Improving Youth Service Navigation

A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

TAMARACK INSTITUTE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TAMARACK INSTITUTE   **Canada**

Communities Building Youth Futures

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In communities across Canada, service navigation or system navigation has been identified as a barrier for youth success. Improving system navigation has the potential to address multiple interrelated gaps in social service systems and increase youth wellbeing, civic engagement, and academic and employment success.

This project came about through the acknowledgement that not all service navigation tools are effective and suited to a specific community or problem. Every community is unique, which means different strategies are needed in different contexts. One community may benefit from a service navigation strategy that would fail youth in another community.

The purpose of this guide is to increase understanding of service navigation by examining the specific barriers that exist and connecting them with strategies that communities can use to successfully address these barriers.

The strategies included in this guide were identified from a combination of desk research and interviews with communities.

This guide encourages cross-community learning by sharing knowledge and lessons learned through lived experience. This guide can serve as a tool for youth organizations, municipalities, governments, and communities looking to support youth by enhancing service navigation.

WHAT IS SERVICE NAVIGATION?

Service navigation is the process required to find and access a service. This could mean a young person seeking affordable mental health services, or looking to partake in specific recreational activities, and so much more. For youth who may be looking for support for their health, education, employment, or recreation, the ability to access those supports can make the difference in achieving success or not.

Imagine trying to get to a destination but the path is winding or long. There may be multiple forks in the road or a lot of dead ends. The path may be overgrown and it's unclear if you're even on a path or not. You may be trying to walk the path at night time or during a storm, and the experience of walking that path may be scary.

Service navigation is making the pathway to support clear and easy.

Service Navigation Barriers

There is a barrier in service navigation when the pathway to access supports is not clear and easy. The first step for a community wanting to improve service navigation is to understand from youth what barriers are in the way of a clear pathway.

The barriers facing youth vary from community to community. The amount of services available, the type of existing supports, culture and accessibility, as well as the convenience or centralization of their location are all things that can differ based on where you live.

Learning About the Barriers In Your Own Community

Do your own research together with youth to see what barriers are most pressing in your community. Here are some ideas to engage with youth:

- Host a focus group to invite youth to share their experiences

- Do some journey mapping with youth to learn about the process involved in seeking support

- Create a survey to ask about the perceptions and experiences of seeking support

- Gather information on intake forms about what enabled youth to access the services

- Reference the Accessibility Grid on the following page and ask youth to circle the experiences (middle row) they have had in seeking support.

Example questions:
- If you were wanting _____ support, where would you go?

- If you felt stuck, who would you reach out to?

- What are your perceptions of [specific organization]?

- What were the things that made it easier for you to get the support you need? Eg. a person, a website, etc.)

- What almost derailed your efforts? What kept you going?

Be sure to engage meaningfully with youth and show the value of their time (eg. with an honorarium). See the Guide: Meaningfully Engaging Youth. Once you've heard the lived experiences of youth, use the accessibility factors to better position the information into strategic planning.

Accessibility Grid

The following are common barriers youth face in service navigation mapped against accessibility factors[1]. This Accessibility Grid allows you to determine the specific barriers that are preventing effective service navigation (top row) through youth testimonial, organizational knowledge, and lived experience (middle row). Use the strategic questions (bottom row) to focus your service navigation improvements.

[1] The Accessibility Factors are adapted from Levesque et al conceptual framework for healthcare access

Accessibility Factors	Approach-ability	Acceptability	Availability and Accom-modation	Affordability	Appropriate-ness
	Services exist that people know about and that they can go to and receive	Services are socially and culturally accessible to people who need it	Services are available at a time and place that will be beneficial to people.	The direct and indirect costs related to accessing services are reasonable.	The experience of services offered meet the needs of individuals
Lived Experience	"I don't know where I can get help" "I need a referral to access support but don't want to make those calls" "I don't know what steps I need to take to access the support" "Every resource is organized differently so it is hard to find the right information"	"I'm worried my family won't approve" "I don't want to be seen accessing the service" "I think those supports are for youth who need it more" "It's not in my language"	"I want to get help but I can't get to the location easily" "There's a 2-year wait list" "It's only available from 9-5" "I'd love to get support proactively but it seems I can only get in if I'm in crisis" "The booking system is giving me errors"	"Does that cost money?" "I'd have to pay for transport to get there"	"I don't like having to re-tell my story over and over" "Individual appointments are available but I'd be more comfortable with a group"
Strategic Questions	How might we increase awareness of services? How might we increase health literacy? How might we build trust between service providers and youth?	How might we reduce stigma? How might we provide services in more languages?	How might we help people to physically reach and use services? How might we centralize youth supports?	How might we ensure that cost isn't a barrier?	How can our service offerings be more responsive to youth preferences?

