

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF GRASSROOTS YOUTH PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE YOUTH WELLBEING

AN EVALUATION OF THE *CENTRE FOR
ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE* (CORE)
A PROGRAM BY *FOR YOUTH INITIATIVE* (FYI)

FALL 2017

AUTHORS

Uzo Anucha, MSW, PhD

Associate Professor – School of Social Work, York University

Provincial Academic Director - Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange

Sinthu Srikanthan, BA, BSW, MSW

Research Associate – Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, York University

CITATION:

Anucha, U. & Srikanthan, S. (2017). *An Evaluation of the Centre for Organizational Resilience – a Program of For Youth Initiative*. Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, York University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 6

Section One: Introduction and Background 8

- a) Program Overview
- b) Capacity-Building in the Grassroots Youth Sector
- c) Program Description
- d) Purpose of Evaluation
- e) Organization of Report

Section Two: Evaluation Methodology 15

- a) Evaluation Strategy
- b) Methodology

Section Three: Process – CORE Program Experience 20

- a) Characteristics of Youth Initiatives and Organizations that Participated in CORE
- b) Overview of CORE Services

Section Four: Outcome – CORE Program Outcomes 50

- a) Outcome One: Young Leaders Improve Understanding of Sector Systems and Practices
- b) Outcome Two: Young Leaders Learn New Skills and Enhance Existing Skills
- c) Outcome Three: Youth-led Initiatives and Organizations Improve Infrastructure to Sustain Operations and Support Programs
- d) Outcome Four: Youth-led Initiatives and Organizations are part of Supportive Networks

Section Five: Beyond CORE: Perspectives on Systemic Issues in the Youth Sector 64

- a) Challenges in the Youth Sector
- b) Opportunities in the Youth Sector

Section Six: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations 73

- a) Summary of Findings
- b) Recommendations
- c) Conclusions

Works Cited 80

List of Figures

Figure 1: Summary of CORE Outcomes

List of Tables

Table 1: Evaluation Questions and Outcomes

Table 2: Age of Initiative or Organization

Table 3: Current Role in Initiative or Organization

Table 4: Other Roles Performed by Participants in Initiative or Organization

Table 5: Experience with Youth-Led and/or Youth-Serving Initiatives and/or Organizations

Table 6: KEM Sessions and Attendance

Table 7: Other KEMs Attended by Participants

Table 8: Method of Reaching Participants

Table 9: CORE's Online Toolkits

Table 10: Utility of KEMs in Improving Work in Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations

Table 11: Relevance of KEMs to Current Challenges in the Youth Sector

List of Appendices (*The appendices for this report listed below are available by request from the Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, York University. Email: youthrex@yorku.ca*)

Appendix A –CORE's Program Objective

Appendix B – CORE's Logic Map

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Appendix D – Focus Group Guide

Appendix E – Online Survey

“The workshops address [challenges in the youth sector] by putting youth on a platform where they can thrive in a supportive environment while being provided resources necessary to thrive. Youth are able to connect with other leaders and gain knowledge, gain confidence to continue the work that they do...”

~ Survey Respondent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation report describes the findings of a process and outcome evaluation of the Centre for Organizational Resilience (CORE), a program developed and run by For Youth Initiative (FYI). The Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) based at York University carried out the evaluation between 2015 and 2017. The purpose and primary goal of CORE is to increase grassroots youth-led initiatives' and organizations' capacity and long-term sustainability. The ultimate intended impact of CORE is to enhance young leaders' abilities in providing relevant and effective programming as well as influencing public policy and decision-makers.

A process evaluation was conducted to document, identify, and analyze the key factors that influenced the implementation and operation of CORE. An outcome evaluation was also conducted to understand CORE's success in meeting its intended outcomes. The evaluation methodology was a non-experimental design / multi-method approach that included both quantitative methods (online surveys) and qualitative methods (thematic content analysis of program documents, open-ended questions in surveys, a focus group, and one-on-one interviews). This approach allowed the evaluation team to fully understand and document CORE's processes and outcomes

The key findings as they relate to CORE's four program objectives are as follows:

Objective 1:

Young Leaders Improve Understanding of Sector Systems and Practices.

Key Finding #1: CORE supports current and future generation of youth leaders through knowledge integration, development, and transfer.

Objective 2:

Young Leaders Learn New Skills and Enhance Existing Skills.

Key Finding #2: CORE builds a diverse skillset for youth leaders that is responsive to a dynamic sector.

Objective 3:

Youth-led Initiatives and Organizations Improve Infrastructure to Sustain Operations and Support Programs.

Key Finding #3: CORE supports the development of distinct organizational identities in the youth sector.

Key Finding #4: There is a need to consider what organizational capacity-building looks like specifically in the youth sector.

Key Finding #5: Youth sector leaders want critical and social justice frameworks for capacity-building in the grassroots youth sector.

Objective 4:

Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations are Part of Supportive Networks.

Key Finding #6: CORE promotes community building within the youth sector.

Recommendations

The following five recommendations are based on the findings of the evaluation:

1. CORE should continue to develop critical, social justice-oriented, and pluralistic models and resources for capacity-building in the grassroots youth sector.
2. CORE should continue to support the bidirectional flow of knowledge.
3. CORE should continue to facilitate networking and community-building opportunities within the youth sector and beyond.
4. CORE should prioritize a smaller cohort of participants for customized capacity-building supports
5. CORE should improve program efficacy by avoiding dual Relationships with participants, especially as it concerns funding.

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Program Overview

For Youth Initiative (FYI) is a non-profit organization that provides programs and services to youth living in low-income neighborhoods in Toronto. FYI's goal is to end youth poverty by empowering youth with the tools they need to get ahead. FYI believes that all young people deserve the opportunity to create successful futures. The organization also works with grassroots, mainstream, corporate, government, and community partners to engage youth. As a multi-service agency, FYI provides youth with settlement services, one-on-one case management support as well as violence prevention and leadership programs.

In 2008, FYI began serving as an organizational mentor (OM) as well as trustee to youth-led initiatives and organizations, supporting them to manage projects and navigate the non-profit sector. This project formally grew into the Agency Mentorship Program (AMP), which was launched in 2011. In recognition of the gaps in the capacity-building supports offered to young leaders and youth-led initiatives and organizations, AMP was designed to develop the organizational effectiveness of these kinds of initiatives in Toronto's Weston-Mount Dennis community.

Through receiving, responding to, and incorporating extensive participant feedback, AMP evolved into the Centre for Organizational Resilience (CORE). Launched in December of 2014, CORE is an evidence-based capacity-building program that aims to build the skills and capacity of emerging and established grassroots youth-led and youth focused organizations ("youth-led initiatives and/or organizations") in the GTA.¹

CORE's strengths are rooted in complementary and responsive services, which support youth-led initiatives' and organizations' development by recognizing that each organization has assets that can be of benefit to their peers. By providing wraparound capacity-building support through skills building, network development, one-on-one mentorship, and administrative support partnerships, CORE aims to support youth-led initiatives and organizations as well as young leaders to make positive impacts and lasting change in their communities, so that they can have a stronger voice in the broader civic arena and become life-long leaders in the non-profit sector.

¹ For Youth Initiative [FYI], 2016a

In November 2014, the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) provided CORE with funding to support and build the capacity of 14 grassroots, youth-led initiatives and organizations under the 2015/2016 OTF Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF), a program that provides grants to youth-led and youth-serving grassroots groups to allow youth to put their ideas on youth wellbeing into action. YOF provides opportunities for participating youth to acquire skills, learn from mentors, and build networks.² The 14 YOF grantees worked with CORE from May 2015 to September 2016. In working with these organizations, CORE built upon the goals of AMP to increase access to relevant and effective programming for youth by building the capacity of youth-led and youth-focused initiatives and organizations. In doing so, CORE's intention is to provide impactful programs in the community and influence public policy and decision-makers.³

Capacity-Building

To deepen the evidence-base that informs CORE's model, an extensive review of literature was conducted on the best and promising evidence-based practices for capacity building in the grassroots youth-led sector.⁴ Overall, the review of literature found that the grassroots youth-led sector requires leaders who are able to effectively navigate the institutional terrain that is the nonprofit sector in order to improve organizational effectiveness and the outcomes of the work of youth-led initiatives and organizations on the ground. Further, capacity building is not about creating unnecessary work or challenges for an initiative or organization, nor is it intended to create more policies and bureaucracy.

At its core, capacity building is “about systematically building organizations that have the clout to make a sustainable difference to pressing, social, economic and environmental problems.”⁵

Capacity-building efforts can be generally categorized as enhancing internal or external processes and outcomes. The review of the literature indicates that the best practices for capacity building programs include: assessing the readiness of a given initiative or organization; providing flexible and adaptive supports; developing realistic timelines; and making use of a network or peer-based approach.

² Ontario Trillium Foundation [OTF], 2015.

³ See Appendix A for CORE's program goals and objectives

⁴ Alston-O'Connor & Houwer, 2016

⁵ Kapucu, 2007, p. 12

However, there is very little literature that specifically pertains to capacity-building for youth-led initiatives and organizations.

The grassroots youth-led sector is increasingly being recognized for its importance for youth and funders are starting to invest in work that does not rely on adults to solve youth challenges, where young people take the lead. The review of literature⁶ reaffirms the importance of capacity building for those who want to improve the ability of non-profits to fulfill this goal.

Program Description

CORE aims to address a gap in the supports available to GTA's youth-led initiatives and organizations, including both incorporated and unincorporated groups; groups that may lack capacity-building supports to build their organizational infrastructure and managerial skills. As highlighted in the literature review, funders are investing in work of young people in their communities, such investments are tied to the ability of these groups to demonstrate that their work achieves specific outcomes for youth.⁷ CORE's ultimate goal is that youth leaders in grassroots initiatives and organizations will have an enhanced capacity to provide impactful programs and influence public policy affecting young people and their communities. As such, CORE's capacity-building framework prioritizes youth-led grassroots groups in building organizational capacity and increasing their sustainability.

CORE's outcomes are as follows:

1. Improving young leaders' understand
2. ding of sector systems and practices;
3. Increasing young leaders' skills;
4. Improving youth-led initiatives' and organizations' infrastructure; and
5. Increasing youth-led initiatives' and organizations' connections to supportive networks.

⁶ Alston-O'Connor & Houwer, 2016

⁷ Hoskins & Meilleur, 2012; Unisky & Carrier, 2010

The purpose and primary goal of CORE is to increase access to relevant and effective programming for youth by building the capacity of youth-led/youth-focused initiatives to provide impactful programs in the community and influence public policy and decision-makers.

FIGURE 1: SUMMARY OF CORE OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 1:	OUTCOME 2:	OUTCOME 3:	OUTCOME 4:
Young leaders improve understanding of sector systems and practices. For example, young leaders understand how to seek out and apply for a grant; understand the difference between unincorporated, incorporated, and charity; understand the difference between government and foundation funding, private donations, and corporate sponsorship.	Young leaders learn new/enhance existing skills, including managerial, leadership, and soft skills. For example, leaders of recipient organizations will improve staff and time management, policy and process development, internal and external communication, governance, strategic planning through supportive coaching, mentor shadowing and direct practical training.	Youth-led organizations improve infrastructure to sustain operations and support programs. For example, youth-led organizations create policy and procedure (human resource, finance, governance) to codify who they are and how they function; build systems and processes (budgets and expenditures) to increase operational efficiency so more time can be spent on community services and programs.	Youth-led organizations are part of supportive networks comprised of people and organizations from a variety of sectors (peers) to improve organizational health and service delivery. For example, youth-led organizations can identify ideal collaborators to increase impact in community; set organizational goals and seek out peers in their networks to support them to achieve the goals.

The program inputs include human resources – such as skilled staff (“CORE’s program leads”), volunteers, interns, and cross-sectoral networks, organizational infrastructure, space, community leaders, funding, and lived experiences of grassroots initiatives – as well as findings, knowledge, and lessons learned from the first cohort of AMP.⁸ CORE’s outputs are program activities in which the YOF grantees, AMP 2.0, as well as other unincorporated groups in the community are

⁸ Anucha, Houwer, Nyarko, & Romaldi, 2015

participants. To achieve the intended outcomes, CORE provides the following capacity-building supports as program activities:

1. **Knowledge Exchange Meet-up (KEM):** A series of skill-building workshops in which young leaders learn leadership and management skills, become familiar with best practices, and develop the infrastructure needed to grow as a sustainable youth-led initiatives and organization in non-profit sector
2. **Online Toolkits:** Provide universal access to capacity-building resources for any group, including youth-led initiatives and organizations outside of the GTA
3. **Network Development:** Opportunities for youth-led initiatives and organizations to connect with peers and diverse adult allies in order to reflect, share challenges, and exchange ideas and strategies for success
4. **Skilled-Volunteer Matching:** Connects youth-led initiatives and organizations with skilled-volunteers who can support young leaders' capacity-building goals
5. **One-on-One Mentoring and Coaching:** Monthly meetings and organizational coaching support where participants can discuss roadblocks; facilitate introductions; share resources; ask questions about workshop materials, sector practices, or related systems; seek feedback on emerging ideas; and develop strategies and plans to tackle challenges
6. **Administrative Support Partnership (ASP):**⁹ Helps youth-led initiatives and organizations build skills and knowledge of organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and leadership capacity by equipping young leaders with necessary administrative and financial management skills and knowledge

Purpose of Evaluation

With the additional participation of the 14 YOF grantees, CORE provided support to youth-led initiatives and organizations that represented a wide range of locations within the youth sector, and included diversity in the types of programming offered, practice perspectives utilized, geographic regions and age groups served, and so forth. This increase in diversity brought complexity as to how CORE, as a capacity-building program, was both implemented and experienced. The participation of diverse groups brought in new opportunities, challenges, successes, and learnings to CORE.

