth and reconciliation in Canada. The Indigenous Youth Leadership Network will support youth sector stakeholders to design programs in a different way – with the experiences of Indigenous youth at the centre. In this network, Indigenous

youth are knowledge keepers. They work with Elders and a range of other knowledge keepers to offer fee-for-service organizational educational and capacity building related to designing and implementing youth programs that don’t reproduce colonial harms.

Youth will support process-oriented strategies that are grounded in relation to land, language, and history.

The Canadian Roots Exchange – Youth Reconciliation Initiative

www.canadianroots.ca/youth-reconciliation-initiative

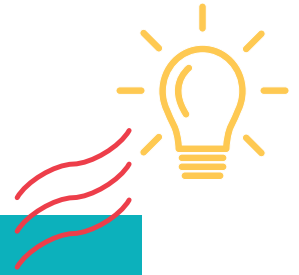
WHERE: Across Canada

WHO: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian youth

WHY: Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE) brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth together with the intent of strengthening inter-generational relations and breaking down divisive stereotypes.

HOW: The Youth Reconciliation Initiative engages youth leaders (ages 18-29) across Canada in building a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth who work together in team who reconciliation/education activities in their respective regions. The CRE is committed to cultivating respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that are based on mutual understanding and appreciation. To contribute to this vision, CRE engages young people in shared learning about Indigenous communities in Canada through respectful dialogue, recreation, and laughter. Youth participate in a retreat where they are oriented to the process of reconciliation and decolonization, gain facilitation skills, and learn about “Indigenous history, culture, and worldviews.” The youth teams then deliver community engagement workshops to youth in their region, and participate in regional/national exchanges and conferences. The program is youth-led.

CASE STUDY



PITCH TWO

YOUTH-INFORMED WEBSITE/APP ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

How might the work of truth and reconciliation unsettle dominant youth sector structures and practices?

THE PROBLEM

The voices and perspectives of Indigenous youth are often missing from program development, policy, and decision-making. Canadian institutions and society lack knowledge about the history and experiences of Indigenous peoples and their communities. Colonial structures silence Indigenous youth and their communities.

Group participants discussed how the incongruity between Indigenous and colonial worldviews creates barriers to reconciliation and they provided several examples based on their lived experience. One participant described how the Government Ministry they worked for didn't want people doing ceremonies. When asked, "how does Indigenous ceremony help Indigenous youth?", this participant described having to come up with justification and

curriculum to demonstrate the rationale behind Indigenous science. Another example of how colonization impacts youth work in Indigenous communities concerns the privileging of writing over speaking: "Elders are forced to do things they've never had to do before like writing down their practices and teachings, which is contrary to Indigenous oral history." Two members of the group were Social Workers and they described how when doing their intakes, they felt conflicted because they want to get to know youth, but the case notes and statistics that are required by management get in the way. They described experiencing more of a focus on statistics and data than on the personal story of each youth. To be a good social/youth worker, you have to be able to adapt to the situation you're in and to gain the trust of youth. They felt that the mandatory interview questions that they are required to fill out aren't always sensitive to the needs of youth and yet they feel a lot of pressure from the Ministry to have meticulously documented case files.

Recognizing that youth voice and perspective is often missing from youth work and highlighting the fact that youth use technology constantly, this group decided to prototype a website/app that would give Indigenous youth a voice.

This website would allow youth workers, teachers, non-Indigenous allies to ask Indigenous-focused questions directly to Indigenous youth. An online space dedicated to increasing knowledge related to Indigenous perspectives and experiences, this site would amplify youth voices and carry on the Indigenous oral storytelling tradition. It will increase awareness about Indigenous culture and ways of being while providing a space for people to ask questions and learn in an engaging format.

The idea is that people can anonymously post questions about Indigenous cultures, practices, experiences, history and youth work and receive answers from Indigenous youth. This allows people to ask questions that perhaps they are too nervous to ask in person or questions that they feel like they should know the answer to. By featuring Indigenous youth voices, it allows them to be seen as experts with valuable knowledge to share. Youth would record their answers in video format (or even just audio), which would allow the continuation of the oral storytelling tradition. There would be a main website to host all of the questions and answers. A website allows for anonymity which in turn allows for questions without judgment. The project would also have social media channels so if people feel comfortable, they could ask their questions on those platforms too.



Mushkegowuk Youth Department

www.mushyouth.com | @MushYouth #MUSHYOUTH

WHERE: Mushkegowuk communities and surrounding areas, including: Kaschechewan First Nation, Fort Albany First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation, Taykwa Tagamou Nation, Attawapiskat First Nation, Missanabie Cree First Nation and Moose Cree First Nation (Ontario, Canada)

WHO: Youth, youth councils, and youth workers in Mushkegowuk and surrounding areas

WHY: The Mushkegowuk Youth Department emerged from the recognition that young people in their communities are experiencing a range of challenges including low self-esteem, lack of opportunities, and historical and intergenerational trauma related to colonization.