Youth Service Navigation Strategies

After gaining an understanding of key barriers through engaging youth, communities will have clarity of where they should focus their strategies. For example: If services are available but we have a problem with approachability, our goal might be to build more awareness of the services that are available.

Below are common goals that communities have defined based on the barriers youth were facing, along with potential strategies that can be used to respond to needs.

Goal	Build Awareness of Services	Provide Support to Youth who are Looking for Help	Improve Availability and Accommodation	Integrate Youth Services
Potential Strategies	List of services Directory of services Awareness campaign	Service navigators Peer connectors Reducing stigma	Co-location of services Online hubs Reduce waitlists and simplify referral processes	Aligned intake among service providers Integrated Youth Hubs

Because the barriers to service navigation are unique to a community, the strategies to improve service navigation for youth will also vary depending on the circumstances. There isn't one solution for improving service navigation. Communities may benefit from a specific strategy, more than one, or a mix of several strategies.

The remainder of this guide provides a summary of these key strategies along with examples and advice from communities who have done this work.

GOAL: TO BUILD AWARENESS OF YOUTH SERVICES

Lack of awareness of which services exist can delay or prevent individuals from seeking the help they need in a timely and appropriate manner. This can lead to delayed diagnosis, untreated conditions, and poorer health outcomes.

When youth don't know about what services are available for them, steps can be taken to build awareness. The problem might be that youth don't know services exist, or don't know that they are allowed / eligible to access them.

Strategies to build awareness of youth services include

- Compiling a list of services
- Creating an interactive directory of services
- Carrying out an awareness campaign

Compiling a List of Services

Researching and assembling all the available services and resources in one place can improve overall awareness of what's available for youth when they need it.

When to use this strategy

Services exist within a community but they are dispersed across many providers and there is a lack of awareness of these supports and how to access them.

If a community is focusing on a specific focus area (for example mental health), a list may be a more effective option than a directory.

Compiling a list is often a first step needed before providing more comprehensive service navigation strategies like directories, navigators, or even integrating services.

Documenting services is an important input for strategic analysis to better understand where gaps in the service ecosystem might exist (eg. geographically, sectorally, population served, etc.)

Advice for building a list

Make them available in places that are easily accessible for youth.

Update it frequently! The information needs to be up-to-date always.

From the get go, have a plan in place for how and when the list will be updated. Consider how you could automate this using AI or integration with other online directories like 211.

Creating an Interactive Directory of Services

An interactive directory provides a way for people to filter and navigate to find the supports they are looking for. A directory is commonly organized by what services are available (mental health services, employment services, education services, etc.), key issues or use cases, geography, and/or age range. Most interactive directories are digital and are offered through a website or app. Common interfaces include maps and tools that offer search and filter functions.

Use this strategy when

Services exist within a community but they are dispersed across many providers and there is a lack of awareness of these supports and how to access them.

You want a customized representation of services for your community or a particular population. Categories and tags can range based on what youth are interested in (eg. from mental health services to BIPOC owned-businesses).

Advice for building an interactive directory

Start with a few categories (e.g. employment services and mental health resources), and build on what else is being offered in the community.

Accessibility of language and format is important – Work with youth to ensure text is written in a way youth are likely to understand.

For Example

Consider changing Primary Health Provider to Family Doctor. Work with youth to figure out what format of information, tags and filters make the most sense.

It's common for directories to be built and then fizzle out. So what can be done to ensure success? Be realistic with the scope and tasks required to build the directory. Account for the maintenance needed to keep the directory relevant. Have a plan for the long term resourcing, staffing, and maintenance.

One strategy to ensure long-term availability is to have a few lead partners equally contributing to the outcomes so that there is potentially more sustainability as responsibility is spread out. Also, a succession plan for the directory should be considered right from its creation.

The scope, timeline, and resourcing needed to build an interactive directory can vary:

Taking a more manual approach can range from 3-12 months and estimated to be over $100,000 with ongoing maintenance costs. This approach is more relational and there can be roles for youth in creating and updating a directory. It is important for an experienced data developer to lead the project to reduce costly mistakes.

Digital advancements have enabled more efficiency through automation of data gathering and updating. Using a platform like Navigi (offered by HelpSeeker), an interactive, user-friendly directory with comprehensive service information and advanced search functionalities can be developed in 3-4 days and estimated at $5-10,000. Real-time inventories are also possible with a larger scope and budget.

Have a strategy and staff tasked with socializing the tool. This could include taking it to schools or youth programs to share how it works and how to access it.

Use Google analytics to understand how youth are using the tool and where improvements can be made.

Have a strategy and process for how and when information will be updated.