⁹ This report does not evaluate CORE's Administrative Support Partnership activities

To understand how CORE was implemented as well as to assess CORE's ability to achieve its goal and intended outcomes, FYI retained the Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange (YouthREX) at York University to develop and implement an evaluation strategy. This strategy consisted of both a process evaluation – to understand how CORE was implemented – as well as an outcome evaluation – to detail the changes that occurred. This report summarizes the key findings of the evaluation and focuses on the experiences of the youth leaders who utilized CORE's capacity-building supports, with a specific focus on the experiences of the 14 YOF grantees.

Organization of Report

This report is organized into six sections. This first section provides an overview of both FYI and CORE. The second section details the evaluation methodology. The third section provides a profile of both the participants who utilized CORE's capacity-building supports and how CORE was implemented by drawing upon the participants' experiences of the program. The fourth section of the report reviews how CORE is achieving its intended outcomes. The fifth section summarizes the challenges and opportunities within the youth sector that CORE participants spoke passionately about that go beyond the CORE program. Finally, the sixth section concludes the report by summarizing the key findings and provides a series of recommendations to for further developing the CORE model.

SECTION TWO:

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation methodology was a non-experimental design / multi-method approach that included both quantitative methods (online surveys) and qualitative methods (thematic content analysis of program documents, open-ended questions in surveys, a focus group, and one-on-one interviews). This approach allowed the evaluation team to fully understand and document CORE's processes and outcomes – both the intended ones and the surprises. The integration of a multi-method approach allowed the evaluation team to build on the limits of individual modes of inquiry and tell richer and more nuanced stories on what outcomes are achieved, how these outcomes have been achieved, and why. This approach is also the most suitable for identifying areas for program improvement. The use of multi-methods acknowledges the complexity and dynamism of the grassroots youth sector.

Process Evaluation Strategy

A process evaluation was conducted to document, identify, and analyze the key factors that influenced the implementation and operation of CORE. Process evaluations examine the culture, implementation, reach, and resource use of a particular program.¹⁰ This type of evaluation is an exploration of how a project carries out its operations as well as how its community works together toward its objectives. In conducting a process evaluation, the emphasis is on describing key activities and characteristics of the program. CORE's process evaluation allows for a careful description of the actual implementation and the identification of critical elements such as the satisfaction of the participants with capacity-building and mentorship activities. The key process evaluation questions are as follows:

- What is CORE's program model?
- What are the characteristics of the 14 YOF grantee initiatives and organizations as well as the other youth sector groups who participated in CORE?
- What are the characteristics of CORE's activities (i.e. type, frequency, duration)?
- Are the services provided in the intended manner?
- How satisfied are the participants with CORE's program?

The findings of the process evaluation will be used to further refine the implementation of CORE

¹⁰ James Bell Associates [JBA], 2008a

to further strengthen and improve the project. To complete the process evaluation, we reviewed all available documentation from the project, including intake forms, communication logs, and case notes describing the meetings between CORE’s program leads and participating youth-led initiatives and organizations. A review and analysis of these documents allowed for a description of project activities that led towards the achievement of outcomes. This review also provided information on barriers to success, new challenges or crises, and the required supports to overcome these obstacles.

Outcome Evaluation Strategy

An outcome evaluation was also conducted to understand CORE’s success in meeting its intended outcomes. An outcome evaluation assesses the extent to which a program does what it has intended to do. Outcomes are the benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities. Outcomes may relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, conditions, or other attributes. They are what participants know, think, or can do, or what their condition is, that is different following the program.¹¹ The outcomes, along with their corresponding evaluation questions, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation Questions and Outcomes

Evaluation Questions	Outcomes
Do participants understand key sector issues, concepts, and practices? Has CORE increased the mentee organizations’ ability to secure additional funding?	Young leaders improve understanding of sector systems and practices. For example, young leaders understand how to seek out and apply for a grant; understand the difference between unincorporated, incorporated, and charity; understand the difference between government and foundation funding, private donations, and corporate sponsorship.

¹¹ JBA, 2008b

What new skills were learned by these initiatives? How have these new skills been used in providing more effective programs and services for youth?	Young leaders learn new/enhance existing skills, including managerial, leadership, and soft skills. For example, leaders of recipient organizations will improve staff and time management, policy and process development, internal and external communication, governance, strategic planning.
Have the 14 YOF grantee initiatives and organizations created policies and procedures (human resource, finance, governance) to codify who they are and how they function? Have they built systems and processes (budgets and expenditures) to increase operational efficiency so more time can be spent on community services and programs?	Youth-led initiatives and organizations improve infrastructure to sustain operations and support programs. For example, youth-led initiatives and organizations create policies and procedures (human resource, finance, governance) to codify who they are and how they function; build systems and processes (budgets and expenditures) to increase operational efficiency so more time can be spent on community services and programs.
Have the 14 YOF grantee initiatives and organizations built partnerships and expanded their networks to increase impact in community?	Youth-led initiatives and organizations are part of supportive networks comprised of people and organizations from a variety of sectors (peers) to improve organizational health and service delivery. For example, youth-led initiatives and organizations can identify ideal collaborators to increase impact in community, set organizational goals, and seek out peers in their networks to support them to achieve the goal.

The outcome evaluation draws from interviews, a focus group, survey findings, and program documentation to examine whether CORE's four outcomes have been achieved. The outcome evaluation helps us to understand and demonstrate the nature of change that the participating youth-sector initiatives and organizations experienced in working with CORE.

Methodology

Following a multi-method approach, the evaluation used data from CORE's management information system (MIS), an online survey as well as interviews and a focus group to answer the key process and outcome evaluation questions. The methods and data sources are detailed below as a narrative.

1. Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and a focus group were facilitated with CORE's participants in order to understand what was working and what needed to be refined in the program. The evaluation team conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with seven out of the 14 YOF grantees from July 2016 to August 2016. An additional two interviews were also completed with two out of the three members of the second cohort of AMP (AMP 2.0); however, as the members of AMP 2.0 were just beginning their work with CORE, these interviews are not considered a primary source of data for the outcome evaluation. The interviews with AMP 2.0 do, however, contribute insights regarding the profile of CORE's participants, including the experiences of emerging grassroots youth initiatives.

The interviews occurred at a place of the participants' choosing, some in the community and others at York University. The interviews allowed for the evaluation team to contextualize the experiences of these initiatives with CORE's capacity-building supports. The evaluation team also facilitated one focus group in the summer of 2016 at York University. This focus group included YOF grantees, AMP 2.0, and other community youth sector groups who utilized CORE's services. The focus group allowed for the clarification of ideas and concepts that emerged from the interviews as well as for the development of new ideas through the participants' collective dialogue.

Interview and focus group participants each received a \$50 honorarium in appreciation of their time. Interview and focus group guides were used to ground and loosely structure the discussions.¹² With participants' informed consent, both the interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded and were subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts of the interviews and the focus group were then loaded into the qualitative analysis program, Nvivo 11.0, and were coded to uncover emerging themes regarding program implementation, experience, and outcomes. These transcripts also contributed to the development of a profile of CORE's participants.

¹² See Appendix C and D for interview and focus group guides

2. Document Review of Management Information System

The evaluation team was provided access to all documents relating to CORE, including the funding application, terms of reference, logic model as well as program documentation such as intake applications, case notes, and communication logs. These program documents, which make up CORE's Management Information System (MIS), provided information on YOF grantees' organizational changes leading towards the achievement of goals as well as information on barriers to success, new challenges or crises, and supports required to overcome these obstacles. Documents from CORE's MIS were also loaded into Nvivo 11.0 and were coded; these codes were compared to the codes generated from the analysis of interview and focus group transcripts to generate a description of CORE's organizational processes, develop an account of participants' experience of the program, and articulate a description of program outcomes.

3. Workshop Evaluations

As part of delivering capacity-building supports, CORE facilitated several workshops for YOF grantees as well as other community groups in the youth sector. Workshop attendees were invited to complete evaluation forms that provided the evaluation team with both quantitative and qualitative data about the workshop participants as well as attendees' experiences of various aspects of CORE's program. CORE provided these forms as well as their own KEM evaluation reports. Both the evaluation forms as well as CORE's KEM evaluation reports were analyzed to answer the evaluation questions with a special focus on attendees' responses to open-ended questions. Participants' responses to open ended questions were loaded into Nvivo 11.0 and were coded. The codes for workshop evaluation responses were also compared to that of the interview and focus group transcripts to develop an account of how KEMs were implemented as well how participants experienced this program activity.

4. Online Survey

An online survey containing both open-ended and close-ended questions was developed for youth sector stakeholders who attended any of CORE's capacity-building workshops and events.¹³ This survey, which was sent by email to participants, invited participants to report the KEMs that they attended and their satisfaction with the program. The survey responses were also used to develop a profile of the youth sector groups who have participate in CORE. Open-ended data from the survey responses were loaded into Nvivo 11.0 and were coded while quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Statistics.

¹³ See Appendix E for Online Survey

SECTION THREE:

PROCESS FINDINGS – THE CORE EXPERIENCE

This section provides a profile of the participants who utilized CORE’s capacity-building supports and how these participants experienced CORE as a program. Drawing from data from interviews, focus group, workshop evaluations, online surveys as well as documents from CORE’s MIS, this section describes how CORE’s program activities – which include KEMs, online toolkits, network development opportunities, skilled-volunteer matching, and one-on-one mentoring – were implemented and experienced by participants. This section primarily concentrates on the experiences of the 14 YOF grantees that CORE was funded by the OTF to support.

Characteristics of Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations that Participated in CORE

Profile of Interview and Focus Group Participants

The interview and focus group participants represented diverse social identities along the lines of race, gender, age, and sexuality. All but one identified as a youth. Participants were leaders in youth-led initiatives and organizations that provided youth with arts-based and recreational programming, mental health supports, mentorship, and gender-specific programs. Participants also identified that their initiatives and organizations served diverse groups, including youth from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer [LGBTQ], Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant communities. In addition to their involvement with their current youth-led initiative or organization, the majority of participants reported having previous and current work and volunteer experience within the youth sector – this included experience in school-based youth work, violence prevention programming, employment services, youth housing and homelessness services, arts-based and recreational programming, and youth mental health. Some interview and/or focus groups participants also referenced having work and volunteer experience outside of the youth sector, including community development, health promotion, and work within the arts and business sectors.

Profile of Online Survey Respondents

Demographic information provided through the online survey revealed that respondents represented youth-led initiatives and organizations with a range in longevity, from being less than a year old to have been running for over ten years. The majority of respondents (39.5 %) indicated that their initiative or organization was between 1 and 3 years old (Table 2).

Table 2: Age of Initiative or Organization

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Less than a year old		18.4%	7
1-3 years old		39.5%	15
3-5 years old		21.1%	8
5-10 years old		5.3%	2
More than 10 years old		15.8%	6
Total Responses			38

Data from the survey also indicated that CORE's participants provide a range of supports in their initiative or organization. 28.9 % of respondents indicated that they provided direct services, while 34.2% of respondents indicated that they performed managerial work (Table 3). Responses to the open-ended questions also indicated that many workers in the youth sector provide a combination of both direct service and managerial support (Table 4).

Table 3: Current Role in Initiative or Organization

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Providing direct services (doing front-line work)		28.9%	11
Management (doing administrative work)		34.2%	13
Other (please specify):		36.8%	14
Total Responses			38

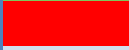
Table 4: Other Roles Performed by Participants in Initiative or Organization

1.	Accountant
2.	Volunteer
3.	Participant
4.	both of the above
5.	Mentoring
6.	Mentor

7.	I am on both the management team and provide direct services
8.	both management and front lines
9.	I do both front line and administrative work
10.	I am front line and do administrative work
11.	Consulting
12.	Community Youth Outreach worker
13.	Providing support to a group of young adults living with special needs
14.	Both

Finally, the survey data indicated that the majority of respondents (63.2%) who used CORE's services and supports have previous experience in working with youth-led and/or youth-serving initiative and/or organizations (Table 5).

Table 5: Experience with Youth-Led and/or Youth-Serving Initiatives and/or Organizations

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		63.2%	24
No		36.8%	14
Total Responses			38

Experience with CORE's Services by participants

Knowledge Exchange Meet-ups

To support the development of skills, circulate tools, and facilitate network development among youth sector groups, CORE hosted a series of monthly events known as KEMs. CORE intended KEMs to serve as learning and networking opportunities for grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations. Attendees included the YOF grantees as well as other youth sector groups in the community. The topics of KEMs, which ranged from financial management to team building, are summarized in Tables 6 and 7. The survey findings in Table 6 reveal that the three top KEM sessions for participants (that included both the YOF grantees as well as other youth sector stakeholders in the community) the "Youth Opportunities Fund Expression of Interest Workshop" (37 %); the "Youth Opportunities Fund Full Application Workshop" (37%), and the By Youth, For Youth, With Youth" (33.3%)].

Table 6: KEM Sessions and Attendance¹⁴

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Simple Financial Tools for Non-Profits		22.2%	6
Team Building and Self Care in Project Management		11.1%	3
Branding, Marketing and Storytelling		11.1%	3
The Good, the Bad, the Unbelievable		11.1%	3
Logic Model (as part of the Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston)		11.1%	3
Asset Mapping (as part of the Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston)		3.7%	1
Laidlaw Foundation Youth-led Community Change Program Information Session		14.8%	4
By Youth, For Youth, With Youth (Networking Event)		33.3%	9
Community Champion Session (as part of the Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston)		0.0%	0
Youth Community Champion Session (as part of the Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston)		0.0%	0
Ignite Youth-led Movement (Networking Event)		3.7%	1
Budget Workshop (for Eritrean Youth Collective)		11.1%	3
Project Management (for Eritrean Youth Collective)		7.4%	2
Grant Writing Basics (for Regional Youth Roundtable members)		14.8%	4
Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston Launch Event		7.4%	2
Agency Mentorship Program - York South-Weston Community Networking Event		7.4%	2
Youth Opportunities Fund Expression of Interest Workshop		37.0%	10
Youth Opportunities Fund Full Application Workshop		37.0%	10
Other (please specify):		29.6%	8
Total Responses			27

¹⁴ The “Fundraising for Youth-led Initiatives” and “Navigating Charitable Partnerships” KEMs were not included as options in the survey and therefore are not accounted for in Table 7.