HOW: The Mushkegowuk Council Youth Department serves as a platform that supports Mushkegowuk youth to strengthen their Cree identity. They amplify youth voice through the creation of youth councils and other opportunities, build the community capacity of First Nations youth workers and organizations, and increase opportunities for youth by supporting grant-writing and fundraising initiatives. Because many of the communities are remote and disconnected, communication is a key part of the Youth Department's strategy. They produce original content and they engage their community extensively through all social media channels. Their new website is currently in development.

CASE STUDY

“There is no pressure to be ‘innovative’, just to meaningfully address the issues at hand.”

Conclusion

The Design Day was rich in ideas, connections and learning!

This was the first time YouthREX used design-thinking to frame an event of this kind, and we learned so much from the experience and from all the participants. We would like to conclude by highlighting five of the ideas that stood out to us based on feedback forms completed by designers and our team’s experiences of the day:

1. Innovation is not always about the new

At the end of the day, a designer prefaced their group’s pitch by saying “there is no pressure to be innovative, just to meaningfully address the issues at hand”. This comment resonated with the larger group, with many people nodding their head in agreement and thanking them for making that sentiment explicit. Most of the ideas that were pitched also reflected this notion – we don’t need to be inventing completely new programming or ways to support young people for the sake of “the new”. Innovation can include returning to models and strategies that already exist, and then designing ways to intentionally leverage and learn from them in order to fine-tune, and/or expand them where appropriate and as needed.

2. Foster connections and support each other

While the issues/challenges that each Idea Lab came up with were specific to the context of their particular topic, there were common issues and challenges across all eight labs such as a sense of isolation, invisibility, and the pressure to bear the burden of external forces – lack of funding, resources, staff and safe spaces. In response to these issues/challenges, the pitches that labs developed focused on facilitating and enhancing connections and communication between and among youth and youth sector stakeholders. Whether online or face-to-face, it is clear that the need for people to feel connected to one another, to be able to ask questions or find/give support and to be part of community, is vital; many do not feel these kinds of opportunities currently exist (in the context of their youth sector work). Designers further expressed a need to more broadly support youth sector work by creating opportunities and conditions for engaging with each other differently, and in a more meaningful way.

3. Engage the power of technology

The pitches also reflect the desire, and perhaps need, for the youth sector to integrate technology more effectively into our work. When designed and used respectfully, groups who prototyped digital spaces such as the Youth Talk App or the Online Platform for Youth Workers cited the importance of hosting a safe space for conversation, for knowledge sharing, for connecting youth and youth stakeholders to resources and support – all in an accessible and efficient way. Digital tools and platforms have the potential of greatly increasing accessibility to information, resources, and of course, the human connections that are so valued. At the same time, technological adoption cannot replace human face-to-face relationships. One designer suggested that we need to also reflect on the effects “technologicalization” can have on change and development work.

4. Leverage what already exists

Implicit throughout all the pitches is that there is valuable knowledge, resources, services and programming that already exists, but often in silos. As such, the pitches focus on creating ways to draw out this information, create conditions that allow for connection and access to information and resources. Designers recognized value in networking their assets to provide enhanced opportunities for youth. This is not to say that new or increased funding/resources are not needed – in order to create these spaces and opportunities for human connection, resources in terms of people, time, money and different skillsets are required.

5. Adapt tools and processes to your context

Youth sector stakeholders, including youth, strongly value building connections and learning through participatory and engaging activities/processes. This is why YouthREX thought that design-thinking processes/activities might be a good way to bring people together to brainstorm and work on ideas to address “thorny” issues. Reflecting on the feedback we received on how people experienced the day, we learned that although design-thinking processes work well at engaging people to focus on the “user experience” and to think through an issue in a focused way that is collaborative and highly generative, these processes might be too focused on moving forward to solutions. This may not align with the complexity of youth wellbeing/youth sector challenges, equity and intersectionality, or the work that stakeholders want or need to do together before arriving at ideas and solutions.

Design-thinking tools and processes clearly need to be better adapted to our youth sector context. We will need ways to create more space for rich, nuanced discussions to unpack the issues and challenges we experience in our sector. Many of the challenges that youth and the youth sector are facing are deeply rooted in complexity. While there is definitely

a need to collaboratively search for solutions and new approaches to addressing these challenges, there is also the need to take time to understand the situation, learn more about the system and find ways to create the conditions for change – all within an equity-focused frame of understanding.

As such, we will be asking ourselves:

- How we can use design-thinking tools and processes to support our work, but adapt them and integrate them with other processes that could better reflect and engage the youth sector?
- What kinds of opportunities will allow us to engage with complexity and systems thinking/mapping in a way that is accessible and meaningful to youth sector stakeholders?
- How can we use design thinking and its processes to support engagement with complexity?
- How might we integrate tenants of equity and social justice within all of these processes?

Final Words

We would like to end this recap of the Design Day by expressing our deep gratitude and thanks to all the community designers who came out on a cold Saturday and brought their whole selves to participate and engage in sometimes difficult conversations about how we can tackle issues of importance to youth wellbeing. Although this recap doesn't quite do enough to capture the energy, excitement and tensions of the day, we hope it offers some valuable insights to youth sector stakeholders and affirmation of the work and experiences of our community designers.



This Design Day Report was developed by Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX).

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.

Visit the eXchange for everything about youth work and youth wellbeing!

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