See it in Action: Future North

Future North is a network for youth based in the district of Sudbury and Manitoulin, Ontario, Their commitment is to work side by side with young people in the community, to understand their experiences, and to work to influence change, so together we can improve available resources and create opportunities in our community.

The Problem: rural location makes service seeking complex

Sudbury's unique geography as a town in Northern Ontario presents challenges for youth seeking various services in their area. Referral processes and geographic service disparities were key barriers in the service navigation access pathway. To address these challenges, Sudbury decided to focus on creating a one-stop resource to reduce the barriers for youth finding and accessing service navigation tools.

The Solution: an easy-to-use online directory

In response to the local challenges, Future North synthesized local services, resources, and tools for youth into an online directory. The interactive community map has 15 categories which can be further filtered by fees, hours, and service

Image provided by Future North

platform (in-person or virtual). The map is easy to navigate and user-friendly but it also serves the purpose of heat mapping the Greater Sudbury community, which covers a large geographic area. Heat mapping identifies areas with gaps in service offerings to better serve all youth in the community.

An online directory has been attempted by various local organizations before Future North turned a spreadsheet resource guide from another organization into a usable resource. Learning from past mistakes, Future North curated specific service categories and both English and French options to support the service navigation process from a youth perspective. Placement students, youth interns, and a youth expert panel were directly involved in the development of the tool, and a dedicated staff member provides continuous maintenance of the map to sort, renew, and edit the services being offered.

*Petryna helped develop Future North's community map, and would be willing to work with other communities to do the same project.

Image provided by Future North

Carrying out an Awareness Campaign

Awareness campaigns bring more exposure to available services and connect youth with them directly. They can be carried out online (eg. social media campaign), through public marketing (eg. billboards, posters) or in-person (eg. service fair, open house, booths at an event).

When to use this strategy

If services are available and lists or directories already exist, awareness campaigns may be needed to bring more

exposure and connect youth directly with services. This can take place in many forms and experimentation might be needed.

Advice for awareness campaigns

The concept of a 'credible messenger' is valuable to think through. Often who is sharing the information is just as important as what information is shared. Youth can also be engaged to act as "trusted messengers" to reach other youth.

GOAL: PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR YOUTH WHO ARE LOOKING TO ACCESS SERVICES

When youth know that services exist and how to access them, the challenge may be in supporting youth to take the step to actually access them.

Strategies to provide support for youth to access services include

- Service navigators
- Peer connectors
- Reducing stigma

Service Navigators

Service navigators provide personal support for youth to access services. Helping youth take the first step can


improve the chances of youth following through on the intake process and/or guiding them through the referral process. Service navigators can also act as advocates for services to build awareness and reduce stigma.

Service navigators need to be stationed in safe, youth-friendly places so they can interact with youth and work through service options collaboratively. Service navigators can also operate online, meeting with youth virtually or through live chat, to connect youth with the services they need.

Advice for service navigator strategies

Service navigators can also be a shared resource across organizations. The benefits of this approach include greater alignment between service providers, reducing duplication of navigation supports, and allowing more opportunity to improve intake and referral processes because they have a bird's eye view on navigation across and within systems.

If there is not funding or the ability to create a service navigator position, consider offering service navigation training for people who hold existing relationships with youth.
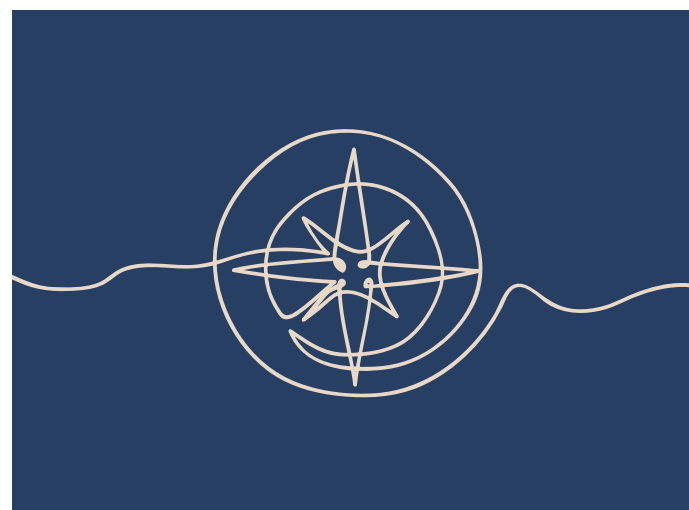
See it in Action: Chilliwack's Every Door Is the Right Door Training

Every Door is the Right Door (EDRD) is an initiative of the Chilliwack Child and Youth Committee to ensure that children, youth and their families are receiving the supports they require in a timely manner. No matter which agency door a client may knock on, they will be directed to the services that best meet their needs. People are not left on their own to navigate the system, instead that "door" will help guide people to the right resource.