“I wish there was more time in the end or the beginning for all the groups to talk with each other and help each other, because that’s when you get ideas going and get solutions. Those are the people who are experiencing the same things as you, not FYI, which is an established organization ... But, as soon as you get to talk to someone who is facing similar challenges, it’s really different.”

~ YOF Grantee Interview

Table 7: Other KEMs Attended by Participants

#	Response
1.	not sure cannot remember what they were called
2.	Fundraising
3.	data party
4.	Recent Fundraising KEM
5.	Grant writing session KEM
6.	Fundraising Event
7.	KEM on fundraising for grassroots initiatives
8.	Fundraising webinar on organizational mentors webinar on governance

As summarized in Table 8, the survey findings indicated that the majority of KEM attendees found out about the events through community newsletters and emails (48.1%), FYI staff (40.7%), and/or social media (i.e. Twitter) (29.6 %).

Table 8: Method of Reaching Participants

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Social media		29.6%	8
Word of mouth		11.1%	3
Newsletter or email		48.1%	13
FYI staff		40.7%	11
Other (please specify):		3.7%	1
Total Responses			27

Satisfaction: Relevant Knowledge and Intentional Relationship Building

The interviews with YOF grantees revealed that the participants reported satisfaction with KEMs in regards to disseminating relevant knowledge and promoting intentional relationship-building in the youth sector. Concerning knowledge dissemination, participants indicated that KEMs directly addressed issues that they were facing as grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations and connected youth sector groups to tangible resources such as information on fundraising. Several participants praised the KEM “Fundraising for Youth-Led Initiatives” as a particularly successful due to the high degree of relevance of the imparted knowledge to the grassroots youth sector.

The fundraising KEM was amazing. Even how to negotiate with your trustee and organization, which is something we were having issues with. I think that was really insightful as well **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Connecting us to actual documents, like worksheets, at the KEMs. Like, we'll go to a fundraiser and we'll get a fact sheet on different fundraising tools you can use **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

While the majority of KEMs were delivered as in person meetings, several KEMs – such as one entitled “Navigating Charitable Partnerships” – were delivered in an online format as a live webinar. This particular webinar-KEM addressed the benefits and challenges associated in working with OM as an unincorporated, grassroots, youth-led initiative or organization. Participants found the content of this particular KEM as relevant to their experiences within the youth sector. Further, participants found that the online platform of this KEM was inclusive of the experiential knowledge of youth-led initiatives and organizations while also being helpful in terms of facilitating participants’ access to knowledge from the perspectives of incorporated organizations that acted as charitable partners. This was particularly useful because the receipt of funding usually requires relationships with charitable partners.

We participated in webinars. They had a webinar around mentorship and trustee relationships, and that webinar was really good, because they gave different definitions of grassroots relationships with regular agencies.... Throughout the webinar, they had someone from grassroots speak on their experiences. And they had a mentor speak about their organization’s challenges **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

While participants valued the knowledge imparted through KEMs, most participants affirmed that the highest value of this program activity lies in their potential for relationship building within the youth sector. Specifically, participants valued KEMs’ unique blend of knowledge transfer and intentional relationship building, a combination that provided participants with an opportunity to develop and circulate knowledge with other peer groups. Participants expressed that KEMs should continue to prioritize peer group relationship building, especially among grassroots initiatives and organizations that may be experiencing similar challenges.

I wish there was more time in the end or the beginning for all the groups to talk with each other and help each other, because that’s when you get ideas going and get solutions. Those are the people who are experiencing the same things as you, not FYI, which is an established organization ... But, as soon as you get to talk to someone who is facing similar challenges,

it's really different **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Challenge: Lack of Depth, Specificity, and Practicality

Although the majority of participants identified that KEMs offered relevant knowledge, some participants reported that, in catering to a generalized audience, KEMs often lacked depth, specificity, and practicality.

I think the KEMs were conceptually an excellent idea, but honestly, I found a lot of them could run into the problem of not having enough depth to be as beneficial as they could be. I know for a few of them, there were definitely instances where, it's like, there's a lot to unpack here. This could easily be two full days of teaching with a skilled teacher **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also shared that they did not find CORE's program leads and other FYI staff to be helpful as KEM speakers as they were experienced as somewhat removed from the grassroots youth sector. This resulted in certain KEMs being ineffective, trivial, and reproducing the hierarchal relations that pervade the youth sector. Rather, participants described valuing external speakers who have experiential knowledge of youth and non-profit sector practices such as grant writing.

The least relevant thing would be putting everyone in a box, because they do try to give us great workshops, but for some of us, it's not a workshop we need... I'm not by any means conceited or anything like that. But sometimes, it's seems as a little bit disrespectful to have a workshop on something I've put my heart into **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The workshops weren't as effective until they had the outside person come and speak. I'm being completely honest. The facilitators from FYI, I didn't find them helpful ... If they bring out a guest to speak, that's really helpful. Maybe their role should be more facilitation or connecting someone. Let's say, they do a grant writing workshop. Instead of them teaching and the folks who are running the CORE capacity-building stuff who haven't written grants, get someone who has written like, 20 grants, and who has done it for the youth sector. It feels like they're trying to be experts on things they have theoretical knowledge on. But that stuff, that's really easy to Google. Every time they brought in someone to speak, I've been like, holy shit! **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The thing I find with the workshop is that the intention is really good and their templates are great, but I don't think the content goes any deeper than what I could find on Google. But,

what they do really well is when they bring in someone who has gone through it themselves and they talk about what worked, or didn't, or examples **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Several participants identified “Branding, Marketing and Storytelling” as an ineffective KEM because it was considered as too rudimentary for some and too advanced for others.

The marketing one was a really good example, because I know a little bit about marketing ... but there were definitely people there scratching their heads because the person there was dropping advanced marketing terms, jargon native to the field that wasn't explained beforehand. So, it was a bit too far in to be an intro piece but once it got to that point, it ended up being more of an overview of services available rather than a discussion of how to use those services in a meaningful, targeted way **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The branding one ... was terrible. It's because the person who they brought in wasn't good. He spent like 5 minutes teaching us how to use Facebook Events.... It was really basic. Stuff I could have looked up really quickly and easily. And, it's presenting theoretical knowledge without any examples. What they provided was really, very theoretical things like value charts. It's kind of like, maybe something you might be interested in before your idea is formed and before you have a grant, and before you're established. It felt like a high school exercise **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Several YOF grantees also identified that the KEMs reflected the hierarchical and westernized structure of the larger youth and non-profit sectors, which the participants experienced as alienating to the communities with whom they work. For instance, in the evaluation of a KEM entitled, “Team Building and Self Care Management”, two respondents raised concerns about the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in capacity-building:

The workshop relies on western cultural ideas and is not accessible to marginalized minority **(Workshop Evaluation Respondent)**.

Competences for inclusion of diverse [groups'] epistemologies. There is bias pervasive through all organization, models and handouts **(Workshop Evaluation Respondent)**.

Indeed, the reviewed literature suggests that existing capacity-building models are based on Western values which are, in turn, constructed as organizational ideals.¹⁵ These workshop evaluation responses raise critical questions as to how capacity-building in the grassroots youth sector itself is envisioned by stakeholders; namely, the provision of generalized KEMs based on

¹⁵ Alston-O'Connor & Houwer, 2016

Western values and ways thinking is contrary to a customized approach. This finding also suggests that there are apparent incongruities between participants' values as well as those that underlie KEMs.

Networking Opportunities

Networking opportunities included both the previously described KEMs as well as CORE's formal networking events for the youth sector. Attendees included the YOF grantees as well as other youth sector groups and adult allies in the community.

Satisfaction: Opportunities for Growth and Knowledge Development

The participants shared that the networking opportunities provided by CORE did not have a competitive character as might be anticipated for a sector that is characterized by finite resources. Rather, the participants shared that CORE's networking opportunities were intimate and were premised on values of mutual growth. This is significant as participants cite isolation and competition as key challenges within the youth sector.

I feel like the space that they create, because it's more intimate and it's not like a going to a big networking seminar where you don't have youth gloaters, so to speak. [CORE] creates these spaces to develop you so that when you're out there, you can do a better job, and they know they can support you **(Focus Group)**.

The workshops address [challenges in the youth sector] by putting youth on a platform where they can thrive in a supportive environment while being provided resources necessary to thrive. Youth are able to connect with other leaders and gain knowledge, gain confidence to continue the work that they do ... FYI CORE is a lead in helping to change the narrative or youth and showcasing the value in youth-led initiatives **(Survey Respondent)**.

We're all isolated and separated, but how do we leverage each other's knowledge work. Because really, there's a lot of competition. As an all-girls workshop, we were able to work with another group and have a conversation around self-esteem, and leverage partnerships and not just, 'here's my business card' **(Focus Group)**.

They had fantastic networking events. We went to networking events last year, networking events where they had different groups come in and share their stuff. It was great because you could go to different organizations, see what they're doing, and networking. That is fantastic, to do that event, but to really emphasize the importance of that and what [it] means for a grassroots organization. The reason why I say that is because organizations don't run by themselves, and sometimes, as organizations and groups, people are really compelled to their cause. 'This is my initiative, this is my cause, and this is what I want to do'. But, you have to build allies and networks **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Challenges: Toronto and Older-Youth Centrism

While participants had high praise for CORE's networking opportunities, several participants experienced networking opportunities as geared towards Toronto-based initiatives and organizations as well as older cohorts of youth. Participants who were situated outside of the GTA noted that CORE's networking opportunities did not reflect their local communities and were rather Toronto-centric.

For us, networking helped us the least, because we had already formed really strong bonds with organizations that were local to us **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The networking sessions, for sure, those were beneficial. Not as much to us because again, so many of the groups that exist don't operate in our region. So, we went to a networking event, and they're Toronto ... Like, there's no connection and it's not that there couldn't be a transition, but once you're in that Toronto border, there's so much more available to you that there's no real benefit for Toronto groups to outreach to [other regions] **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

These participants reported that they found their own community networks to be more helpful than those facilitated by CORE's networking opportunities. One participant, who was situated outside of the GTA, reflected on the importance of utilizing local resources.

We tend to look at more local resources, and I think that this project [CORE] feels a little bit more Toronto-based, and I know that's changing with the next round or whatever, but you know, local resources are kind of important **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

This participant also shared that they did not engage in many of CORE's networking opportunities because they conflicted with local events.

The other issue was that all of the capacity-building things were like, the third Thursday of the month. And, we had a yearlong schedule where we had the local police do an event with our team that night. So, that can't be rescheduled. And almost everything they did was on that corresponding Thursday. And then, on top of that, we would have to bring them to Toronto ... Our participation has been limited because it's just been difficult with the schedule, and that format is not a good fit with this group **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants stated that locations were not accessible and recommended that CORE include events in communities outside of the GTA.

Location - some of the workshops you provide are not easily accessible for youth. Different locations other than the Toronto area would be helpful **(Survey Respondent)**.

We just need them to be flexible to come to us, and if they're hosting events locally, we will host it. We're totally cool with that. So, being flexible to look outside of Toronto **(YOF Grantee)**.

“The workshops address [challenges in the youth sector] by putting youth on a platform where they can thrive in a supportive environment while being provided resources necessary to thrive. Youth are able to connect with other leaders and gain knowledge, gain confidence to continue the work that they do ... FYI CORE is a lead in helping to change the narrative on youth and showcasing the value in youth-led initiatives.”

~ Survey Respondent

In addition to location, the YOF grantees exhibited diversity in regards to youth served by participating initiatives and organizations. One participant, whose program supported younger youth, reported that they experienced CORE as having a primary focus on older youth. For this participant, the focus on older youth rendered CORE's networking opportunities as inaccessible. The participant described how networking opportunities, which took place during school nights, were inaccessible for younger youth.

We're like, 'we're not going'. And I had to put my foot down and say, 'I've got grade 7 and 8 students and I can't truck them ... and bring them back at 11. That's not going to fly' **(YOF Grantee)**.

Issues of parental consent and permission also presented as barriers for participating in CORE's networking opportunities.

Some of our youth are little, they're tiny people, and we had to do the same thing, like student permission ... At one point, when they were trying to get the groups to know each other, we had our group make a video, like a YouTube video, to introduce themselves and those kinds of things. It was just really challenging for us **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Online Toolkits

Online toolkits are a collection of resources for organizational capacity-building that are hosted on CORE's website.¹⁶ The toolkits include forms, power point and brochure style presentations, case studies, as well as videos. At the time of the evaluation, CORE's 21 toolkits were grouped in the following categories: Financial Management (3); Human Resources (5); Program Design (7); and Governance (4). Table 9 depicts how CORE organizes its toolkits on its website.

The toolkits are freely accessible to the general public and are intended to be used by program participants at their convenience. Additionally, the toolkits are also designed to extend CORE's capacity-building supports to initiatives and organizations that are situated outside of Toronto. A cursory review of the titles of the toolkits suggests that these instruments generally provided participants with technical capacity-building supports. Participants described that they either accessed the toolkits themselves, or were referred to specific toolkits by CORE's program leads during one-on-one mentoring sessions.

¹⁶ The toolkits can be retrieved from http://www.foryouth.ca/learning_modules

Table 9: CORE's Online Toolkits

Financial Management Toolkits	Human Resources Toolkits	Program Design Toolkits	Governance Toolkits
• Financial Management • Organizational Budgeting • Simple Financial Tools for Non-Profits	• HR Legislation: Guidelines and Laws for Managing Staff • HR Policy and Procedure: Documenting Relationship Organization and Staff Team • Team Building and Self Care in Project Management • Branding, Marketing, and Storytelling • Navigating Charitable Partnerships – A Toolkit for Grassroots Youth-led Initiatives	• Program Design: Logic Models • Theory of Change Models: Outcome-Based Program Design • Strategic Grant Writing • Best Practices in Grant Writing • Program Evaluation • Intentional Program Design • Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed Grant Writing Session	• Board Models • Risk Management • Board Development • Managing your Governing Body

Satisfaction: Innovating, Engaging, and Accessible Methods of Knowledge Circulation

Participants who reported using the online toolkits found them to be highly innovative, engaging, and transferable to the work that they do with youth. Participants found it notable that the online toolkits were effective in rendering knowledge on bureaucratic terms, procedures, and hierarchies accessible to the grassroots youth sector. Participants also found that the online component increased the toolkits' accessibility, as information is readily available.

