



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

Environmental Scan of
Planning Tables
Serving Children and
Youth in Grey Bruce
2023

Internal Report prepared by Jill Umbach, Grey Bruce
Children's Alliance, September 2023

Introduction

The Grey Bruce Children's Alliance has undertaken a rapid environmental scan of strategic planning/network tables serving vulnerable children and youth in Grey Bruce after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Grey Bruce, we have a history of strong interagency collaboration between multiple organizations. While many tables are government mandated, we have many tables working together because of limited human and financial resources across a large geographic area. Overall, this has resulted in a high degree of local partnership and collective action.

Pre-COVID 19 pandemic, surveys of networks/planning tables serving vulnerable children and youth had been carried out by the Grey Bruce Children's Alliance (2019), Vital Focus on Youth (2019) and the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2020). Post-pandemic the Grey Bruce Ontario Health Team (2022-2023), the Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy (2023), Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and Vital Signs Advisory Committee are reviewing their plans but no one is specifically looking at children/youth networks.

Survey Results

Eight organizations from the Children's Alliance and 11 key stakeholders were interviewed. Youth voices/family councils members were not interviewed due to summer holidays and/or inactivity. One Indigenous 2 Spirit Mentor was interviewed.

Respondents indicated the **top issues facing children and youth in Grey Bruce** were mental health (37%), substance misuse (27%), poverty (housing + food) (21%), youth transitional supports (5%), wait lists for services (5%) and lack of shared service planning (5%).

- Since 2021, an estimated 21,900 adults within the Grey-Bruce Ontario Health Team (OHT) patient population have experienced mental health and addiction issues.
- Approximately 1,600 to 1,800 children and youth access community child and youth mental health services each year (GB OHT 2021)
- 13% of children and youth under the age of 18 in Grey Bruce live in low income households. (Stats Can Census 2021)
- A range of 6.9% to 22.6% of children and youth under the age of 18 live in low income households at the municipal level. (Stats Can Census 2021)

Additional issues that are important include creation of safe youth spaces, increasing youth voices, address inter-generational trauma, racism, sexual harassment, trans-homophobia, developmental delays during pandemic and eating disorders.

Survey Results

From a system change perspective, what collaborations are missing?

- **Youth Wellness Hubs**
 - More youth friendly spaces
 - Safe spaces for queer youth
 - Social hubs to counteract the isolation and substance misuse
 - Face-to-face engagement to develop relationships
 - More skills building + service provision in the same space
 - Initiatives like Launchpad and The Foundry in other parts of the Counties
 - Collective programming
- **Youth focused healthcare**
 - Ministry of Health + Ministry of Education collaboration
 - Childcare staff recruitment and retention
 - Autism program staff recruitment and retention
 - Addressing complex special needs children and youth with mental health issues
- **Collaboration/service delivery for youth substance abuse prevention**
- **Formalizing transitional supports for youth collaboration**
- **Private sector funding and long-term commitments to youth initiatives (housing)**

Who is Missing from many tables?

- CMHA-GB and GBCFS to be at the table more often with resources
- Youth voices
- Families we serve
- People with grounded expertise/lived experience
- Indigenous communities
- Newcomers/Diverse community groups
- School boards
- Private funders
- Youth Engagement Coordinators
- School Boards
- Mental Health and hospital connections to community agencies
- Universities/Colleges - research
- Faith-based/culture-based community groups

Mapping Results

A Mapping Exercise started with cataloging planning tables, networks, committees and working groups into 2 main categories: ones that serve All Ages and those that serve Children/Youth only using the following definitions:

- **Planning Tables, Networks and Committees** exchange information, coordinate sector programming, carry out collective research and take collective action. Some are government mandated and others have formed to fill a gap.
- **Working Groups** are domain-specific and focus on discussion or activity around a specific subject area. Most working groups are organized to delve into a particular problem, identify solutions, take action and make recommendations to larger Planning Table, Network or Committee. Community of Practice and/or Situation Tables have been grouped under Working Groups.

Comments:

- Government mandated tables remain in place and have dedicated staff to provide leadership, coordination and admin support. However, many non-government mandated tables do not have sufficient operational dollars and dedicated staff to provide table/network coordination after the COVID 19 pandemic.
- The Ontario Health Team Grey Bruce is a new planning table that is forming new working groups and a Community Council.
- Many key stakeholders expressed challenges with hiring and retaining staff; COVID 19 pandemic burnout, and lack of resources to engage more fully with youth.