In order to achieve this, the helping community has to be well integrated and aware of the various services and what they do. Training is offered through workshops and professional development days.

"EDRD attempts to keep service providers aware that seeking help is often a vulnerable place. When helping is a job, we can forget this and EDRD brings us back to it and our core compassion for others"

Dr. Robert Lees, Psychologist for MCFD and EDRD facilitator

Peer Connectors

Similar to service navigators, peer connectors work directly with youth to help them access services. Peer connectors can be considered more relatable to youth and offer an accessible entry point to service intake. They are often people who have experience in accessing similar services, and/or may be of a similar age. Peer connectors help challenge the discomfort of confiding in a professional or adult to access services.

When to use this strategy

Peer connectors are helpful when services exist but there are barriers in acceptability. Perhaps a youth doesn't know anyone who has experienced something similar. Or maybe the youth doesn't feel comfortable reaching out to their go-to adult for help. Or accessing the support might not be a common practice in one's culture.

Advice for peer connector strategies

Training is important! Training for peer connectors often includes active listening, cultural awareness, safety, consent and boundary-setting, self-disclosure, and strategies for self advocacy, alongside service navigation training. Offer role modelling and practice scenarios to build comfort and confidence.

Get creative with how peer connectors can help. Some peer connector models use a buddy system to support youth to fill intake surveys, and connect with youth between sessions to help schedule appointments or check in on their wellbeing.

Offer different modalities for connecting with youth. Some people prefer text, some prefer video calls, others prefer in person.

It can be hard to explain what a peer connector is. This may impact the uptake in use. Use stories, examples, and simple language to explain how it works in your community. For example, "A peer connector is like a trusted friend who knows the ins-and-outs of the system."

It is important to compensate peer connectors well.

See it in action: Foundry BC Peer Support

Foundry's vision is to transform access to services for young people in British Columbia. In addition to integrated Foundry Centres located in communities throughout the province, Foundry offers peer support for any young person in BC between the ages of 12-24.

From the Foundry BC Peer Support webpage:

What is Peer Support?

Peer support is peers helping peers. It is based on the belief that those who have experienced challenges can provide support, encouragement, hope and mentorship to others facing similar situations, encouraging them to continue their healing.

Peer Support Workers Offer

Non-judgmental support and understanding

Help with navigating the health care system

Help finding services and resources

Foundry peer support works alongside other services to enhance and support care. Every service provider brings expertise to their role

Image Provided by Foundry BC

at a Foundry centre. For Peer Support Workers, this is our ability to connect with peers in a way that reduces the power dynamic found in a lot of health services, where service providers are seen as having all the authority and expertise. The power of peer support lies in connection and the bonds of shared experiences.

Reducing Stigma

Sometimes the challenge in providing support is to make youth comfortable enough to access services, which can be done indirectly by reducing stigma.

Stigma is when someone, or society at large, sees you in a negative way because of your condition, illness, or experience. For example, people with mental illnesses are often portrayed by the media as dangerous, violent, weak, and unpredictable. Stigma can be real or perceived, and in either case, it increases feelings of social exclusion and isolation, and prevents people from accessing services.

Reducing stigma strategies include workshops, awareness campaigns, or are included as part of other service navigation tools (for example, talking to a peer connector about shared experiences and how asking for help is okay).
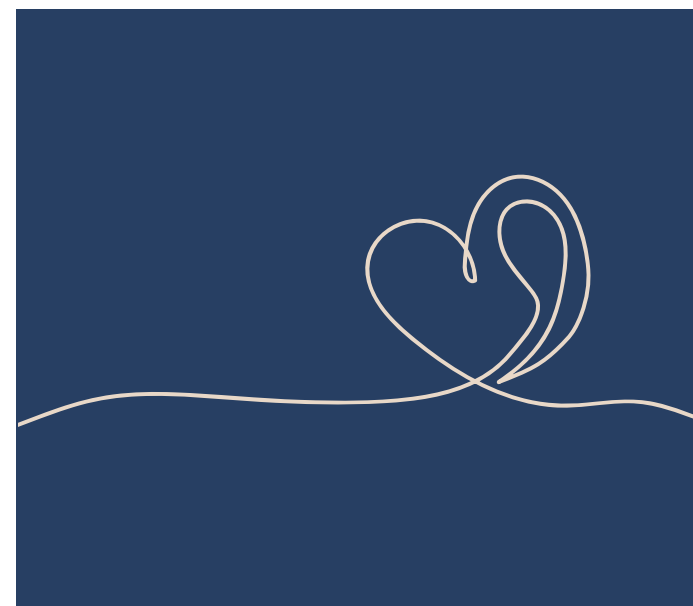
When to use this strategy

Services exist but there are barriers in acceptability and services are not seen as socially and culturally accessible to people who need it. Acceptability rates are often lower regarding mental health, and in culturally-diverse and economically-diverse communities.