Definitely awareness of sector and system practices is huge. I feel like that's what [CORE does] really well online because you want to be able to flip back to it whenever. So, that's really big. Access to resources, definitely, because [CORE] create[s] a lot of resources, like, the templates, the online tools. They recently came out with one that's about working with organizational mentors, which is a new term in the sector to being with, and for them to come out with a toolkit now – that's something I wish we had when we started **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Their toolkits are just like, 'we're going to do a toolkit.' And, you look at it as somebody that works with youth, like, 'whoa, this is so easy to read, there's not a lot of jargon'. So, if I had a youth in my program and they're like, 'I want to run a BBQ to raise money for a program I want to do for me in my community', you can be like, 'okay, here's these tools' **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

[The online toolkits] more or less clarified some bureaucratic stuff, some hierarchies within [non-governmental organization] sector work **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Challenge: Lack of Awareness of Online Toolkits

Although the online toolkits provide an opportunity for youth-led initiatives and organizations to have free access to knowledge, some participants reported that they did not use the online toolkits and attributed this to their lack of awareness.

Honestly, it was an issue of awareness for me. And this may just be me, but like, maybe they weren't stressed enough to me, or were mentioned and I just forgot it, but I did not know about some of the web tools and web options **(Focus Group)**.

Skilled Volunteer Matching

CORE's skilled volunteer matching connects community members with specific skills and talents to youth-led initiatives and organizations that require specialized supports. CORE's program leads assessed participants' needs on an ongoing basis through one-on-one mentoring. Participants would fill out a form if they identified a need for a skilled volunteer in their initiative or organization. CORE would then facilitate connections between available skilled volunteers and

participants. The intention behind the activity was to support the capacity of youth-led initiatives and organizations while providing meaningful and lasting volunteer opportunities for community members.

Satisfaction: Supporting Capacity through Specialized Volunteers in the Community

Participants described that skilled volunteer matching met the material needs of their initiatives and organizations. Further, participants reported that the volunteer matching facilitated relationships that were successful, sustained, and supported the capacity of participants' initiatives and organizations by providing specialized services that might otherwise be costly to procure. This is a particularly noteworthy achievement on the part of CORE given that volunteering is in decline and such matching is becoming increasingly challenging within the voluntary sector.¹⁷

We wanted a lawyer. We wanted somebody that did [public relations]. So, it's like, even though on our team a lot of us have certain skillsets, capacity, you can't do everything. Just because we have a background, we don't have to do it all the time. It would be nice to have other support. [CORE] found us this second year, a lawyer who did [public relations] work before. That was really helpful **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

We wanted to hire a fundraiser, so FYI sent it out to people that they knew do that type of work. So, the person that we ended up hiring was someone who had done stuff with FYI ... But [FYI] sent [the fundraiser] the email, so that was really helpful **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

[CORE] did connect us with one local adult as a volunteer, and we did connect with them. And he came out, and he's a brilliant fit ... we think he has kind of perfectly matched skills. I was amazed that he was around the corner from us, so we will continue to reach out to him **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Challenge: Need for Unspecialized 'General' Volunteers

While the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with CORE's skilled volunteer matching program, one participant expressed that having an increased number of volunteers from CORE would have supported capacity in their initiative.

It would be great if there were volunteers helping us. We're always needing volunteers and stuff for our events, because again, we don't have the money all the time, right? So, to have volunteers helping out, or even CORE people coming out and helping at events. We had a

¹⁷ Volunteer Canada [VC], Manulife Financial, Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development, & Harris Decima, 2010; VC, Manulife Financial, Harris Decima, 27 Shift Consulting, & Ontario Volunteer Centre Network, 2012; VC, Manulife Financial, & 27 Shift Consulting, 2013

huge event, no one came out. I'm doing everything by myself, and it's really difficult. And, especially, that was all done out of pocket... I have to put on 75 hats every hour, and it would be really nice to have volunteers. I think that's what all of these people are here to help out for. It's to make our jobs easier. Having volunteers is maybe something they can help out with **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

CORE's MIS reveals that this participant's dissatisfaction with skilled volunteer matching was a result of a mismatch between the CORE's intentions behind the program and the needs of the participant. Namely, the skilled volunteer matching program, which is intended to build organizational capacity by providing volunteers with an opportunity to utilize their specialized skills, was not seen as useful for initiatives and organizations who required more 'general' volunteers to support their non-specialized program activities.

Website and Social Media

CORE utilized the Internet and social media, specifically, Twitter and Facebook, to promote network development in the grassroots youth sector. Additionally, CORE used an email listserv to circulate events and job opportunities that would be of interest for participants.

Satisfaction: Circulating Up-to-Date Knowledge on the Youth Sector

Participants expressed having satisfaction with CORE's use of the Internet and social media. All of the interview and focus group participants who reported being active on social media shared that they engaged with CORE on either Twitter and Facebook. One participant shared how CORE used social media to circulate the impact of their work in the grassroots youth sector.

Whenever we did interviews, if we did radio interviews or blog interviews, they shared all our stuff, even our newsletter. They were like, 'you guys did a lot of stuff this year, are you comfortable if we share that out?' And they collect all of our information and shared it with their network and things like that are meaningful because the story isn't just us as an organization, but they're stories of our youth **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

“When we don’t know what you’re doing, first time being funded, grassroots, it can be daunting and it can be difficult to know you’re doing things right, and what things you could be doing to make it better. And they had a really good balance of never stepping on our toes or taking the wheel from us, but able to keep us on the path that we were driving things in, providing us with the right assistance in order to keep us on track”

~ Focus Group

Another participant described how CORE was able to tap into the convenience of social media for the purposes of networking and circulating up-to-date information in the youth sector.

So, with the social media piece, it's been really great with them. They always re-tweet our stuff, or they'll mention us. I like how they are on social media. That's been really helpful. So, if there's an event or a KEM or a workshop, because not everybody can go through their emails 24/7, and they know we're on social media. So, they'll add us and be like, 'this is coming up, hope you guys can make it.' And then, with them, I think that's how we're able to see what other people are doing, so if another organization, something really great happened, we can send an 'oh congratulations' and you can see it on their wall, because they're very aware about what other sectors are doing across the sector **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Data from the workshop evaluations also suggested that CORE's use of social media was effective in circulating information on KEMs, as 29.6 % of respondents indicated that they found out about the events through social media (Table 8). Relatedly, participants praised CORE for their use of email to circulate up-to-date information in the youth sector.

Just being on the email list and seeing that there are so many workshops or events or 'hey there's a job coming up', always being present is so important, having such a presence, and we were even confused because so much support was coming our way **(Focus Group)**.

I think their email blasts are useful. So, they send a lot of emails, which is like, just information around what they're doing. But then also, if someone else is having an event and they need support with something, the fact that they're able to put that information out there **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

One-on-One Mentoring and Coaching

One-on-one mentoring and coaching is a central activity in CORE. It is during these sessions that all of CORE's program component activities are integrated to support specific capacity-building needs and goals. During these sessions, CORE's program leads and participants discussed: referrals to community partners and collaborators, toolkits, and events; long-term sustainability of participants' initiatives and organizations; and emerging issues and crises within participants' groups. The sessions were intended to occur as formalized monthly meetings; however, the recorded case notes from CORE's MIS suggest that the actual frequency of the one-on-one mentoring and coaching sessions varied. At the time of the evaluation, seven YOF grantees had case notes recorded on a monthly basis; six YOF grantees had case notes recorded that were

between two and eight months apart; and one YOF grantee had only one case note recorded for a one-on-one-mentoring and coaching session.

Satisfaction: Distinctive Mentoring, Strong Relationships, and Customized Supports

Importantly, participants experienced CORE’s one-on-one mentoring and coaching as distinct from the support provided by their OMs. To clarify the value of this distinction, it is important to recall that in receiving a YOF grant, participants are required work with various incorporated non-profits, one being organizations that serve as participants’ OMs. OMs provide “project mentoring, administrative support, governance, and financial accountability.”¹⁸ Although OMs provide many benefits to mentee organizations, such as financial management skills, access to charitable registration, and funding opportunities, power imbalances persisted in mentoring relationships between participants and their OMs.

According to the ***Organizational Mentor Agreement***, as the trustee organization, the OM administers the YOF grantee’s funds.¹⁹ Several YOF grantees experienced communication breakdowns in their relationship with OMs, which sometimes led to a lack of timely dispersal of funds. Further, although the organizations represented by OMs may have begun as grassroots groups, the specific individuals who occupied the OM role had limited experience in starting a grassroots group – an experience that participants expected and desired in an OM.

When I talk to my mentor at [an incorporated organization], she’s just a woman who got her Masters and has been working there for six years. That’s not someone who has any idea what it’s like to start something **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also felt that their OMs lacked experience in the grassroots sector, which, according to CORE’s MIS, shaped their experience of mentorship from OMs as ‘corporate’ or ‘abstract’ – such approaches did not resonate with the participants’ realities, needs, and goals.

Fortunately and appropriately, CORE’s one-on-one mentoring and coaching filled in some of the gaps left by the OMs’ limitations. CORE’s program leads offered empathy and coaching, which helped participants respond to and manage challenges in their relationships with OMs. The relationships between CORE and YOF grantees were made easier because CORE was not directly implicated in the dispersal of YOF grantees’ funding. This separation minimized power imbalances

¹⁸ OTF, 2015, p. 18

¹⁹ OTF, 2016

in this particular mentoring relationship²⁰ and made it easier for participants and CORE's program leads to engage in comparatively uncomplicated one-on-one mentoring and coaching relationships. Further, although FYI itself is an incorporated non-profit organization, participants perceived CORE as being closer to the grassroots youth sector than their OMs. The result was that distinctiveness of CORE's position and their credibility in the eyes of the participants contributed to making one-on-one mentoring and coaching sessions an invaluable resource to grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations.

Given this context, participants were comfortable discussing a range of challenges with program leads during sessions, including issues concerning community members, OMs, and issues internal to participants' initiatives and organizations. CORE's program leads provided participants with practical guidance in navigating the challenges that emerged with stakeholders and offered to facilitate conflict resolution to address internal issues.

[CORE has] actually helped me deal with sponsorship. Like, I had a little tiff with a sponsor. And I won't say I have anger problems cause I don't but certain things like, especially because like, this is like, my baby. So, I'm very protective over it, you know what I mean? So, when people try to like, shift me around or take advantage, like She-Hulk wants to come out. But I know that in this field, I can't ... [CORE] definitely helped me like in terms of like, how to structure myself verbally as well as in written form without coming off too aggressive or too rude or anything like that **(AMP 2.0 Interview)**.

Participants typically attributed their sense of satisfaction with mentoring and coaching to their relationships with CORE's program leads. Several participants described CORE's program leads as exceptional. These participants also emphasized that they had strong relationships with their program leads, which contributed to a customized experience with CORE.

[The program lead] has always been on top of reaching out, checking in, providing guidance. Even on [the program lead's] off-time, [they] would come in just to support us. It was really above and beyond, and even beyond... [The program lead] has been absolutely great and it's sort of, it's weird, because even beyond the technical benefits, there's the moral support there of having someone to check in with **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

[The program lead was] great. My experience is not with CORE, my experience is with one person at the end of the day, and [the mentor's] been amazing as a representative of CORE. I feel extremely comfortable around [the program lead], and I've had a really great

²⁰ As will be further discussed later in this section, power imbalances between CORE and participating grassroots initiatives were not completely eliminated as the receipt of the YOF grant was contingent upon engaging with CORE.

experience **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants explained that their strong relationships with CORE's program leads were facilitated by informal engagements such as 'checking in' and 'reaching out'. These engagements contributed to a sense of consistency in support, even during program interruptions such as staff turnover at CORE.

[The program lead] was very diligent about checking it, and very good even if it wasn't a scheduled meeting to check-in and see how we were doing. Really, very well supported in terms of that **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

They've gone through some turnover, but each person who has been transitioned into the role, they've smoothly transitioned into communicating with us, being of good support, always checking in **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

For the most part, participants felt that once a month sessions met their preferred level of engagement. Participants expressed that this level of frequency was consistent, facilitated independence, and worked with participants' limited resources.

There was always consistent communication, and when we needed more, they were available **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

It was exactly the right amount to be beneficial without being obtrusive, or too hand-holding, because you don't want to be checking in too, too often **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

I think it's okay the way it is, because we just don't have the capacity to meet more than that **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

“We all have different goals, different sections of the city. So, I think like the one-on-one mentorship that [CORE] did was a good idea, but I think it would have been much better if they had picked individuals who had come from the grassroots sector. Because the grassroots is a different world ... I can totally see how much thought and intention they put into it, but I think they were trying to do too much and suit everyone’s needs too fast”

~ YOF Grantee Interview

Participants expressed satisfaction with being able to relate with CORE's program leads. Specifically, participants found that the program leads were flexible, authentic, and genuinely interested in participants' work. Further, participants found the fact that program leads from CORE were also youth to be particularly beneficial.

We can relate to them because they're similar in age to us. So, a lot of jokes someone else might get, they get too. It's also being us because we're being creative, being able to work alongside someone, to have someone to support us who like, understands kind of where we want to go, is nice **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The fact that [FYI] show up for stuff. That's been the key thing that people have said on our team, even our volunteers **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

I think it's awesome that they're able to engage young people in such dynamic ways, and create spaces that are safe where young people do not feel discriminated for what they look like, or what they were bringing. They were able to create space where diverse people could come in, share, and be engaged in meaningful work. They look like they actually care about your individual projects. Different people would come and show genuine appreciation and happiness for each of our groups **(Focus Group)**.

