



EVIDENCE BRIEF

Six Practice-Based Strategies for Centering Youth in Pandemic Recovery Efforts

This Evidence Brief summarizes Young Ontarians United's report, *Hopeful Resilience: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Young Ontarians* (2021). The report details the disproportionate impacts that the pandemic has had on different groups of Ontario youth, particularly with respect to their education, employment, and health.

HOW DID WE COMPILE THIS EVIDENCE?

Working from a youth-led, solutions-building approach, Young Ontarians United put forth 143 individual, organizational, and government-level recommendations to support young people in recovering from the effects of the pandemic. From these recommendations, six practice-based strategies emerged that can be implemented by youth workers to support a comprehensive pandemic recovery for youth.

01. INVOLVE YOUTH IN ALL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

In order to create systems that consider youth's unique needs and views, organizations must include young people's voices, opinions, and experiences in all pandemic response initiatives. Engage youth in the development, design, planning, and delivery of services. Acknowledge that collective collaboration is necessary for the establishment of systems that are inclusive of all Ontarians, and recognize "it's time that young Ontarians have a seat at the table, too" (p. 89).

02. CREATE MEANINGFULLY INCLUSIVE SPACES

Foster a culture of inclusion and respect for all youth, regardless of their identities, backgrounds, skills, needs, opinions or experiences. Commit to challenging bias, stigma, and discrimination, and create clear guidelines that do not tolerate any form of abuse, harassment, outing or doxxing.

Service providers should:

- Work to decolonize services and increase BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) inclusivity in program planning and implementation.
- Use gender collective terms (e.g. "Hi, everyone!"), add pronouns to introductions and screennames and encourage youth to do so as well if they are comfortable, and ensure young people are aware of program/organizational staff who are LGBT2SQ-friendly.
- Provide culturally-relevant services and make sure there are staff who are multilingual, as youth come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

03. USE A VARIETY OF APPROACHES TO ENGAGE WITH YOUTH

Incorporate the use of mixed methods for the delivery of program and service content. Provide opportunities for in-person **and** online engagement, recognizing that in-person programming is not accessible or preferable for all youth.

If possible (and in accordance with program policies and procedures), record program components, workshops, and resource information so that young people can interact with supports at their own pace and on their own time. Consider being available outside of scheduled programming for 1-on-1 conversations where youth can ask questions and relay concerns that they may not want to raise in front of others. Give young people the option of visiting these 'office hours' in-person, online through a platform such as Zoom, or by phone (if appropriate).

04. BE RESPONSIVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNIQUE NEEDS AND RECOGNIZE THAT ISSUES IMPACTING YOUTH ARE INTERSECTIONAL

Meet youth where they are. Recognize that young people have different intersecting identities, life experiences, and social, educational, economic, health, and cultural needs. Accommodate these diverse identities and needs by creating programs that are flexible and responsive. Consider the intersectionality of issues that youth experience when providing in-person and/or online programs and services.

Promote staff diversity and provide professional development opportunities to ensure program facilitators have the competencies needed to provide meaningful support to youth. Develop an online database of diverse and intersectional practitioners that young people can access if they are looking for additional supports and services beyond the scope of program staff.

05. REMOVE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SERVICES

A comprehensive pandemic recovery requires the removal of barriers preventing young people from accessing systems. This is done “via transparency, improved access to information, raised awareness, greater availability of services, and culturally-grounded, responsive, and equitable offerings” (p. 89).

Organizations can make this possible by:

- Providing youth with access to services in a variety of ways (e.g., in-person, video call, text, phone call);
- Using a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities for online programs;
- Removing or significantly reducing program and service fees;
- Providing childcare options for young parents who are engaged with services;

- Supplying youth with low-cost or free and healthy meals;
- Increasing access to translators;
- Having staff wear masks with transparent openings to support lip-reading; and
- Ensuring young people have internet access by providing them with phones (with data plans), laptops, and internet dongles, when possible.

06. FOCUS ON BUILDING SKILLS

Offer targeted supports that help youth build the knowledge and skills needed to achieve their educational, employment, and life goals. Ensure all young people have equitable access to this training and capacity building. With respect to employment-specific training, design programs in consultation with sector stakeholders so that youth are better prepared to enter the workforce and be competitive candidates.

Skill-building supports that organizations can provide include:

- Programs that teach positive coping strategies and self-advocacy;
- 1-on-1 mentorship programs that link youth with diverse and intersectional mentors (e.g., LGBT2SQ and/or BIPOC mentors, etc.);
- Internship and networking opportunities; and
- Transferable skills seminars (e.g., resume/cover letter writing, interview preparation, digital literacy, financial literacy, conflict resolution, etc.).

LEARN MORE

[YouthREX's Research Summary](#) of Young Ontarians United's report asks six important questions and gets at what the youth sector needs to know in order to best support young people in recovering from the effects of the pandemic.

CITATION

Wang, K., D'Souza, T., Sarker, S., Jain, A., Ling, M., Sahota, R., Zhang, A., Sandhu, S., & Dhaliwal, K. (2021). *Hopeful resilience: The impacts of COVID-19 on young Ontarians*. Young Ontarians United. <https://youthrex.com/report/hopeful-resilience-the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-young-ontarians/>