Advice for actively trying to reduce stigma

Provide relationship-building opportunities (with service providers or navigators) to support young people to overcome their uncertainty, fears, and previous negative experiences in attempting to access services.

Equip people with trusted relationships (eg. family members, friends, teachers, coaches) with scripts, tools, and confidence to be able to identify potential concerns and support youth to seek help.

Invite people to share their stories with one another about what it was like to access support. Youth can feel less alone and a sense of hope when they hear of others who have experienced and overcome similar things. These stories are most effective when it comes directly from the person with lived experience, but stories may need to be anonymized for privacy or safety.

Offer open houses or behind the scenes footage to show youth what a service or support looks like and what the process would be once they arrive.

GOAL: IMPROVE THE AVAILABILITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF YOUTH SERVICES

When people struggle to physically reach and use the services at the times and places they are offered, improvements can be made to increase the availability and accommodation of supports.

Strategies to improve availability and accommodation of youth services include

- Co-location of services
- Online hubs
- Reducing waiting lists
- Streamlining referral and/or intake process

Co-location of Services

Co-location is when multiple supports (run by different organizations) are available in one physical location. For example, health services could be available at a school, or housing supports available at a drop-in centre. Co-location is most effective when it is centred around the youth experience, building in the supports that youth are looking for at a location that is convenient to them.

When to use this strategy

When transportation is a main physical accessibility barrier, co-location brings multiple services into one location, reducing travel needs.

When the service needs of youth are high enough that centralized supports in one location make the most functional sense for ease of navigation amongst them.

Advice for co-location

Include key information about each organization on the door or in an obvious place. Include details like what supports are available, who can access them, and how to access them.

Watch Out For:

Co-location doesn't ease barriers around multiple intake processes and youth having to tell their story over and over. Hard to navigate processes can become even more glaring when a youth is looking at a door but can't get in. In these cases, consider incorporating streamlined referral, intake, or navigators.

Online Hubs

An online hub offers a go-to virtual space for youth who are looking for information or support. Online hubs can range from simple to comprehensive. A simple online hub might include a service lists or directories, a calendar of programming, and a resource library. A more comprehensive online hub might also include access to navigators and peer connectors, instant messaging and text chat services, and direct service through virtual appointments, clinics, or programming. Online hubs are often staffed by trained youth support workers, service navigators, or peer connectors to respond to youth questions.

An online hub is often created to expand service options so that the "right fit" service delivery model is available for each youth and their preference. Some youth may be more comfortable chatting by instant message compared to talking on the phone or being in person, whereas others may prefer face-to-face or a group setting.

When to use this strategy

Challenges like physical accessibility (such as transportation) and stigma can be addressed by an online hub. Many

youth are already accustomed and comfortable with online formats and may look to an online hub as a first response to service needs.

Advice for online hubs

Online hubs are a great starting point, and can be a great way to offer preventative and proactive supports, but can't always provide direct or crisis support. It's okay to start simple.

One challenge when offering direct virtual support is determining available hours of support and offering 24 hour support is very resource intensive.

For virtual supports, online instant messaging or texting, consider a regional approach by sharing resources across a larger geographic area. This can allow for adequate staffing and provides services to more rural areas which are often underserved. Virtual supports already exist province-wide in British Columbia through Foundry, and Alberta through Kickstand. Consider utilizing these rather than re-creating your own virtual supports.

For online instant messaging or texting, specific training is needed as it requires using certain methods to draw out information online that you might be able to gather differently in person (like reading a person's body language as you speak with them).

Consider the bandwidth and connectivity reliability needed for virtual offerings and ensure service offerings can be accessed by youth on the devices they are likely to be using.

See it in Action: Northern Outlet Online Hub

The Northern Outlet is a safe, in-person and virtual space for youth aged 13 to 18 in the Algoma District to participate in fun activities, check out what is happening locally, and learn about available resources. It was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to offer virtual support when people weren't accessing services in-person. The Hub includes a coordinator, youth or adult facilitator, and counsellor.

Image from the Northern Outlet Online Hub

The Northern Outlet has been shaped by youth and operates as a collaborative, bringing together service providers and grassroots groups. They believe one agency shouldn't do it alone and they rely on each other to weave a supportive environment together with youth.

The collaborative shows commitment to youth leadership – employing youth in key roles and compensating youth contributors, and to action – tracking indicators of success and seeing key issues as urgent and actionable.