Participants reported that CORE's program leads provided support that addressed the anxieties that some participants had as leaders of initiatives and organizations that were being funded for the first time. Furthermore, participants also emphasized that CORE provided support in ways that ensured that it was the participants – not CORE – who took the lead.

When we don't know what you're doing, first time being funded, grassroots, it can be daunting and it can be difficult to know you're doing things right, and what things you could be doing to make it better. And they had a really good balance of never stepping on our toes or taking the wheel from us, but able to keep us on the path that we were driving things in, providing us with the right assistance in order to keep us on track **(Focus Group)**.

We feel more confident knowing they're walking alongside us, so, we are more empowered to get things done because we have their support **(Focus Group)**.

As well as having an ally, someone you can communicate with to ask questions, that's also been very useful **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

While the opportunity is always there to ask [CORE] if we need help, that help is not hoisted upon us, which to me, I think, speaks in the large part for the respect of us as youth to still be able to run and maintain this project on our own merits **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

[CORE doesn't] come in and say, 'you need this, this and that' but they come in and say, 'what are you looking for?' And I can decide with my team what we're interested in and what we would like to discuss, and they try to accommodate for that **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

By developing strong relationships that facilitated participants' independence, one-on-one mentorship and coaching was provided in ways that were customized and responsive to meet participants' specific needs and goals.

Having the opportunity to speak with our mentor [program lead] about it ... was really beneficial because [the mentor] could kind of think about which ones would actually fit with our group so that we're not going through and taking time to go through different options and eliminate ones that aren't relevant **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

It's been excellent, every time that I've gone out to my mentor [program lead] and I've said 'this is what we need' or 'this is what I'd like to see', I've always seen it. If they're unable to provide it for me, [the mentor] always connects me with links or seminars online that I can connect to and build my capacity, so, they've been wonderful **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Working with CORE? It's been amazing and again specifically with the people I've been working with, I think they take the initiative to reach out to me, they always follow through on their conversations, they're there on time, just really easy to communicate with, so I've had a pretty good experience with them **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Those meetings were about things we needed to discuss, be it funding opportunities or different ways we could track our goals and stay on top of them and find different strategies to achieve them **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Challenges:

A) Power Imbalances

Although most participants shared the opinion that CORE's one-on-one mentoring and coaching was beneficial, as noted earlier, the fact that engaging with this program activity was a requirement tied to funding represented an area of contention for several participants. These participants explained that, in working with YOF grantees, AMP 2.0, and other community groups, CORE served many groups with a diverse array of needs, and – similarly to what was seen in the

case of KEMs – these participants found the one-on-one mentoring and coaching was catered to a very general audience and therefore, not useful to them. As a result, these participants identified mandatory engagement with mentoring and coaching sessions as a strain on resources that did not offer them much benefit. One participant shared of their experience of CORE’s mentoring and coaching was that their program lead did not have sufficient experience in grassroots organizations.

We all have different goals, different sections of the city. So, I think like the one-on-one mentorship that [CORE] did was a good idea, but I think it would have been much better if they had picked individuals who had come from the grassroots sector. Because the grassroots is a different world ... I can totally see how much thought and intention they put into it, but I think they were trying to do too much and suit everyone’s needs too fast **(YOF Grantee Interview).**

While power imbalances were minimized by relationship-building and program leads’ relatability, CORE’s indirect connection to funding – made manifest through the fact that participants were required to engage with CORE – became particularly problematic when participants were obliged to participate in activities that may not have met their needs.

One participant, who shared that they had a positive relationship with CORE’s program lead, hypothesized that the relationship would look different and might be more difficult and complicated had it been intimately configured around funding.

The only way like, I guess for me to really, I guess, test [CORE’s] character, as an organization, is to be in that predicament with like, financial. I mean, like, it’s one thing to give advice and all that kind of stuff but then, I think there’s like, the real issues, or whatever the case is, will come once the money starts coming in. Because, they’d be my trustee, you know what I mean? They’d be the ones handling my money and things like that. So, I think that’s where I guess they’ll learn more about me that way and I’ll learn more about them **(AMP 2.0 Interview).**

Tellingly, CORE’s MIS also reveals that, for initiatives and organizations whereby FYI acted as a charitable partner/OM (AMP 2.0 as well certain YOF grantees), power imbalances came to be influential in CORE’s one-on-one mentoring relationships. Specifically, as the dispersal of funding is contingent upon the mentee’s participation in CORE’s activities, mentoring and coaching sessions were used to monitor participation in CORE’s program activities as well as to caution those who did not have sufficient attendance. In such cases, CORE mentors formulated the lack of attendance as an absence of ‘commitment’ to the program; such a formulation may mask underlying issues, such as lack of resources, and impede frank discussions. These experiences make

it clear that instances in which FYI is both charitable partner and capacity-building organization bring about unique and heightened power imbalances to the mentoring relationship.

Finally, when asked about what was missing from the CORE, several participants emphasized the importance of using social justice frameworks to guide capacity-building.

If I think of something that wasn't necessarily offered, it's just different youth engagement models. So, seeing that different people come from different educational backgrounds, I feel that it would be useful to run something on different youth engagement models and

how they look in practice... Things like the anti-oppression framework **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

It's really hard to understand your privilege when you don't have an unpacked idea of what it's like being on the other side of things. If you don't have someone with that perspective, all you're doing is spitting in the wind and hoping it lands somewhere **(Focus Group)**.

The issue of power imbalances appears to be of significant concern to participants in one-on-one mentoring and coaching as well as throughout the larger program, and, as such, merits specific attention in program implementation.

B) Staff Turnover

Participants also highlighted that staff turnover at CORE was a challenge in implementing one-on-one mentoring and coaching. CORE's MIS appeared to indicate reduced mentoring and coaching sessions for initiatives that were impacted by CORE's staff turnover. One participant described that staff turnover resulted in few or no mentoring and coaching sessions. This participant shared that they did not attribute their successes to CORE's capacity-building supports.

It was just really challenging for us. I can't say that we've experienced all the capacity-building that CORE offered, because we haven't. One thing a bit challenging was that there's been turnover in staff ... I really don't think CORE has done a lot of those things. We're doing some of those things intuitively. That's okay, our youth, I mean, it would be interesting. I'm not sure if our youth could answer any of these questions in relation to CORE. We just haven't because of the turnover. We just haven't had that chance to build. Like, 'remember that one lady? She was really neat, is she coming back?' And we're like, 'no, she got a new job **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Many participants also recognized a need for FYI to offer more support to CORE's staff. These participants articulated that the critical mentoring and coaching supports provided by CORE may not be sustainable with the current staff size and perceived compensation structure.

YOF Grantee Participant 1: Bigger team, because they're [CORE] three people, I believe. They work a lot.

YOF Grantee Participant 2: So, having a bigger team that's compensated well. Essentially, that'll showcase the work they do and improve longevity. So, if they're stretched so far thin, it'll affect quality. In order for CORE to continue to be CORE, and the good work they do, that team needs support and needs to be compensated well. And a bigger team could also decrease the chances of burnout.

I wish they [CORE] would be able to have more funding too. I'm not sure how it works for them, but they're really great. And, as a youth worker, I know that a lot of the work they do is free, but no one acknowledges it **(Focus Group)**.

More staff because I feel like they [CORE] take on so much that it might be more helpful to them and for their groups if there were more people working with them **(AMP 2.0 Interview)**.

Summary

Using the vantage point of CORE's participants, this section has provided an account of the CORE experience by describing how program activities, such as KEMs, online toolkits, network development opportunities, skilled-volunteer matching, and one-on-one mentoring, were implemented and experienced by the program's participants. Additionally, this section highlights how the program activities were satisfying to participants, as well as challenges that arose. Following naturally from this description of the CORE experience, the next section will outline the outcomes achieved by CORE.

“A lot of the networking stuff was super, super, super beneficial, conceptually. Even if we didn’t get as many of our networking connections, we definitely took the skills regarding networking that we learned through the initial summit and the networking events to connect the groups back, and that was super helpful to us.”

~ YOF Grantee Interview

SECTION FOUR: THE OUTCOMES

This section of the report focuses on the impacts that CORE's programming had on the participants, and specifically, the 14 YOF grantees. This section draws from interviews, survey findings, and program documents from CORE's MIS to record the changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that participants experienced as they relate to CORE's intended objectives and outcomes. Although the objectives were not realized for all YOF grantees at similar levels of intensity, overall, the outcome evaluation found that CORE is reaching its objectives of improving young leaders' understanding of sector systems and practices, increasing young leaders' skills, improving youth-led initiatives' and organizations' infrastructure, and increasing youth-led initiatives' and organizations' connections to supportive networks.

Goals and Objectives in working with CORE

Building Capacity into the Youth Sector

In working with CORE, participants articulated the key objective of building capacity within the youth sector, both in their initiatives and organization as well as among the youth with whom they work. For the most part, participants viewed capacity-building in their initiatives and organizations in terms of developing skills to obtain funding. For instance, participants described that they hoped to obtain funds to establish, sustain, and expand their programs.

In terms of our goals it was just kind of expanding and scaling, and using that first time influx of money to broaden our group, get a nicer space, be able to have things like food for people who come in, or transit reimbursement, stuff like that **(Focus Group)**.

We were hoping to really establish ourselves within our region and get regular attendance, get access and connections with the other groups that were there **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Another concern was sustainability, so how do you stay alive beyond this granting session? And being able to keep funds flowing. And also, for ourselves, what sort of opportunities are there for us to grow our own capacity **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

My organizational goals were to expand, so, we got money not only to work in [one community], but also [a second community]. So, kind of expand our reach geographically, but also get more. We were funded the year previously for 15-20, and we wanted funding for 25. We wanted to successfully engage them in literature, build relationships, and talk

about the needs of young women and how we can support them through that **(Focus Group)**.

Participants also identified building capacity with youth involved with grassroots initiatives and organizations as a key objective in working with CORE. Participants conceptualized capacity-building with youth as skills and knowledge transfer as well as providing youth with mentorship opportunities.

We were thinking about mentoring youth leaders because our cohort turns 28 next year, so we won't be part of the sector. So, looking at finding youth who want to be a part of the work **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

For my program, it was always to have the participants come back in the future when they're older and do what I'm doing. I don't want to be involved forever. I want them to do it **(AMP 2.0 Interview)**.

Try to offer youth that were in our programs access to capacity-building. If they wanted to start their own program or have some knowledge about something, just having a plane of contact of someone they could connect to **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

A lot of the youth service providers are run by youth now and so it's like, we should also be supporting them, so we're supporting the youth that are participants, but it's like how do we find ways to support people that are a grassroots organizations, but they're still youth, they're still under 29 and they still need that support as well, that understanding. And they're impacted as well, by their own traumas in their own communities, and I think for us it's just kind of expanded, in terms of saying how do we support everyone just in general? Because if we can support them, they can better support their youth **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Creating a Community within the Youth Sector

Finally, the participants described creating a sense of community within the youth sector as an objective in working with CORE. Namely, to counteract competition and isolation, participants expressed that wanted to build community with other youth sector workers, initiatives, and organizations.

We would really like to do a youth forum somewhere here, versus in Toronto, that looks at youth engagement. As a local youth servicing organization, and for youth workers, it's a moving target. We would love to have a youth forum where we talk about it **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

When we first came into contact with CORE, our whole thing was to have a successful program, and then to network and get to know youth service providers **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Unsolidified Goals and Limited Expectations

While the majority of participants indicated that they had some sort of intention in their work with CORE, some of the YOF grantee participants alluded to the fact that they had unclear goals and objectives due to being required to work with CORE as a condition of their grant. One interview participant explained that they did not have any ‘solidified’ goals and objectives in working with CORE:

I’m not really sure that that [goals and objectives were] really solidified **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

During the interview, this participant referenced that receiving a YOF grant required this participant’s engagement with CORE.

I’ll be honest. I don’t even know when we applied for the grant, that we would be working with these other organizations to help us with stuff. We were like, ‘oh, okay, we’re going to be paying this group to work with us.’ And when they’re like ‘you must come out to this’, it’s like, ‘no, I’m paying you’ **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

A second participant also identified that being required to work with CORE as part of receiving the YOF grant had shaped their limited expectations for the program.

CORE supported us because they got a Trillium Grant to do the capacity-building the year I was in it. So, I didn’t really go in with any expectations really... I wasn’t expecting anything from FYI **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Other participants also expressed exasperation in the required engagements that comes with grant money.

When you have grant money, you have to work with all these different people. You have to, you have to! **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

So many people different people have needs. But to make a meeting mandatory for something that our company may not need is a frustrating part **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

While the majority of participants saw utility in working with CORE, the required engagement with CORE appeared to have been linked to a lack of expectations for CORE for some YOF grantees, which resulted in frustration and a feeling that they were required to access supports that they may not necessarily need. As will be later discussed in this report, the required engagement with incorporated non-profits, such as FYI and others, appeared to be a source of tension and reflects the power relations that the participants, as leaders of grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations, both work within and resist.²¹

By providing a demographic description of participants as well as an account of participants' challenges, opportunities, goals, and objectives, this section has provided an in-depth profile of CORE's program participants. In establishing this profile of participants, the proceeding sections will describe how CORE was implemented and experienced as well as the outcomes achieved as a result of the program.

Objective One: Young Leaders Improve Understanding of Sector Systems and Practices

The outcome evaluation found that, through working with CORE, participants increased their knowledge on youth sector issues, concepts, and practices. Survey findings demonstrate that the majority of respondents indicated that they found the knowledge imparted by KEMs to be beneficial to their work in the youth sector. For instance, 77.3 % of survey respondents indicated that they have directly used what they have learned from KEMs to improve their current work in the youth sector (Table 10). 64 % of survey respondents indicated that they found that KEMs addressed the challenges that they encountered within the youth sector (Table 11).

