

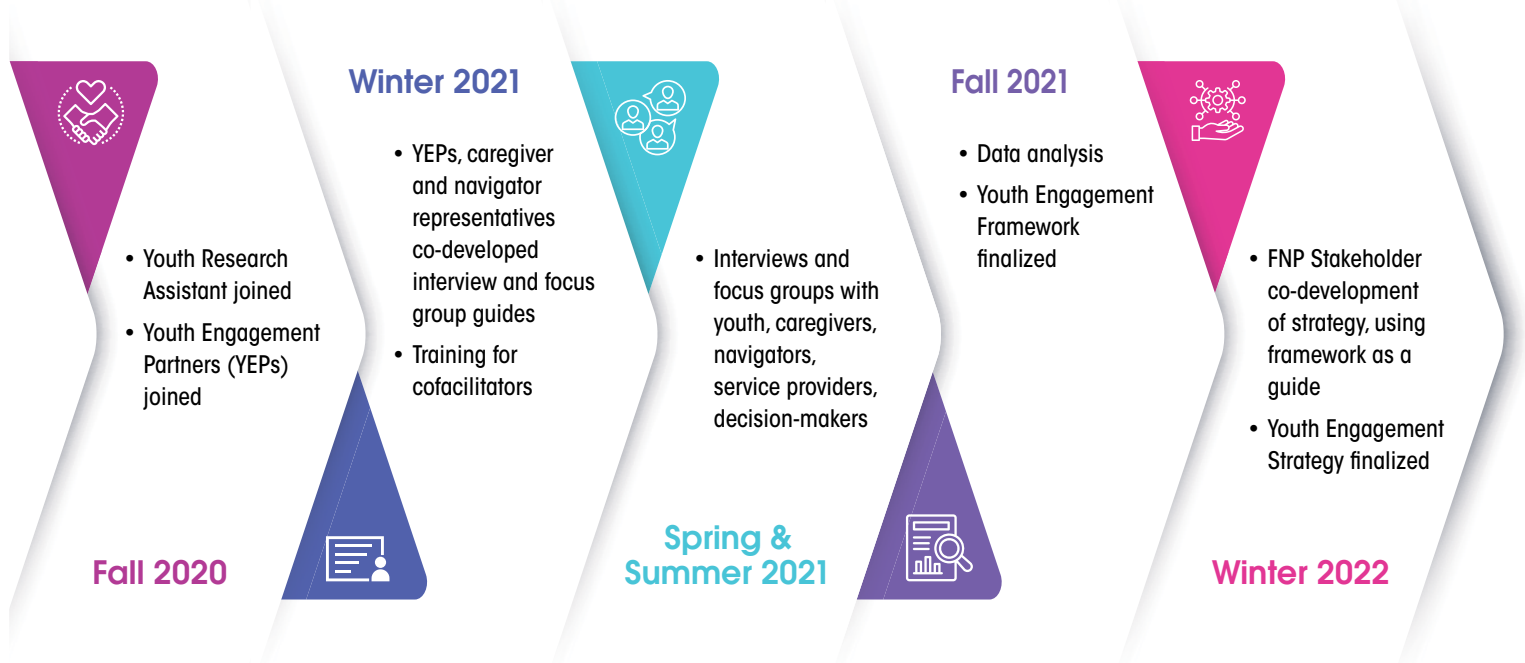
The Family Navigation Project (FNP) is a service for youth ages 13-26 and their families in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to help them find and gain access to timely, accessible, and youth-friendly mental health and/or addictions (MHA) care. FNP's service across the GTA includes Durham, Halton, Peel, Toronto, and York region.

FNP has always been guided by the lived experiences of caregivers navigating the MHA system in support of youth. This guidance has made a significant impact in our model, which offers support to families as a youth's ally through their mental health journey. We are intentionally making a shift to further embrace lived experience by creating opportunities for youth to share what it is like for them to access and move through the MHA system to enhance FNP's support for youth. Youth-lived expertise will enrich our established program and support our strategic priorities to continue to best serve youth and their families across the GTA.

The Youth Engagement Strategy is in line with FNP's and Sunnybrook's larger strategic vision. Read more about [Sunnybrook's Strategic Plan](#) and FNP's Strategic Plan.