Youth Voices/Advisory Councils

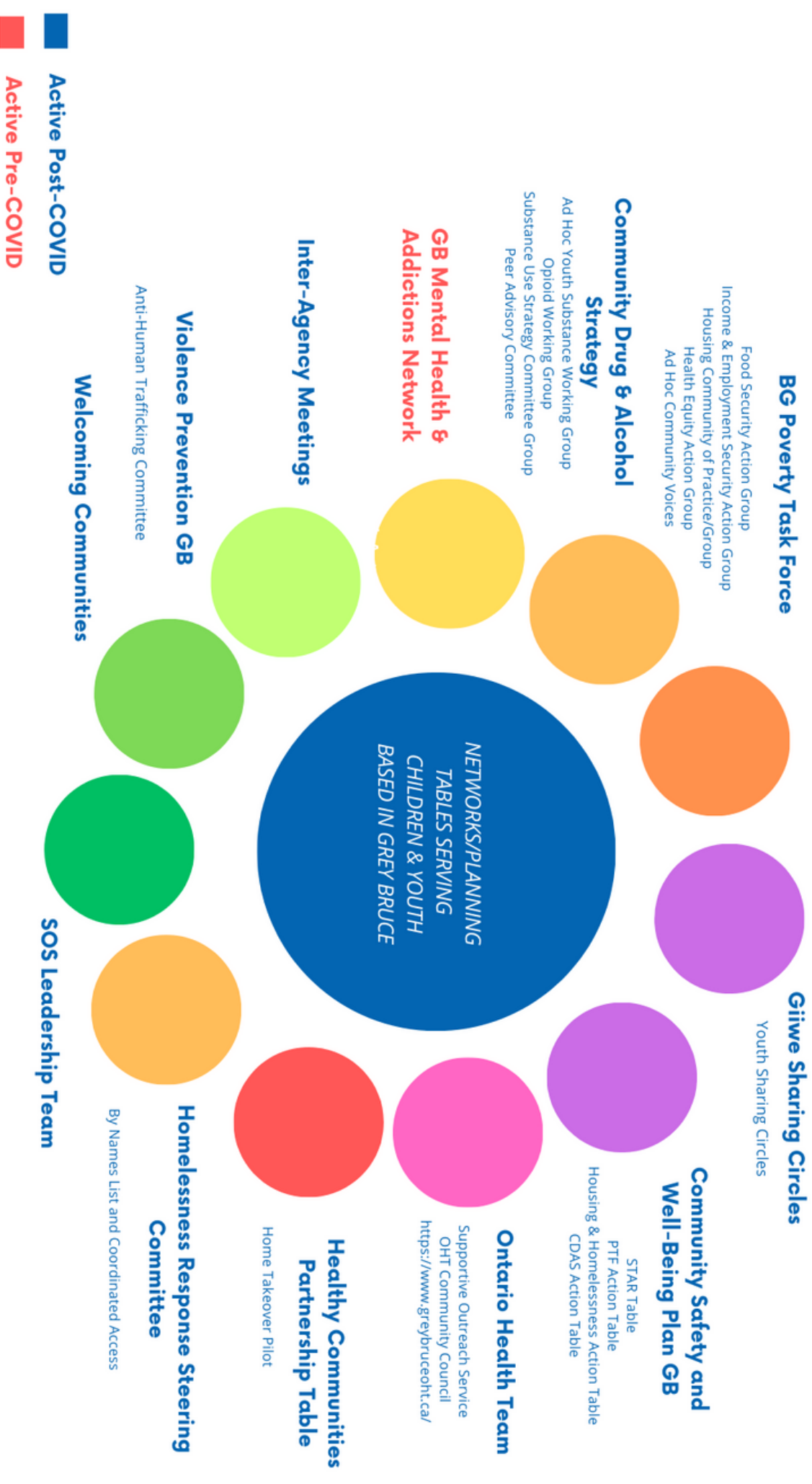
Many of the larger tables also have Advisory Councils made up of people with lived experience. Due to the importance of youth voices, these were mapped separately.

- **Youth Voices/Advisory Councils** represent the voices of the population we are serving. In this case the report lists mostly youth and family representing groups. Some are all ages, peer-led, domain-specific and a few are youth based.

Comments:

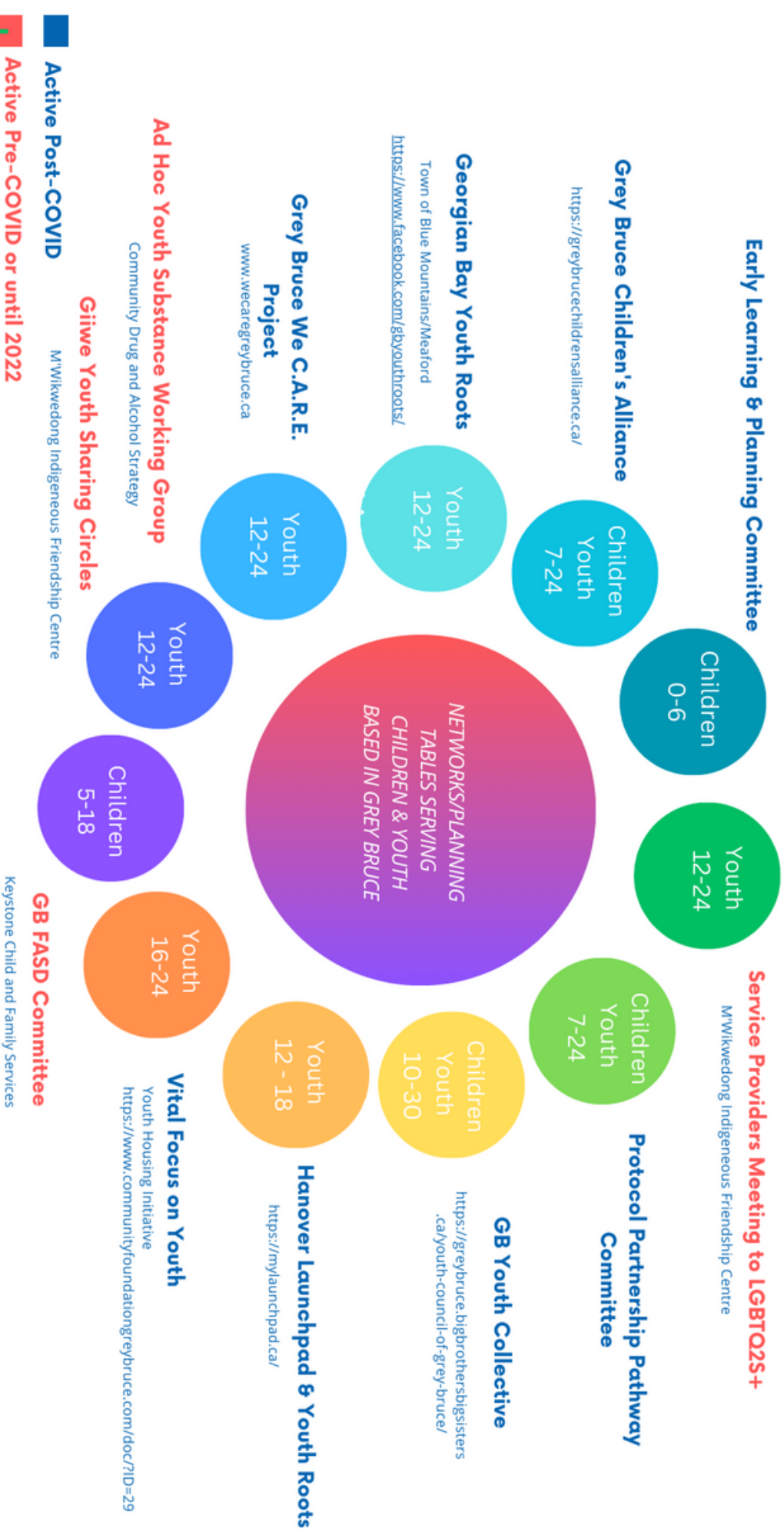
- 4 out of 10 Councils listed were not active by the end of the COVID 19 pandemic and have not resumed. For example, Keystone CFS's Youth Advisory Committee reported a need to re-engage, re-focus and find funding to support the Committee.
- Some "youth hubs" are listed such as Hanover Launchpad but youth hubs and safe spaces for vulnerable youth was mentioned often.
- A New Indigenous Youth Council has sufficient funding but recognizes that peer-led councils require some back-stopping by staff/mentors.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN MAP: ALL AGES