Table 10: Utility of KEMs in Improving Work in Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations

Response to whether KEM has improved current work in Youth-Led Initiative/Organization	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		77.3%	17
No		22.7%	5
Total Responses			22

²¹ FYI, 2016b

Table 11: Relevance of KEMs to Current Challenges in the Youth Sector

Response to whether KEMs are relevant to current challenges

Chart

Percentage

Count

Yes		64.0%	16
No		36.0%	9
Total Responses			25

Participants also shared that the networking opportunities provided by CORE facilitated their development of youth sector knowledge. Specifically, networking allowed participants to develop and circulate current knowledge on different parts of the youth sector.

I think one of the great pieces is that when a lot of, even youth service providers, when we network, they'll bring up stuff. For instance, with FYI, we did a web care and our focus was mental health, so a lot of the youth service providers who got funded, a lot of them came to our group, and we just started a conversation around how much do they know in general about mental health. And then in terms of their programs, like, what are they seeing? **(YOF Grantee Interview)**

Participants also reported that they had gained knowledge on the practices of different institutional systems that intersect with the youth sector. For example, one participant described how they learned about working appropriately with school systems.

[CORE] definitely gave us a lot of background on the sector and dealing with things at the school board, without ever breaching any confidentiality or anything, they did give us some access on some of the struggles other groups faced **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Several participants discussed having increased knowledge about the differences between unincorporated, incorporated, and charity organizations. In particular, participants shared how they were able to integrate this knowledge into how they envisioned the future of their initiative.

The [KEMs] around organizational mentors and things like that. Looking at that and deciding what direction we want to move in. Those resources were good because it really gave a good understanding of what those things mean and figuring out what direction we want to go in based on information we received **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

So originally, I had no idea if I wanted to incorporate or scale. Basically go NGO route or rely on grants. At this point, I don't want to rely on grants and want to generate private revenue. So, I've been thinking about going that route and researching that. Trying to figure out the right path **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

That webinar workshop was really good. The slides were informative. They talked about difference governance structure, and that was really useful for us to look at as a group. We looked at governance models, steering committees, different things like that, that was really useful. For us moving forward, those were some of the things we have to do to become incorporated and things like that **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also shared that working with CORE increased their knowledge about available resources, including their knowledge of funding opportunities in the youth sector.

CORE has been excellent in providing us with advice about what's in there, helping us recognize different funding opportunities **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

I would say around funding opportunities and how to navigate those things when it comes to applying for new funding in terms of things like how to write grants, how to word things, which are so many skills and things we've had experience with, and we've had different supports with that in the past **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

One participant shared that although they were unsuccessful in obtaining funding, they received thorough and helpful feedback from CORE's program lead, increasing this participant's knowledge and building their capacity to obtain future funding.

We did one applications and didn't get it because they got twice as many applications and had a funding cut that year. And our rep at CORE went over four drafts of it and provided feedback each time within 12 hours of us sending it. They really did their best to be on top of it **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also demonstrated increased knowledge on key issues that persist within the youth sector such as isolation and competition. One participant shared their insights and reflections on the competitive attitudes they experienced in engaging with other youth-led initiatives and organizations working with CORE.

But still, I really feel like everybody is trying to do their own thing. I think it's set up that way because of how funding is. People doing things that are similar but even though you do it already, I'm not going to ask you. We're just going to do our own thing **(YOF Grantee)**.

Objective Two: Young Leaders Learn New and Enhance Existing Skills

Overall, the outcome evaluation found that, as a result of working with CORE, participants were able to develop new skills as well as nurture and refine their existing skills. In particular, participants developed and/or improved their skills in management, leadership, and interpersonal communication. Additionally, participants also reported that they developed direct practice skills for working with youth as a result of working with CORE.

CORE's MIS revealed that the managerial and leadership skills developed by participants included conflict resolution skills. For instance, several YOF grantees developed and utilized conflict resolution skills to work through internal and external issues that they encountered. One participant also shared that they developed the skill of 'being intentional' in their managerial and leadership work and related this to organizational branding and reputation.

I think the importance of being intentional as well as being strategic in the line of work, and being aware of who you align yourself with as well. I think in the work that we do, who you align yourself with, and what you do helps with your branding and marketing. So, with CORE, being intentional about the branding piece and being recognized by other organizations, and as leaders in capacity development **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also reported that they developed highly transferable 'soft' or interpersonal skills. For example, although participants situated outside of the GTA experienced CORE's networking events as Toronto-centric, the participants reported that these events still facilitated the participants' relationship building skills, which they used to develop connections in local communities.

A lot of the networking stuff was super, super, super beneficial, conceptually. Even if we didn't get as many of our networking connections, we definitely took the skills regarding networking that we learned through the initial summit and the networking events to connect the groups back, and that was super helpful to us **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also reported that they developed their managerial, leadership, and interpersonal skills by observing how CORE conducted itself as a program. Participants shared that they learned about the planning work that goes into organizational development by observing how CORE operates.

Being able to see how CORE's interactions are with a funder or with other organizations. Seeing the role of planning in execution. So, if we want to do something it can't be last minute, there's a lot of work behind the scenes **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

For us, the resources sometimes are not always the resources [CORE] share[s] out, but it's like, things we ask about. For instance, someone did these infographics, and it's like, there's got to be somewhere you can get them for free. And, when we went to a fundraising event, [the program lead] did a presentation, and I'm like 'where did you find that?' And then, [they're] like, 'I used this site, and I go there all the time' and that's super helpful for us, because we want to make training modules one day, and we want them to be very vibrant and engaging. And we want it to have the information, but in a creative way, where people can maintain it better. So, when you see something that they've done, people might be like 'oh it's a presentation, I'm ready to go home.' But for us, it's like, 'where did you get that to make that presentation', so that's very helpful **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also described how they were able to transfer the skills that they had learned to the youth with whom they worked. For instance, one participant shared how the skills that they had learned from the "Fundraising for Youth-Led Initiatives" KEM was transferable to the needs of youth in their program. Another participant shared that the online toolkits fostered the development of fundraising skills, which were also transferable to youth participants.

I really enjoyed the fundraising for the grassroots KEM. I think especially, because my youth group is coming up to me and they say, 'we want to do car washes, we want to do this, and raise money.' And for me, it's like, 'how do we do that' because we're not a registered charity. So, it's nice to sit down with them and actually learn some strategies that I can bring back to my youth afterwards **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

You look at [the toolkits] as somebody that works with youth, like, 'whoa, this is so easy to read, there's not a lot of jargon'. So, if I had a youth in my program and they're like, 'I want to run a BBQ to raise money for a program I want to do for me in my community', you can be like, 'okay, here's these tools' **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

One participant also shared that CORE's networking opportunities directly supported the growth and development of youth who participated in their initiative.

It was good for [the youth participant] to be there, it was challenging for him. It was an overwhelming setting for him at first. But you know what? He did really, really well, I was so proud. I talked to his mom afterwards, and I was so proud of how he was that day. And so, it was very positive from that perspective, yeah. It was good networking, I think. And he was able to come back and share **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants also identified that they were able to incorporate the knowledge and skills fostered by KEMs into workshops for youth in their programs.

I know the budgeting workshop was big and the toolkit we got from that, individuals were able to use it for their program, their professional work, and for themselves. We were able to use some of those resources to build a workshop and guide facilitation for that when we were building things for youth **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Finally, participants reported that CORE's one-on-one mentoring and coaching supports provided participants with skills to mentor and cultivate the strengths of the youth with whom they worked.

We are now mentoring other youth leaders for the future, so it's passing on that way. And supporting us supports the growth **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Objective Three: Youth-led Initiatives and Organizations Improve Infrastructure to Sustain Operations and Support Programs

Based on the available data sources, the outcome evaluation found that the YOF grantees are beginning to develop program infrastructure to support their initiatives' and organizations' sustainability and efficiency. For several YOF grantees, CORE's KEMs directly increased participants' knowledge on financial management policies and procedures. This was particularly significant as several YOF grantees indicated that, prior to their involvement with CORE, they had limited knowledge and skills regarding financial management.

I remember sitting through workshops, like the financial management one, which was amazing. Because I didn't have a financial management binder, and they provided us with that **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The stuff with the templates is so great. That helps a lot because I just had never signed an honorarium before I had to give them out. So, doing that means that I can learn by doing. Like, I can see it and that's pretty empowering because I don't have to make it up, make a mistake, have it be invalid, get audited, and get in trouble. I think like when you just give out something like that, which is work, and is a free resource, that's pretty empowering **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

The outcome evaluation also found that YOF grantees are beginning to develop and codify organizational structures and procedures, including governance structures and steering committees, which reflect their initiatives' communities and goals. According to case notes from CORE's MIS, one YOF Grantee is developing a non-hierarchical and community-building focused

governance and organization structures that are aligned with their cultural identities and values. It is interesting to note that this initiative's governance and organizational structure resists the issues of bureaucracy, hierarchy, and Eurocentrism, which participants identified as systemic challenges in the youth sector.

Objective Four: Youth-led Initiatives and Organizations are part of Supportive Networks

Data from interviews and the survey indicated that CORE's program was highly successful in facilitating participants' connections to supportive networks. This was demonstrated by the fact that participants felt a sense of community both in CORE's program activities as well as in their own community collaborations.

Participants particularly found that KEMs supported relationship building within the youth sector and provided a sense of community.

Having these KEMs, where there's the opportunity to meet other groups and learn, those things would be a good way to move forward **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Like in KEMs, what they've done is they've had grassroots leaders do different portions of workshops, that's where they do things to help us work together on facilitation and things like that, and that's been pretty good. And I'll be checking in like, 'hey, remember I did this facilitation with you?' And there's a vested interest now, because then, you have something in common **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

FYI has invited us to a lot of things to do, actually, which has been great. Because it's nice to feel connected and to just kind of share knowledge, and just knowledge exchange with other organizations. Also, it promotes what we do, and that's been one of the issues for us, because we're out there **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants noted that, although they experienced some insecurity when they launched their grassroots initiatives and organizations, CORE's facilitation of supportive networks through KEMs was a source of confidence.

The knowledge exchange meet ups were helpful on a self-esteem level where I met with other grassroots organizations. As a grassroots organization you don't think that people know what you're doing and are interested, but it was a confidence booster for me to know that there are older organizations out there interested in what I'm doing and wanted to help **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Awareness and exposure, having an understanding and knowing of what's out there. And being that bridge over that gap helps with finding a sense of belonging. Essentially you have to take that step, but they provide a lot of support to help you get to that stage where you're opening that door **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants reported that KEMs functioned as a formalized space for youth leaders to discuss challenges within the youth sector. Having a formal space to discuss these challenges was particularly important to grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations as they often lack the institutional support and space to identify, discuss, and address issues that are common across the youth sector.

I think CORE does their best to address through offering a wide range of their KEMs. So, I think that's one of the strategies that they've used to kind of address some of the challenges or some of the foreseeable challenges that some groups don't know... I think that's been helpful in addressing challenges that are currently going on, as well as future challenges that haven't arisen yet. And also, being able to provide those conversations that haven't happened yet in a formal setting. Some of those conversations have been the most useful, in terms of communication, organizing as a whole, and some of the challenges that come with that. Because in the sector, one thing you do realize is that a lot of the challenges are consistent across the board **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Case notes from CORE's MIS also reveal that program leads facilitated several participants' connections with community partners and other grassroots groups to collaborate on projects. Participants were also able to develop relationships and collaborations with partners and grassroots groups on their own accord.

“The knowledge exchange meet ups were helpful on a self-esteem level where I met with other grassroots organizations. As a grassroots organization you don’t think that people know what you’re doing and are interested, but it was a confidence booster for me to know that there are older organizations out there interested in what I’m doing and wanted to help.”

~ YOF Grantee Interview

Participants also highlighted that CORE's retreats facilitated and supported 'bonding' as well as participants' discovery of their similarities as grassroots youth-led groups. CORE's retreats contributed to a sense of community among the 14 YOF grantees.

During the 'bonding time' with the other people, it was really cool to be with them ... I really like what they do with the retreat to get to know people **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Everyone there is on the same page, they want the same things in their own community. So, you kind of like, are talking about your problems, and someone might know something, or someone who can help. So, it's like that that's a very supportive network. We try to problem solve for each other ... Instead of everyone being like, 'here's your cheque. Do your thing.' It's like, 'you're all amazing. Come together. Let's support each other' **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants identified that the supportive networks created among the YOF grantees, and more broadly, within the youth sector, created opportunities for collaboration.

Really get a sense of these other people all working towards the same kinds of goals, so having the opportunity to touch base with the other groups in our cohort was definitely beneficial **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Things like, the networking event. It was just about being able to touch base with groups from the other cohort. 'How's it going? What issues have you been having?' **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

So, I like with FYI. It's like, when you keep bringing people together and you get to know each other, and then you get to share stuff. It's like, building a point where people will begin to start to collaborate because you're just like, 'okay, we have similar issues. This person said they can do X Y and Z, you have this skillset and not this skill set. So, why are you trying to do everything? Why won't you bring that person in?' **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

I like the fact that they [CORE] create opportunities for our teams to get together and for us to engage with others, and I think the more opportunities people have, the more they'll collaborate eventually. And eventually, it's that spark that starts, and I think they help to create that **(YOF Grantee)**.

The sense of supportive networks amongst YOF grantees is particularly significant, as one participant who received a YOF grant in a previous year noted that this sense of connection and

community did not exist among the earlier YOF cohort. This participant noted that the inclusion of previous YOF grantees in FYI helped support peer-to-peer relationships.