Development of Youth Engagement Strategy:

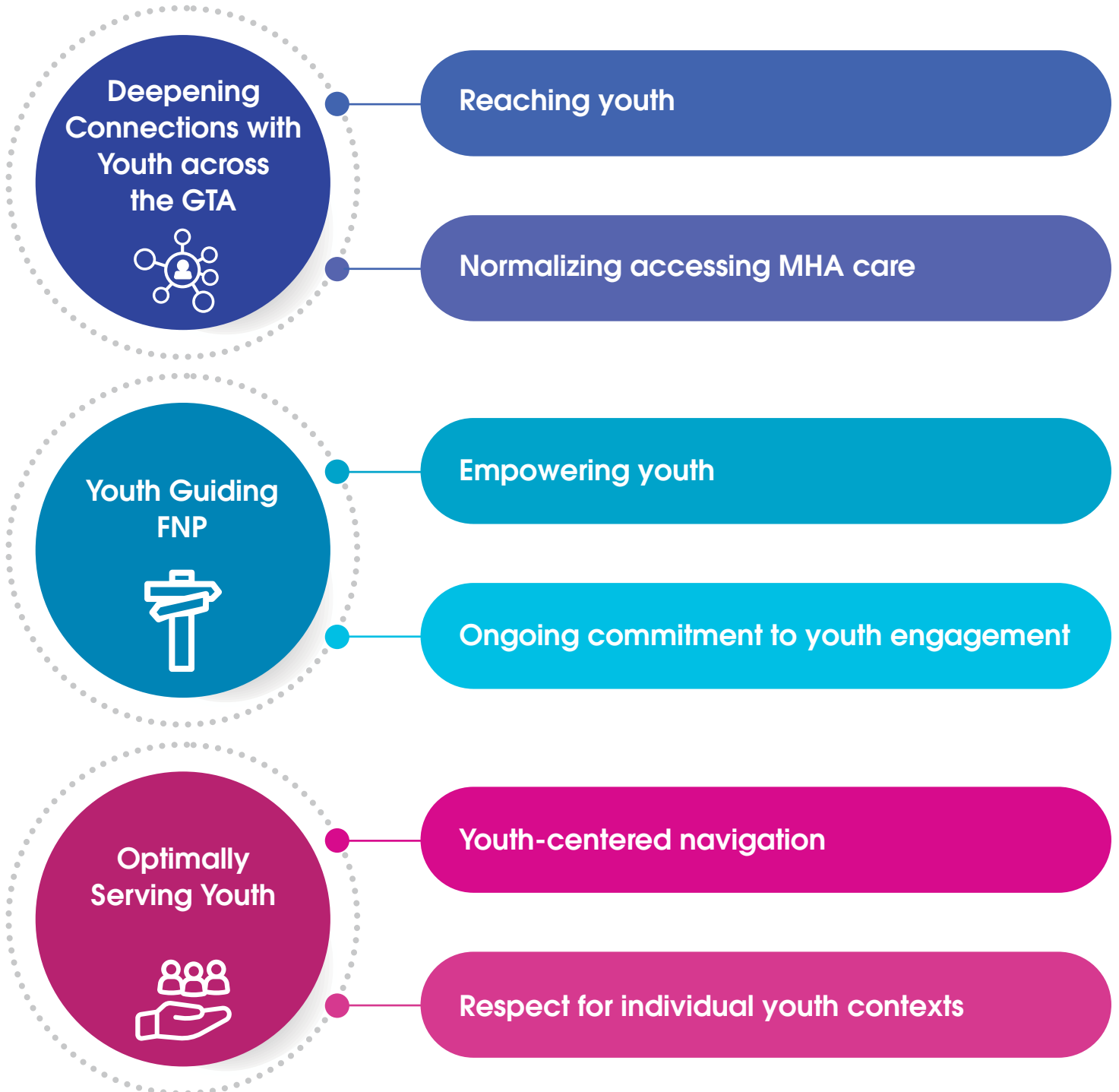
The development of FNP's Youth Engagement Strategy began in 2020, and has been informed by youth, caregivers, navigators, MHA service providers, MHA system decision-makers, and community partners at every step of the way. We embarked on our journey to further embrace youth engagement at FNP through a participatory action research project in partnership with youth. The team, including youth and adult members, conducted interviews and focus groups with youth, caregivers, and service providers, as well as FNP staff. This study resulted in a Youth Engagement Framework consisting of 10 critical themes in youth engagement work, which then guided strategy co-development sessions with stakeholders, including FNP staff, leadership, Family Advisory Council and Youth Engagement Partners. The figure below summarizes the development process for this evidence-informed strategy.