Reduce Waitlists and Simplify Referral Processes

One barrier youth face is that referral or intake processes can be burdensome and involve several steps. Long wait lists are a common barrier that youth face when trying to access supports. Some youth don't have a family doctor, or easy access to one, to provide a referral. Often triage systems result in care being provided to people who are in crisis or who have immediate need, and people who have a non-critical need have longer wait times. This can result in preventative care being less available.

Many service providers have worked to improve intake processes and reduce waitlists by making changes to their intake and service delivery models. There are a range of intake models including:

Self referral - can be done in-person, by phone, by text or chat, or online, and an appointment is scheduled

Referral by professional - professional contacts the service provider directly to schedule an appointment

On demand - services are available by walk-in at set locations and times, in mobile pop-up locations, online, or by phone (talk, text, IM). Common processes are first-come-first served or a screening and triage and prioritizes based on urgency of need.

Central intake hub - handles initial intake assessments across multiple service providers. See next Goal for integrated supports.

When to use this strategy

When services are available but youth are sharing that the steps to access the service are too difficult.

If waitlists are named as a barrier or youth are discouraged from accessing services due to waitlists.

Advice for simplifying the referral process

The first step is analysis. The goal is to understand availability of service offerings and staff resourcing against population size and need.

Consider using an analytics platform, like Karto (offered by HelpSeeker), for this analysis. Karto provides invaluable insights into service trends, community needs, and resource allocations, enabling communities to calibrate supply and demand effectively and address emerging needs proactively. HelpSeeker also offers workshops and analysis to support communities who are wanting to better understand their service delivery ecosystem and how it can be streamlined to better support people in need.

Be willing to try creative solutions. This could involve efficient ways to work down a waitlist (i.e. finding them a volunteer to sort waitlists/administrative tasks) or adding drop in services that don't require an appointment.

See it in Action: Youth Wellness Hub Windsor-Essex

In Windsor-Essex, both youth and service providers were struggling with the reality of massive waitlists for support. Through the process of integrating youth supports (see next section), they made a commitment to expand access and have a zero waitlist. They have switched their model so that all services for youth are walk-in, no appointment needed.

They got the word out through service providers, through the schools through existing channels like Edsby (the school learning and communication platform) and in-person booths and pop-ups, and through social media. Since the switch, the utilization of drop in services has been significant.

Image from the Windsor-Essex Youth Wellness Hub Website

GOAL: INTEGRATE YOUTH SERVICES

The most comprehensive way to improve accessibility to youth services is to integrate multiple youth services (beyond co-location) so they can be reached through one place and process.

Strategies to integrate youth services include

- Aligned intake among service providers
- Integrated youth wellness hubs

Aligned Intake Among Service Providers

Multiple services can share an intake process which is regulated by an overarching body responsible for directing youth to the service they need. This solution requires collaboration and legal and privacy agreements between multiple service providers. Service providers need to commit to a common screening process and establish care navigation pathways that lead youth to the appropriate supports.

When to use this strategy

If intake processes are a barrier to accessing services (due to length,

complexity, or content requirements), then aligned intake will reduce the need for youth to repeat the process.

If multiple service providers offer similar support, aligned intake can help distribute demand across providers. It can also help youth find the right service for their needs versus what happens to be available or what they happen to find.

Advice for aligned intake

Consent forms and data agreements can be set up so that if youth want or need to access another service, the same intake form can be shared with the new service provider. Additional information specific to a service might be required, but this reduces the need for youth to share their story multiple times.

To reduce this risk, ensure all service provider partners are committed to the same intake process by carefully considering the foundational information that is needed from a youth for access across all services and providers. Service provider partnership agreements can also include a shared database, where all providers have access and align processes with one platform.

Watch Out For:

There may be organizational constraints in eliminating their customized intake processes. Sometimes aligned intake provides an initial streamlining with referral, and then a user still needs to complete another intake process, which can result in a burdensome user experience due to duplication or extreme length. This happens when individual providers are still maintaining their own databases and/or intake processes in addition to the shared process.

Integrated Youth Wellness Hubs

Integrated youth wellness hubs combine multiple supports—such as mental health, substance use, primary care, vocational, housing and other support services—into a one-stop-shop model of care offered in a youth-friendly space with youth-friendly hours. The integrated model reduces transitions between services and responds to various levels of need.

The model is being scaled across Canada through Foundry (British Columbia), Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario, Huddle (Manitoba), and Kickstand (Alberta). It is based on evidence-informed models already underway in Canada such as ACCESS Open Minds (Pan-Canadian), as well as previous international initiatives in Jigsaw (Ireland) and Headspace (Australia).

Hubs often establish themselves as safe, multi-use spaces for belonging, offering preventative, educational, employment, and recreational supports. When youth can casually access a space, they will be more comfortable turning to this space when they need to access another service or are in crisis.