They [the last cohort] were like, ‘I want to know what you do, where are you located’ and then one of them was like, ‘I want a list of everybody’s information.’ So, last cohort, they had information but nobody connected or stayed in touch. Everybody wants to do their own thing. This group, this year, was different. And, I think that’s because FYI and YOF brought some of us back to facilitate. So, they got to ask us a lot of questions, and because we’ve already done our first year, it’s like peer to peer **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Although CORE was successful in connecting participants to supportive networks and creating a sense of community among participants, such connections generally did not extend beyond the youth sector. While some participants expressed indifference to the lack of engagement with diverse areas of practice, other participants indicated a desire to connect with individuals and groups outside of the youth sector.

I don’t think there’s been much engagement with other sectors, I think that’s something they could do much better on, encouraging us to look at the world outside the sector **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

[Recommendation] Link with adult allies and mentors from government, city council and established organizations that can share their experiences on building successful and sustainable organizations **(Survey Respondent)**.

In sum, the outcome evaluation indicates that although varying in intensity for each participant, CORE is on its way to meeting its objectives. The next section concludes the report with a summary of key findings as well as series of recommendations to further enhance and revise CORE.

SECTION FIVE:

BEYOND CORE - SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN THE YOUTH SECTOR

In addition to findings that were relevant to understanding CORE's processes and outcomes, CORE evaluation participants also spoke passionately about the challenges and opportunities within the youth sector go beyond CORE's mandate. An analysis of these important perspectives that they shared are summarized in this section.

Challenges in the Youth Sector

Lack of Youth-Friendly Services and an Under Resourced Grassroots Sector

A persistent challenge identified by participants was a lack of youth-friendly services across the non-profit sector. Data from interviews, focus group, online surveys, and workshop evaluations revealed that, from the vantage point of the youth sector, mainstream services within the non-profit sector have limited engagement skills in working with youth. Furthermore, participants indicated that mainstream services are generally unsuccessful in engaging youth, as such organizations often do not reflect the social identities of the youth they seek to serve. Speaking of their work experiences within a mainstream agency, one participant discussed the implications of the makeup of service providers in mainstream non-profit organizations.

All of the people that I worked with did not reflect the demographic we work in the community. They don't even live in the community. They drive from the Beaches to work in this poor community... I don't know how you could relate as an upper class woman to these things. So, there's a lack of diversity, and I see it with our LGBTQ2 programs. There weren't LGBT people in the program. So, we're having straight people support them. I think there's a place for everyone to help, but we need to do some kind of asset mapping and see, 'are you really the best person to be in this position?' **(Focus Group)**

Another participant reflected that within mainstream and/or 'clinical' services, limited engagement skills manifest as stereotypes, which further act as a barrier to service for youth.

When you come in with the clinical side, it's like they have their own biases and stereotypes. So, it's really difficult when you're trying to explain that you are able to engage youth in the way they engage youth, but you also have this other piece that supports them. Because they don't understand it...they don't really know how to engage their youth to get involved **(YOF)**

Grantee Interview).

Participants also identified that policy and service construction of ‘youth’ and ‘adult’ through defined age categories was a detriment to a youth-friendly sector, as once an adult, youth are rendered as ineligible for the services in which they were previously engaged. One participant explained how the bureaucracy entailed in distinguishing a youth from an adult contributed to services that do not meet the needs of youth.

A lot of the youth who we see, if they were 18 when they went in, and are 24-25 when they come out. Their mentality is the same from when they went in, but now you’re telling them you need to go into adult care. That you’re an adult and they’re just like, ‘it doesn’t work’

(YOF Grantee Interview).

As members of grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations, participants shared that they are able to form strong and meaningful relationships with youth. However, while these groups are able to engage youth, participants expressed that gross under-resourcing takes a toll on youth workers.

I’m working with young people and build a great relationship with them. With trust comes that disclosure, “I was raped”, “this happened”, and all of these things are transmitted to me as a youth worker. All this pain and hurt, and I don’t know what to do with it because I’m not a rape counsellor, but it comes with the work that you do. So who is going to be there for me when I’m unable to face these issues at home all by myself? **(Focus Group)**

Finally, participants expressed that diminished resources across the non-profit sector, along with deficits in training and supports in the grassroots youth sector, culminate in youth being unable to access the services that they require:

There’s already a huge waiting list for referrals, and so with a lot of youth who don’t get the actual support they need when trying to see somebody. The staff [that youth] feel like they have a relationship with, they don’t know how to better support them because they don’t have the education or even say, just some of the training skills to better support them **(YOF Grantee Interview).**

Problematic Funding Schemes

Participants cited funding as another key challenge in the youth sector. Participants expressed that the task of obtaining funding as difficult to navigate and riddled with bureaucracy. One participant described how current, project-based funding models in the youth sector lend themselves to uncertain futures for grassroots initiatives and organizations.

A lot of the grants, once they're gone, there's nothing to bridge you to anything else. Once it's gone, it's gone, and you have to figure out how you're getting funded next **(Focus Group)**.

Participants with limited or no funding described using out-of-pocket funds and working in unpaid, underpaid, or part-time roles. One participant described how limited funding blurred the distinction between unpaid and paid labour.

We also wanted to get more money, double the money, double the pay for us, because I was only getting paid part-time and my partner, she was not getting paid **(Focus Group)**.

Participants expressed that the project-based funding model that is prevalent in the youth sector is both unsustainable and damaging to the larger communities.

This kind of patchwork band-aid solution is not working and is perpetuating problems in our community **(Focus Group)**.

CORE's participants were keenly aware of the socio-political context of funding, in which the dispersal of limited public funds is mediated by societal values for individualism, self-sufficiency, efficiency, and productivity. As two participants put it, obtaining funds for the youth sector entails rationalizing and regulating programs to fit within a fiscally-constrained social context that does not want to give people a 'free ride' or 'handouts' – participants expressed that these solutions, however, are ineffective and inadequate.

There's really intense accountability politics that prevent real growth. There's inefficient solutions being created because those solutions come across as satisfying so that left-side voters feel confident and right-side voters feel like we're not giving people a free ride... There's a constant balance, from a social and institutional perspective, of trying to do things for people but without doing it for free **(Focus Group)**.

We have so much money to fix the world's problems but people don't want to because of this idea of handouts but that's ridiculous. What can they do, man, so many problems. People need to get rid of this mystique around non-profit work and what we do **(Focus Group)**.

Participants also raised critical questions about how the bureaucracies of funding are not conducive for the development of youth leaders. One participant expressed that stringent funding requirements do not allow youth to make mistakes and grow.

Giving young people who are working in the sector the opportunity to make mistakes in that process. Because in a year you learn so much but then you have to reapply and start again. I think long-term sustainability, having support for people working in the sector, there are a lot of adults who don't understand young people **(Focus Group)**.

“Another big challenge in the youth sector is the lack of value placed on youth by society. It is one of the often lowest paid professions and it is a very emotionally draining field of work. This lack of value and stress of the work is one of the biggest contributors to the high number of turnover in the sector.”

~ Workshop Evaluation Respondent

Participants also discussed how the competition for funding, both within the youth sector and across the non-profit sector, shapes a sense of isolation among youth-led initiatives and organizations.

I noticed everybody feels like they're competing. It's a funder thing, it is set up that way. It's something that needs to change, because if you collaborative, you can impact more youth. If you collaborate, you have more stats, sustainability, but everybody wants to do everything on their own **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Hierarchal Structure and Systemic Oppression within the Youth Sector

The participants also spoke of the hierarchal structure of the youth sector, in which governmental bodies, funders, and adults are at the top of the hierarchy. As workers of precariously funded youth-led initiatives and organizations, the participants were acutely aware of being positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy in an already marginalized sector. The participants described the structure as being 'top down', where grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations are constrained by and have little influence over the policies, procedures, and frameworks that underlie the youth sector that are set by those at the top of youth sector hierarchy. The participants also reflected that the hierarchal structure of the youth sector also lent itself to the exclusion of youth in decision-making roles, such as in the governance within youth-serving organizations, which participants perceived as being dominated by adults. In turn, the structure serves to preserve the status quo rather than facilitate social change.

There are not enough youth voices at the table. I think that's something not talked about a lot. What I mean that is you have people in positions who are speaking on behalf of youth, and you know, sometimes, that voice of the youth is missing there. You can interpret something as challenges, but if you actually speak to the youth, what they say is different. Lacking youth voice at the table, that can really shape the changes in policy and procedures and how organizations run, how governments run ...**(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

It's such an uphill battle to get to the 40 plus group, and my boss is in a different group, the above 80 group. And you were scared, you don't want to say some things, because you don't want to upset the management, and this is how the elite use poverty against poor people. Because once I'm not poor, I want to keep my job, even if it's oppressing my community **(Focus Group)**.

Participants also highlighted employment as a site in which the youth sector's hierarchal structure manifested as systemic oppression. According to de St Croix (2013; 2016), young people perceive youth sector work as intrinsically meaningful and rewarding. One of the strengths of the youth

sector is that its workers, as themselves, youth, are emotionally engaged and passionate about their work; however, de St Croix (2013; 2016) observes that the sector's hierarchal structure makes its workers vulnerable to exploitation and alienation. During the focus group, the participants spoke in great detail about the systemic oppression in employment within the youth sector, which is often insecure, precarious, and socially stratified.

I've had a manager who had three anti-oppression certificates on the wall, and she oppressed the hell out of me and my staff. So, just because these people have the academic qualifications to be there, it doesn't mean they should be there **(Focus Group)**.

There's no secure employment. I was the only woman of colour there. There were no LGBTQ people, and there was no secure employment for us. The marginalized people, we were all on contract. And they're here, preaching about precarious work, but yet they are doing the same thing to us. There's no secure employment for marginalized people in this sector **(Focus Group)**.

Participants describe a racialized hierarchy in the youth sector in which straight, white workers with academic credentials are more likely to have secure jobs, while racialized, LGBTQ and/or non-academically-educated workers are more likely to be precariously employed. The participants also noted that their lived experiences, which often propel youth into entering the youth sector, are marginalized and devalued within the labour market. Systemic oppression stratifies the youth sector such that it offers secure employment only to those who possess academic credentials, which is experienced by participants as a site of race and class privilege.

Staff Turnover and Burnout in the Youth Sector

Finally, the participants described that the previously identified challenges culminate in high rates of staff turnover and burnout. Participants expressed that many programs run with either limited or no funding. In spite of a deep passion for youth work, participants described their work as 'draining', particularly on an emotional and personal level.

Turnover and burnout are a huge issue in the sector. Because this work is draining, it takes a lot out of you **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

This sentiment was echoed across interviews, the focus group, and workshop evaluations. One workshop evaluation respondent discussed how, in spite of the necessary supports provided by the grassroots youth sector, this work is ultimately devalued.

Another big challenge in the youth sector is the lack of value placed on youth work in within itself by society ... It is one of the often lowest paid professions/industry and it is a very ... emotionally draining field of work. This lack of value and stress of the work is one of the biggest contributors to the high number of turnover in the sector

(Workshop Evaluation Respondent).

In being willing to ‘work more for less’, workers in the youth sector are vulnerable to exploitation as their labour is devalued. It is no wonder that staff turnover and burnout are common in the sector. Participants warn that, without adequate funding and supports, even passion – a key resource in the youth sector that is highly praised by all stakeholder groups – eventually runs out.²²

Opportunities in the Youth Sector

In spite of the challenges within the youth sector, participants expressed hope for the grassroots youth sector. Specifically, participants saw hope in the youth sector through economic and political opportunities. Although participants saw project-based funding as deeply problematic, they also reported to have observed increased amounts of such funding available, which have resulted the presence of supports for under-resourced communities.

There are much more specialized groups which is great, because issues of intersectionality, of different needs. A lot of the problem with umbrella groups is that they can’t adequately cover those things. So, it is good to see that those types of groups are also getting attention and funding now **(YOF Grantee Interview).**

The increased funding for pilots and projects has led to the emergence of grassroots initiatives and organizations that address the intersections of youth’s experiences such as that of mental health, race, gender, and sexuality. Indeed, this is an area where mainstream services struggle, and where grassroots initiatives and organizations, which are responsive to communities’ emerging needs, thrive.²³

Participants also perceived that the current political landscape of both Ontario and Canada to be ‘youth friendly’. For instance, the participants interpreted both the available funding opportunities

²² de St Croix, 2013; 2016

²³ Ilkiw, 2010; McCready, 2015

in the youth sector as well as current politicians' experiences in working with youth as evidence for a 'youth-friendly' nation.

Funding is also a big opportunity as well, especially for folks in positions of power who are youth-focused and really have a true youth-focused agenda, looking at even it from a national perspective, Prime Minister is a Minister of youth. Looking at changes in Parliament, as well as funders. There being more money for youth programs and youth led programs by youth who are under 29, which is also going to shape the sector **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

Participants reported that they believed that, in this youth-friendly context, with increased – albeit still project-based – funding, there is an opportunity for youth to make political change as leaders.

I think an opportunity would be to find ways to convene all of these individuals into one space to really do something. Some sort of plan to be able to address issues that youth are facing, understanding the bureaucratic process of organizations/funders and bringing together these youth groups because our voices would be stronger as one **(YOF Grantee Interview)**.

SECTION SIX:

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report documents the findings of both the process and outcome evaluations of CORE, FYI's capacity-building program. The purpose and primary goal of CORE is to increase grassroots youth-led initiatives' and organizations' capacity and long-term sustainability; in doing so, the ultimate intended impact of CORE is to enhance young leaders' abilities in providing relevant and effective programming as well as influencing public policy and decision-makers. CORE's precursor, AMP, involved a smaller cohort of participants with common characteristics;²⁴ the process evaluation revealed that CORE's participants, which include the YOF grantees, AMP 2.0, as well as other community youth sector groups, brought increased diversity to the program. Such diversity was accompanied by new dynamics, challenges, successes, and learnings for CORE. Although CORE's outcomes were met with varying levels of intensity for each of the participants, the evaluation findings indicate that CORE is on its way to reaching its goals and objectives. Below is a summary of the key findings as they relate to CORE's program objectives.

