

Top Ten Things We Learned About positive youth development in Ontario

1. As a focus for their work a number of **groups are referring to Positive Youth Development.**

- Groups include Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Stepping Up, Stepping Stones), YouthREX, Youth CI and Lions Quest Canada – The Centre for Positive Youth Development among others

2. Some people were talking **Positive Youth Development** (specifically defined) **and** some participants were talking about **positive youth development** (a broad mindset) and there is room for both approaches.

- There was a deep discussion about what positive youth development means that became a recurring thread through the discussions at the gathering.
- Groups were -
 - debating whether the term was a verb or a noun,
 - discussing the different definitions that are generally accepted in the field,
 - viewing it as a stated goal or an ongoing process,
 - sharing their organization's own definition.

3. There is a lot of **positive energy and a desire to work together** to move the agenda forward.

- We recognized that in the past the catalysts for action related to children and youth has been as a reaction to negative situations (drug use, violence, poverty) and there is a move to be proactive and to encourage youth as advocates to create awareness and drive the discussions.
- We must think about –
 - What we can do together
 - What we can do in our sector/application
 - What we can do as an individual agency
- “Don’t let great be the enemy of good” in the process
- The term ‘network’ was used to crystalize a commitment to contribute
- We agree that we are part of a bigger purpose to improve the outcomes for wellbeing of children and youth

4. Participants recognized the **need to develop a shared understanding** related to positive youth development.

- Accessible tools and sharing expectations are very important to this group
- A fluid idea/community to advance pyd in the way we have begun to discuss
- A common language can be used in many ways including from funders will help service providers who are applying for support
- The definition that the group offered after discussion was “Supporting all young people in becoming healthy, happy, contributing members of society.” (and then providing each aspect with the indicators for each)
- The group also offered positive youth development as an approach to the problems/challenges identified by the various indexes we use and our focus needs to be on how to work on the challenges

As collected from the Ontario Positive Youth Development Champions Gathering on September 22nd and 23rd, 2015 in St. George, Ontario.

5. There is a need to **make useful data and evaluation material accessible.**

- “Important to have numbers people understand” people like graphs that follow the good=up and bad=down formula
- What values or imperatives do we want to reflect?
- What do we want to learn about?
- What do you want to pay attention to?
- Is it a framework of wellbeing – the potential of an index using the MCYS document that can be used inter-provincially and would hold up internationally?
- Mapping exercise done prior to the meeting should be continued and enhanced with the tool being accessible for telling the story
- Building capacity
- How do we use imperfect data?
- What quality standards are reasonable?
- We need to build trust in the evaluation
- Who should be using it and how should it be used?
- Outcome based vs singular focus
- Process of change = quality of investment (Students Commission example)
- Important to develop a common language first around what is important – factors that make a difference in the long term in people’s lives – what do young people need? What should we be doing to make this accessible/happen?

6. **Both established and new relationships are key** for moving the positive youth development agenda forward.

- Respect the players in the field already
- Invite others to the table
- Recognize innovation

7. There is an opportunity to be deliberate at all levels of outreach to **be mindful of diversity and inclusion.**

- All areas of equity, diversity and inclusion must be addressed including but not limited to age, geography, demographic, culture, region
- What is the voice is represented in the data? Who is missing? (group liked the child’s perspective shared in UNICEF model)
- In many areas where there is evidence it is still missing for the micro populations – pay attention to those conversations to see if the ‘evidence’ is really supporting them

8. We agree that we can **increase our reach by working collaboratively**

- Systems change
- Agree on what government should do and what foundations should do (happening already in work place and disability sectors)
- An informal network that provides potential pathways to collaboration, deeper knowledge, and coordination of services

9. We can do a better job of **telling the stories** surrounding positive youth development.

- Need to get positive youth development to the level of Second Hand Smoke example – reach critical mass to get people to care
- Advocacy
- Build our capacity to tell, methodology, tools, basis for learning and continuous improvement
- Issues media focus on are actually declining in relevancy when it comes to real people and real issues
- Measuring What Matters – provides the full landscape, good approach to follow

10. There is a **need to continue the conversation** as a **large group** and also as **application-specific groups** including funders/policy-makers, researchers and practitioners.

- Opportunities where all of the players are present in the room
- Creating the climate where people are respectful yet comfortable enough to speak freely
- What is the vehicle and as passengers what is our role, how long are we on for the ride?
- Gather as an opportunity to share
- Converge to gain understanding and diverge to connect to the concepts as individual agencies

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