Youth hub staffing often includes a care coordinator, counsellor or social worker, nurse, peer support worker, and intake clerk. Some staff may work at the hub 100% of the time, and other staff from partnering service providers may work from the hub for set hours/times or to offer set programming.

The process of establishing a wellness hub includes

Building a network of youth-serving organizations (including grassroots and youth-led organizations) with a commitment to orienting around young people. The network needs to articulate a common vision and engage youth in an advisory/leadership function.

Establishing a common screening tool that includes mental health and substance use. The GAIN short screener – SS is often used as a starting point.

Building care navigation pathways – this is the agreed upon process for how youth will be supported based on the results of the common screening tool.

Understanding and addressing gaps – Develop a shared understanding of system gaps and work collaboratively, co-creating solutions with youth, to address them.

Building common measurement - Establishing joint consent, data gathering practices, and using that data for measurement-based care.

When to use this strategy

If your community is ready to offer youth-centric, wrap-around support.

If there are barriers across several areas of accessibility, it can be easier to transform/overhaul the system through integrated care versus incremental and dispersed system improvements.

Readiness for deep collaboration is a prerequisite for the creation of a youth wellness hub.

Advice from Communities Who Have Set up Youth Wellness Hubs:

- Focus on your unique community and don't recreate the wheel - take an asset-based community development approach and use every community asset and resource you have.

- Set up collaborative governance systems so that youth are at the centre. Many communities hire the youth advisors first, recruit a youth action committee to help determine name, location and program design, and set up tables including a steering committee, family advisory, and service providers table.

- Always ask, "Who are we not hearing from?" Don't recreate biases in the system.

- Providers have a tendency to hold onto data. Set up agreements early for how numbers will be counted.

- The coordinator role is key and it's also the hardest position to secure funding for. Build relationships with funders and use in-kind resources for service provision.

- Peer mentors are a game changer - compensate and train them well.

- The timing of services and programming is so important. It must be what youth want.

- Use proof of concepts to make the case for sustainable funding and shifting the way systems are set up and decisions get made.

- Establish a common brand that is recognizable and liked by youth. Youth need to know where they can go to get youth-centred care.

- Include food! Eating together and serving one another builds community and trust.

- If you don't have a physical space yet, don't worry. Begin the process of engagement, network building, and showing up. Some communities have begun with online support and others have used a trailer that moves about the community, while waiting for the right space.

See it in Action: Timmins Youth Wellness Hub

In Timmins, Ontario, key issues facing youth included lack of services and lack of access to those services. Despite not having dedicated spaces, community centres, or any additional budget, community partners had good relationships with each other and were committed to improving support for youth.

This effort was Asset-Based Community Development in practice: In July 2018, 25 local agencies and organizations began working together alongside youth to respond to the needs. Their work started with youth engagement to get insight on a pop-up model of service. Partners named their assets, strengths, and resources, and these were aligned and leveraged to co-create a rotational youth hub.

The Timmins Youth Hub launched in September with two pop-up hubs each week. At first, the pop-up location rotated across schools and community agencies, and then after an out-of-action EMS trailer was donated, the hub became mobile and began popping up everywhere!

In June 2021, the Timmins Youth Hub team was accepted as a new Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) site, which would enable them to expand, reach more youth, and further integrate services.

In October 2022, the Timmins Youth Wellness Hub found a permanent home in downtown Timmins as "Hub Headquarters". Their programs and services now include community and social support services (education, employment and training, housing, family support, income services,

Image Provided by Timmins Youth Wellness Hub

and outreach), Youth Wellness Team Services (including mental health, substance use, primary care, sexual health, care coordination, and peer support), and skills and wellbeing activities (including workshops, health-based leisure activities, Indigenous and cultural programming, and drop-in time).

Their rotational pop-up model is still continuing and is a key part of their brand, allowing the hub to reach out to youth in different parts of the community.

Image Provided by
Timmins Youth Wellness Hub

TYWH's ongoing governance model includes a:

Board of Directors of the Timmins YWHO - The Timmins Youth Wellness Hub is an incorporated non-profit.

Youth Advisory Committee - to provide an outlet for youth to formally contribute to the development of programs and services offered by the TYWH and to act as a bridge between youth and the TYWH to bring forward diverse perspectives

Community Partner Table - to provide a forum to discuss, plan and identify needs and gaps in services for youth who present at the TYWH. It also promotes and reinforces seamless pathways to increase access to services that are culturally respectful.

Learn more: https://ywhtimmins.ca/

Improving service navigation for youth, and together with youth, is possible and can significantly improve youth outcomes.

It takes centering youth voices.
It takes a collaborative and innovative mindset.
It takes creative thinking about the assets in your community.
We need to share resources.
We need to be persistent in our response.