Purpose of the Youth Engagement Strategy:

We at FNP understand that youth need to feel a sense of connection to FNP to be comfortable and engaged in using our service and in influencing our program design, implementation, and evaluation. We strive to make FNP a warm and inviting place for youth to share their experiences, ideas, and expertise in all facets of our program, and to feel supported in effectively navigating the MHA system. To accomplish this, we will focus on structural, organizational, and individual levels to drive our guiding principles of deepening connections with youth across the GTA, ensuring youth are guiding FNP, and optimally serving the youth who reach out to FNP.

Guiding Principles:



Deepening Connections with Youth across the GTA: Integrating the strengths of, and adding to, the wealth of knowledge in the GTA MHA community

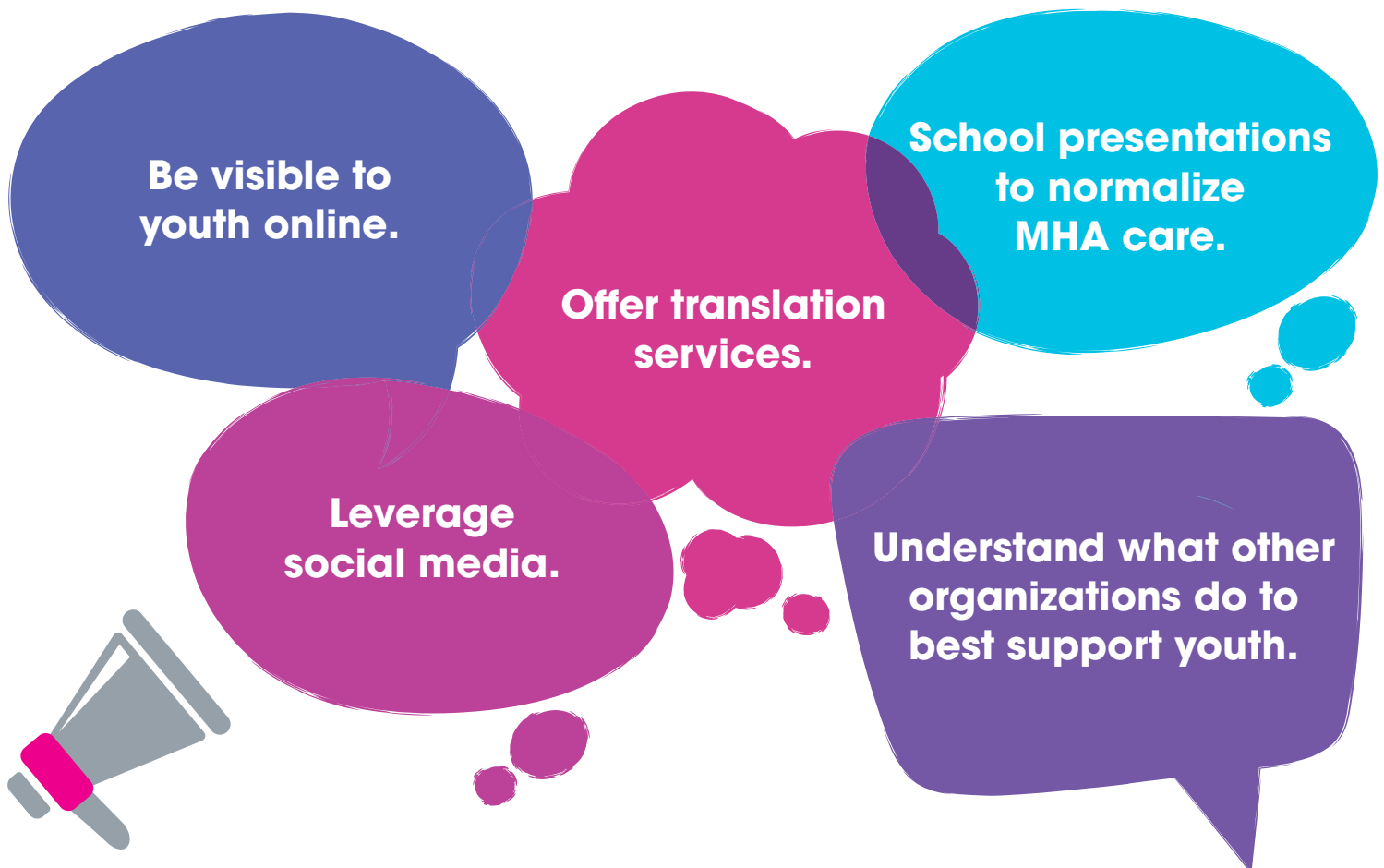
Reaching youth:

- FNP will engage and connect with youth across the GTA in the following ways:
 - » Forming partnerships with schools and community groups that already do outstanding work with youth.
 - » Working towards greater online visibility for youth and ensuring our online communication conveys transparent and clear information about our service.
 - » Embracing a health equity lens to pursue and expand outreach to ensure otherwise under-served communities know about FNP.

Normalizing accessing MHA care:

- FNP recognizes the very real internal and external barriers to accessing care reinforced by factors such as stigma. We will work to address these barriers by:
 - » Supporting MHA awareness in the GTA community through presentations and written information for youth-serving groups or schools.
 - » Advocating for youth-friendly and youth-informed care to stakeholders in the MHA system.
 - » Involving youth in the co-creation of external multimedia presentations to transmit research and practice findings in youth-friendly ways.

What FNP heard from stakeholders:



Youth Guiding FNP: Embracing youth leadership to elevate youth voice within FNP

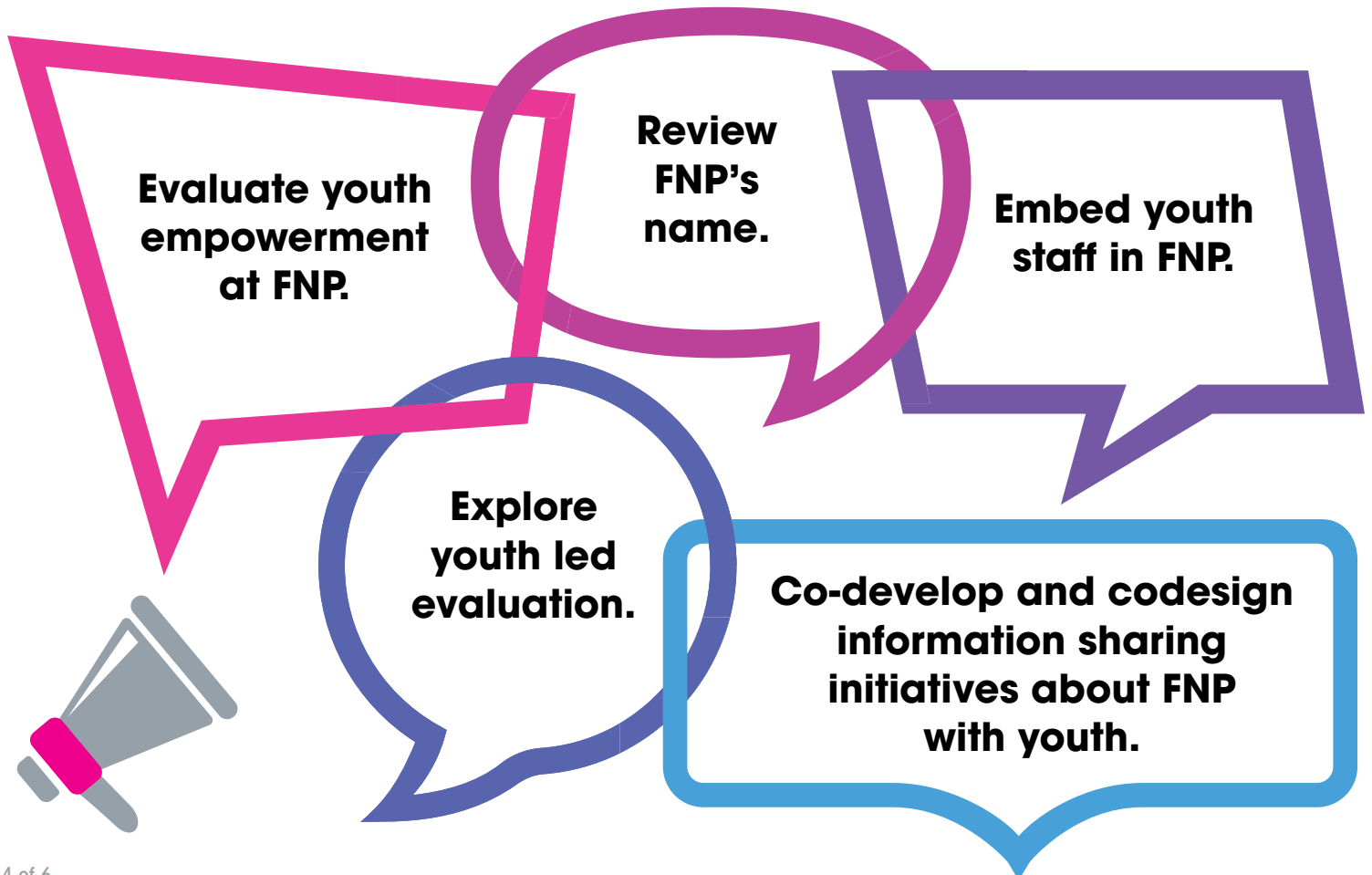
Empowering youth:

- FNP is committed to engaging directly with youth to empower them to guide FNP policies, and practice and influence system transformation. We will achieve this through:
 - » Implementing and investing resources in a Youth Advisory Council at FNP.
 - » Exploring and creating youth staff role(s) at the FNP to embrace the value of peer-to-peer support.
 - » Reviewing FNP policies and practices to ensure youth autonomy is supported in their care trajectories.
 - » Creating opportunities for youth to share ideas and priorities for improving the youth MHA system through research and practice.

Ongoing commitment to youth engagement:

- FNP will demonstrate our ongoing commitment to youth engagement by instituting sustainable practices to continually partner with youth to co-design and co-develop various activities and initiatives including:
 - » Creating spaces to allow youth partners to develop and implement initiatives at FNP.
 - » Evaluating our youth engagement efforts in partnership with youth, to ensure positive outcomes for youth and families and high satisfaction with our program.
 - » Ensuring this strategy remains dynamic and responsive to youths' needs through ongoing evaluation and re-development.
 - » Reporting the outcomes of our efforts to youth-friendly conferences and publications and beyond.

What FNP heard from stakeholders:



Optimally Serving Youth: Creating a comfortable, warm, and open space for youth and families connecting with FNP.

Youth-centered navigation:

- FNP will be youth-centered in all elements of the navigation process, to prioritize that youth are heard and have the tools to connect with the care they need in the MHA system. We will accomplish this through:
 - » Forming authentic relationships and providing youth with the opportunities to connect with FNP throughout the navigation process.
 - » Ensuring youth-friendly language in FNP communications.
 - » Exploring a broad array of virtual and in-person MHA services across the GTA so FNP can best meet the access needs of youth seeking MHA care.
 - » Providing youth-friendly options for connecting with FNP.
 - » Supporting youth to understand their options for care and the larger MHA care landscape.
 - » Supporting connection to, and participation in, high-quality and youth-friendly services and resources.
 - » Ongoing training and skill-building for all FNP staff.

Respect for individual youth contexts:

- FNP will ensure an environment of respect for the diverse situations and systems impacting youth, and their preferences in seeking MHA care. This includes:
 - » Recognizing the role of given and chosen family systems in youths' recovery journeys, and providing support for youths' preferences and needs.
 - » Embracing allies as supports to young people seeking care.
 - » Committing to making FNP a place where youth from diverse backgrounds and experiences can feel a sense of belonging and comfortable bringing their full selves into their experience with FNP.

What FNP heard from stakeholders:



Hear directly from youth about MHA system experiences.

Explore texting as a new communication option.

Youth peer support embedded in FNP.

Explore options for short-term navigation.

Confidentiality has to be a given.

Conclusion:

We at FNP understand that the process of authentically engaging youth in all aspects of our service is critical to improving FNP and influencing positive change in the MHA system. We strongly believe that youth engagement in MHA care can have positive impacts for the youth and for their loved ones who support them in their mental health journeys. We want to thank FNP's Family Advisory Council, the FNP team, and most importantly the youth who helped to provide guidance and feedback in the co-creation of this strategy. It is clear that the process of authentic youth engagement requires a significant investment, and we are excited and committed to continue this process. We plan to refine and improve our strategy with youth and other stakeholders' input to ensure we are staying ahead of the everchanging MHA system landscape. As we embrace these shifts in our process, we remain as committed as ever to ensuring that no youth or family feels lost in the MHA system.