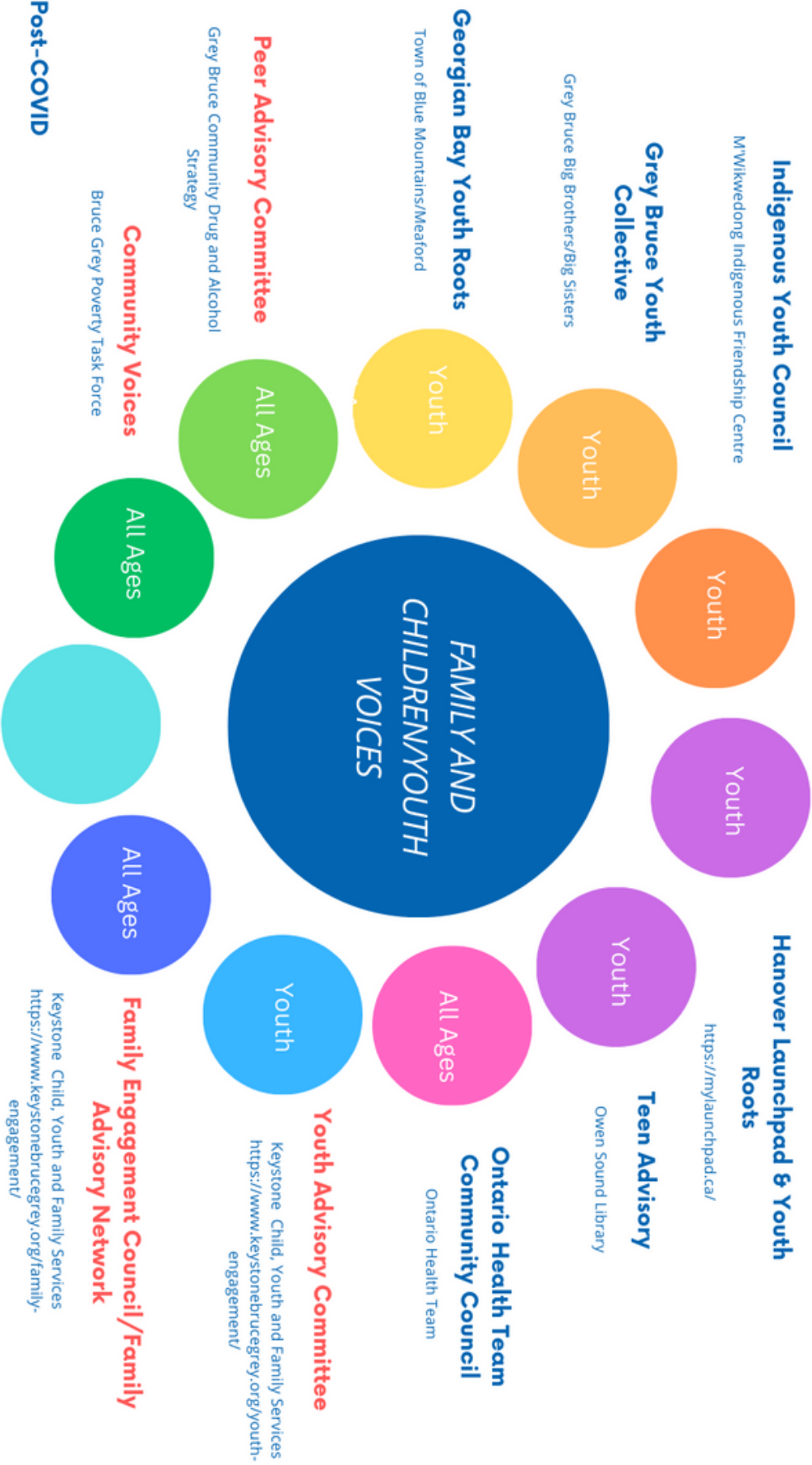


ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN MAP: CHILDREN/YOUTH ONLY

FOCUS



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN MAP: VOICES



Recommendations

How can we build more strategic networks to reach shared goals?



01

Create Safe Spaces

Joint planning with youth to create safe spaces, including gender diverse spaces, culturally diverse, land-based and creative opportunities. Encourage more face-to-face as well as virtual communication and engagement.



02

Variety of Youth Spaces

Create spaces where youth go. City of Owen Sound turns off power to plugs in parks to discourage people experiencing homelessness to hang out in parks; but this impacts on youth using park spaces.



03

Youth Voices

Celebrate awesomeness and diversity. Ensure barriers are reduced i.e. transportation, language, etc. and build trust and peer leadership.



04

Simplify Access to Mental Health Resources for children

Develop joint strategies to advocate for additional local services and simplify the process for families.



05

Joint Planning with Youth

Social anxiety is high with youth and they don't trust easily. Identify barriers and solutions together. Families and youth need systems simplified. Resources are limited and wait lists wear people down.



06

Agency Staff Recruitment and Retention

Burnout of service providers is seen across all tables. Agencies make referrals but don't do follow up. Better service planning is needed for complex cases.

Opportunities for Strengthening Networks by Children's Alliance



01

Service Providers Meeting to LGBTQ2S+

Service Providers Meeting to LGBTQ2S+ was created out of need but stopped in 2022. Was meeting monthly but workload of facilitator was too high to continue the coordination, facilitation and admin support to the table.



02

We C.A.R.E Project

We C.A.R.E. Project started as a network responding to youth suicide under a OTF grant. Needs assessment was completed but a Coordinator was not funded in Phase 3. Want to create more structure to support the program and online services.



03

Youth Substance Working Group

Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Coordinator's hours are reduced from full-time to part-time (2 days/week) and so group remains Ad Hoc.



04

Keystone Youth Engagement Council/Family Engagement Council

Keystone Youth Council/Family Council both need new focus and funding. Keystone Family Engagement Expert is currently on leave. Need to restart.



05

Giiwe Youth Sharing Circle

M'Wikwedong IFC hosted sharing circles to build working relationship with child/youth protection and housing agencies serving Indigenous families/youth. Need to re-connect this equity work.



06

Ontario Health Team

Engage with **Ontario Health Team Grey Bruce** on the larger OHT Transitional Aged Youth Strategy.