This knowledge, advice, and these examples are being shared for the benefit of youth organizations, municipalities, governments, and communities looking to support youth by enhancing service navigation.

TAMARACK
I N S T I T U T E
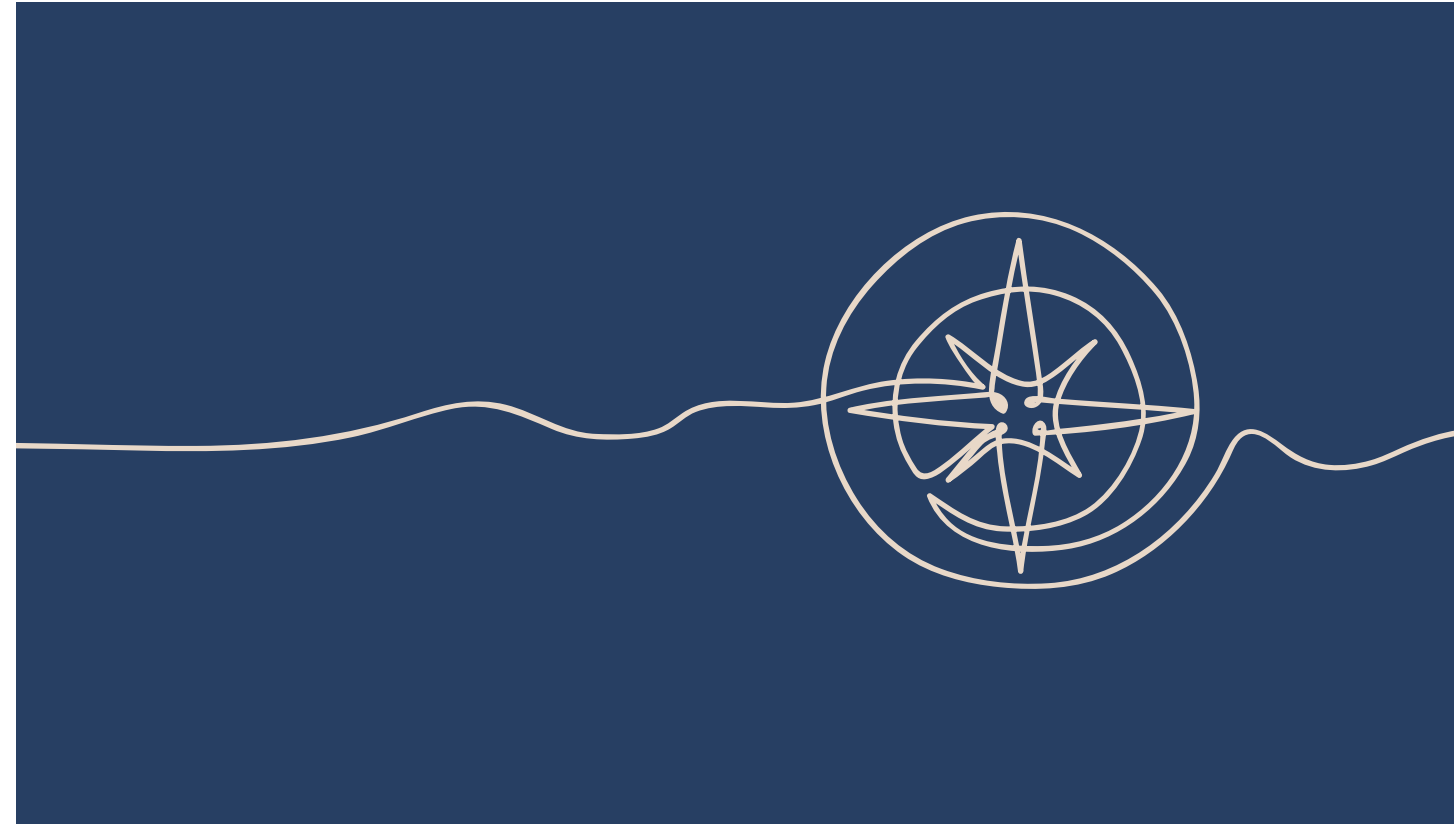
Community is a Verb.

Empowering Action, Inspiring Change.

The Tamarack Institute empowers communities and individuals to break free from poverty, adopt sustainable climate transitions, invest in youth, and inspire belonging and purpose through coaching and collaborative partnerships and guiding resources.

Tamarack's Communities Building Youth Futures (CBYF) team supports and invests in youth-led action and strategic investments, shaping a future where the potential of every young person is realized.

Tamarack is located in Turtle Island (North America), the ancestral home of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. We acknowledge historical oppression and commit to addressing ongoing inequities in this territory.

CONTACT@TAMARACKCOMUNITY.CA
TAMARACKCOMMUNITY.CA