Objective 1: Young Leaders Improve Understanding of Sector Systems and Practices

Key Finding #1: CORE Supports Current and Future Generation of Youth Leaders Through Knowledge Integration, Development, and Transfer

CORE was successful in increasing young leaders' knowledge, including enhancing participants' knowledge of current issues, systems, and practices within the youth sector. Participants integrated the knowledge imparted to them through CORE to build resilience, both in their initiatives and within the broader youth sector. Further, participants developed community-based knowledge by sharing their lived experiences through the peer networks fostered by CORE. The knowledge integration and development extends beyond CORE's immediate participants, as youth leaders transfer the knowledge to youth with whom they work, thereby building the capacity of the next generation of youth leaders.

Objective 2: Young Leaders Learn New Skills and Enhance Existing Skills

Key Finding #2: CORE Builds a Diverse Skillset for Youth Leaders that is Responsive to a Dynamic Sector

Youth leaders have developed a diverse array of skills in areas such as management, finances and

²⁴ Anucha et al., 2015

funding, leadership, communication, conflict resolution, program development, research and evaluation, relationship-building, and direct practice with youth. Participants leveraged these skills in their initiatives, organizations, and communities to develop partnerships and programs and obtain funding. Participants reported that they also transfer the skills they develop to youth in their community. This diverse skillset will allow youth-led initiatives and organizations, both current and future, to adapt to the ever-evolving youth sector.

Objective 3: Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations Improve Infrastructure to Sustain Operations and Support Programs

Key Finding #3: CORE Supports the Development of Distinct Organizational Identities in the Youth Sector

In spite of the dominance of hierarchy and bureaucracy within organizational models in the non-profit sector, through their participation with CORE, youth leaders were successful in identifying their own pathways for organizational resilience. Participants demonstrated having increased knowledge about different organizational models and used this knowledge to both envision and plan for the futures of their initiatives and organizations. Several participants have also begun to codify who they are as youth-led initiatives and organizations through the development of policy and procedures and are actively seeking additional resources to support how they imagine the evolution of their groups. At least one participating group demonstrated innovation and, at the time of the evaluation, was developing organizational infrastructure based on their organizational identities and values as a non-hierarchical, community-based group. This finding is promising given that dominant organizational models may distance grassroots initiatives and organizations from the communities from which they emerged.

Key Finding #4: There is a need to consider what Organizational Capacity-Building looks like specifically in the Youth Sector

Although CORE intended to provide customized activities, several participants experienced CORE as a generalized capacity-building program. Furthermore, throughout the evaluation, participants shared contradictory messages: participants value community level work and knowledge, and often made recommendations for CORE to increase the space for grassroots mentors in the program; at the same time, participants also expressed a desire to develop technical skills; furthermore, participants reported that they experience pressures to conform to hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational structures. These findings raise critical questions as to how capacity-building for the youth sector is conceptualized. The tensions between participants' desires for capacity-building may also reflect the challenges of implementing existing capacity-building

strategies which, as suggested by the literature review, are not specific to the youth sector.²⁵ The use of generalized capacity-building models with grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations speaks to the larger issue of the professionalization of youth work, as youth-led initiatives and organizations come to be modeled after nonprofit organizational models. These changes may have the unintended consequences of distancing grassroots initiatives and organizations from the community, and de-politicizing youth work.²⁶

Key Finding #5: Youth Sector Leaders want Critical and Social Justice Frameworks for Capacity-Building in the Grassroots Youth Sector

In conceptualizing capacity-building for the youth sector, it was apparent that youth leaders who participated in CORE had strong values for working towards social justice. Namely, when asked what was missing from CORE, several participants emphasized that critical and social justice frameworks were absent from CORE's program activities. As such, to continue to provide support tailored supports, it is important for CORE to strengthen and develop capacity-building models for the youth sector – one, which, as suggested by the evaluation findings, embraces critical and social justice frameworks in supporting organizational development and resilience.

Objective 4: Youth-Led Initiatives and Organizations Are Part of Supportive Networks

Key Finding #5: CORE promotes Community-Building within the Youth Sector

Of particular note was CORE's great success in fostering a sense of belonging and community among program participants as well as the broader youth sector. All of the program participants expressed that they found value in building community within the youth sector. Regardless of their satisfaction with CORE's program activities, participants all shared that they found common experiences and challenges with their peers. The fact that belonging and community were valued was also demonstrated in changes in participants' behaviours, including increased collaboration, networking, and relationship building throughout their involvement with CORE. Participants recommended that networking should be further extended to beyond the youth sector.

²⁵ Alston-O'Connor & Houwer, 2016

²⁶ Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure, 2013

“I think an opportunity would be to find ways to convene all of these individuals into one space to really do something. Some sort of plan to be able to address issues that youth are facing, understanding the bureaucratic process of organizations/funders and bringing together these youth groups because our voices would be stronger as one.”

~ YOF Grantee Interview

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the final findings of the process and outcome evaluation of CORE, FYI's capacity-building program. Although CORE's MIS provided information on all of CORE's participants, this evaluation was limited by the fact that not all of the YOF grantee, AMP 2.0, and other community initiatives and organizations were represented in the interviews and focus group. Given the six key findings, the following subsection provides a series of recommendations to enhance CORE's program experience as well as its ability to consistently meet its program objectives for all of its participants. In order to accommodate the needs of a diverse and dynamic youth sector, CORE requires more funding to facilitate additional resources and staff in supporting capacity-building for grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations. Given existing constraints, the following recommendations are made to maximize CORE's limited funding:

1. Continue to Develop Critical, Social justice-oriented, and Pluralistic models and resources for Capacity-Building in the grassroots youth sector

Many of CORE's program activities, such as KEMs and the online toolkits, appear to be based on Westernized, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and technical approaches to capacity-building. These approaches, which are implicated in colonialism, racism, and poverty, are also identified by participants as challenges within the youth and non-profit sectors. While CORE intended to support grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations in developing knowledge and skills in navigating a sector that is implicated in inequality, a lack of critical, social justice-oriented, and pluralistic approaches to capacity building may have imposed mainstream models of organizational development onto grassroots youth-led initiatives and organizations. Further, while CORE's current resources impart important skills and knowledge for the development of organizational resilience, young leaders also desire a balanced approach to capacity-building which embraces values for community, social justice, and pluralism. This evaluation therefore recommends that CORE incorporate time and space throughout its program to allow participants to think through how they can navigate the current funding context while resisting oppressive structures. Elements that may be integrated into CORE to balance its program may include the following:

- a. Increased knowledge on power imbalances within the youth and nonprofit sectors
- b. Increased content on social justice frameworks including critique of the dominance of Western values in existing capacity-building approaches
- c. Increased time and space in program activities to include peers and mentors from the community

- d. Increased content and opportunities for advocacy

2. Continue to Support the Bidirectional Flow of Knowledge

All of the participants valued the knowledge gained from participating in CORE; however, some participants expressed concern when their existing knowledge and expertise on a given topic were not acknowledged by program leads, who were, at times, seen as ‘experts’. Rather, participants valued learning from the experiential knowledge of their peers as well as from other leaders in the grassroots youth sector. The bidirectional flow of youth sector knowledge should therefore continue to be prioritized in implementing CORE.

3. Continue to Facilitate Networking and Community-Building Opportunities within the Youth Sector and Beyond

Participants expressed that they found high value in CORE’s networking opportunities. Further, participants shared that the sense of belonging and community fostered by CORE was novel and unexpected, especially in the current funding context in the youth and non-profit sectors. Although these networking opportunities were described as rich, meaningful, and as impactful experiences, participants had interests in connecting with sectors beyond that of the youth sector – a broader approach that they found lacking in the implementation of CORE. To enhance the networking opportunities, CORE should continue to support networking opportunities that are inclusive of diverse sectors.

4. Prioritize a Smaller Cohort of Participants for Customized Capacity-Building Supports

While CORE’s strengths lie in the program’s ability to facilitate community-building and networking, the outcome evaluation revealed that the program’s objectives were not realized at similar levels of intensity amongst all participants. Further, the process evaluation revealed that participants appeared to have uneven engagement with CORE. Given funding constraints, CORE may consider prioritizing a smaller cohort of participants in the program for customized supports such as one-on-one mentoring and coaching. Prioritization should be based on in-depth assessments that explore initiatives’ strengths, needs, and goals. It is important to underscore that CORE’s program activities were highly valued by several participants; however, the mandatory engagement with CORE was a detriment to other participants.

5. Improve Program Efficacy by Avoiding Dual Relationships with Participants, especially as it concerns Funding

This evaluation found that while CORE’s program activities were highly valued by some participants, others found the mandatory engagements with CORE as a detriment to the program.

Further, although participants did not speak explicitly on instances where FYI was both the capacity-building organization and the charitable partner, OM, or trustee, CORES' MIS revealed that in these instances, capacity-building activities, such as one-on-one mentorship and coaching sessions, were repurposed to monitor and caution initiatives and organizations in their participation with CORE. These dynamics speak to the power imbalances that youth-led initiatives and organizations must navigate within the youth and non-profit sectors – such power imbalances are further intensified when FYI is both the capacity-building organization as well as the charitable partner, OM, or trustee for a given youth-led initiative or organization. As such, to maximize CORE's efficacy, FYI should avoid having dual relationships with participating youth-led initiatives and organizations, particularly as it concerns connections to funding – including both direct and indirect or invisible ties.

WORKS CITED

- Alston-O'Connor, E. & Houwer, R. (2016). *Investing in the Future: Strategies for Building the Organizational Capacity of Youth-led Organizations and Initiatives*. Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange. York University: Toronto, ON.
- Anucha, N., Houwer, R., Nyarko, M., & Romaldi, C. (2015). *An Evaluation of the Agency Mentorship Program. The Applied Social Welfare Research and Evaluation Group*. York University: Toronto, ON.
- de St Croix, T. (2013). 'I just Love Youth Work!' Emotional Labour, Passion and Resistance. *Youth and Policy*, (110), 33-51.
- de St Croix, T. (2016). *Grassroots Youth Work: Policy, Passion and Resistance in Practice*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- For Youth Initiative. (n.d.). **About Core**. Retrieved October 14, 2016 from http://www.foryouth.ca/about_core
- For Youth Initiative. (2016a). *A Timeline of FYI's Capacity-Building Journey*. [Prezi Presentation]. Retrieved December 1, 2016 from https://prezi.com/ncfxfeg5bbsb/copy-of-timeline_core-launch/
- For Youth Initiative. (2016b). *Navigating Charitable Partnerships: A Toolkit for Grassroots Youth-led Initiatives*. Retrieved October 17th, 2016 from http://www.foryouth.ca/navigating_charitable_partnerships_a_toolkit_for_grassroots_youth_led_initiatives
- Hoskins, E. & Meilleur, M. (2012). *Ontario's Youth Action Plan*. Retrieved on October 10, 2016 from http://everykid.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/1210on.youth_.action.plan_.pdf
- Ilkiw, V. (2010). Emergence of the Youth-led Sector. *The Philanthropist*, 23(1), 36-43.
- James Bell Associates. (2008a). *Evaluation Brief: Conducting an Outcome Evaluation*. Arlington, VA: James Bell Associates.
- James Bell Associates. (2008b). *Evaluation Brief: Conducting a Process Evaluation*. Arlington, VA: James Bell Associates.

- Johnston-Goodstar, K., & VeLure Roholt, R. (2013). Unintended Consequences of Professionalizing Youth Work: Lessons from Teaching and Social Work. *Child and Youth Services*, 34(2), 139-155.
- Kapucu, N. (2007). Capacity Building for Community-Based Small Nonprofit Minority Health Agencies in Central Florida. *Management*, 24(3), 10-17.
- McCready, L. (2015). A Double Life: Black Queer Youth Coming of Age in Divided Cities. *The Educational Forum*, 79(4), 353-358.
- Ontario Trillium Foundation. (n.d.). *Youth Opportunities Fund 2014-2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.otf.ca/community-impact/grants-awarded/youth-opportunities-fund-2014-2015>
- Ontario Trillium Foundation. (2015). *Youth Opportunities Fund: Grassroots Innovation Guide 2015-2016*. Retrieved from http://www.otf.ca/sites/default/files/yof_booklet.pdf
- Ontario Trillium Foundation. (2016). *Organizational Mentor Agreement*. Retrieved October 17th, 2016 from http://www.otf.ca/sites/default/files/yof_y3_-_organizational_mentor_agreement.pdf
- Volunteer Canada, Manulife Financial, Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development, & Harris Decima. (2010). *Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for Our Communities*. Ottawa, ON: Volunteer Canada. Retrieved from <https://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap-report>
- Volunteer Canada, Manulife Financial, & 27 Shift Consulting (2013). *Building the Bridge for Volunteer Engagement: The Canadian Voluntary Sector's Perspective on the Trends and Issues Identified in Bridging the Gap*. Ottawa, ON: Volunteer Canada. Retrieved from <https://volunteer.ca/content/building-bridge-ii-full-report>
- Volunteer Canada, Manulife Financial, Harris Decima, 27 Shift Consulting, & Ontario Volunteer Centre Network. (2012). *Bridging the Gap in Ontario: A Profile of Current Trends in Volunteering*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Retrieved from <https://volunteer.ca/content/bridging-gap-ontario>



OUR VISION

An Ontario where shared knowledge is transformed into positive impact for all youth.

OUR MISSION

To make research evidence and evaluation practices accessible and relevant to Ontario's grassroots youth sector through knowledge mobilization, capacity building and evaluation leadership.

ABOUT US

The Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange (YouthREX) is a province-wide initiative based at the School of Social Work at York University with five regional Hubs across Ontario that promote the integration of research evidence and evaluation in the development and delivery of Ontario's youth programs. YouthREX regional hubs engage local grassroots youth serving organizations, academic partners, youth and policy stakeholders in capacity building, knowledge mobilization, research and evaluation opportunities.

YouthREX is primarily funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services with extensive contributions from York University and the three YouthREX partner universities.

www.youthrex.com // exchange.youthrex.com

@REXforYouth

416.736-5433 / 1.844.876.5433

youthrex@yorku.ca