

The State of the Youth-Led Sector: A Decade Since the “Summer of the Gun”

Delivered to Community, 2018





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
For Youth Initiative	3
Laidlaw Foundation	3
Introduction	3
Research Methodology	4
Research Participant Profile	5
Youth-Led and Sustainability	6
Timeline of Events	7
Youth Challenge Fund Context	8
Youth Challenge Fund Successes	11
Youth Challenge Fund Challenges	12
Youth Challenge Fun Learnings	13
Legacy Initiatives	16
Youth Opportunity Fund	18
Current State of the Youth-Led Sector	22
Threats to the Youth-Led Sector	26
Future of the Youth-Led Sector	27
Recommendations	28
Conclusion	30
Bibliography	31

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Executive Summary

For Youth Initiative and Laidlaw Foundation supported a qualitative research project that investigated trends related to the evolution of youth-led ideology and areas of growth for youth-led initiatives in the City of Toronto in 2015, a decade after the Summer of the Gun. This research study collected qualitative data from 13 participants in various roles in the youth-led sector regarding their perspective on youth-led ideology and initiatives, factors affecting sustainability, and the current state of the youth-led sector.

Research Participants defined youth-led initiatives as:

1. Youth have real decision-making power.
2. A spectrum.
3. An ever-evolving concept.

Youth Challenge Fund was implemented in 2006 as a response to the increase in gun violence during the Summer of the Gun in 2005 and funded 110 youth-led initiatives in Toronto. Successes of YCF included the increased awareness of the youth-led ideology, the inclusion of youth voices in systems level decisions, and the recognition of the positive contributions that youth can make. Challenges included pressured timelines, lack of established frameworks, power imbalances between funders and youth, few learning and mentorship opportunities available for youth leaders, and lack of evaluation processes. These successes and challenges as well as internal and external factors influenced the sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

Lessons from Youth Challenge Fund were used to create Youth Opportunity Fund and address challenges related to the understanding of what youth-led means, successive funding, mentorship, skill development, evaluation, and the current state of the youth-led sector. The future of youth-led initiatives will involve the integration of technology into youth-led initiatives, the advocacy-driven nature of initiatives, the diversification of funding, and collaboration. Threats to this future include disappearing funding, burnout among youth leaders, and lack of support and mentorship from adult allies.

Recommendations to ensure the successful future of youth-led initiatives:

1. Funding
2. Mentorship
3. Valuing Youth
4. Innovation
5. Sustainability
6. Gun Violence and Racism

The continued issue of gun violence and violent crime among youth in Toronto means that youth-led initiatives continue to be relevant in the present day and warrant immediate attention from all stakeholders in the private and public sectors.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

For Youth Initiative

For Youth Initiative (FYI) is committed to supporting young people in accessing opportunities for growth and achievement in areas that they might otherwise find barriers to pursuing. They do this primarily in the York-South Weston Community in Toronto through providing mentorship, tools, and other opportunities to youth participants. FYI endeavors to create a community of diverse youth who are empowered to pursue their own goals.

Laidlaw Foundation


Laidlaw Foundation is committed to providing opportunities for young people to become fully empowered and engaged members of society through the funding of projects. They consistently support innovative ideas that work towards sectoral and systemic change to support young people in achieving this. Additionally, Laidlaw Foundation works through consistent promotion of young people's skills to create a society that includes youth voices in social, political, and economic decisions and endeavors.

Introduction

This research project was supported by Laidlaw Foundation and FYI to better understand the ideology of the youth-led sector and its evolution from 2005 with the emergence of the Youth Challenge Fund to a decade later in 2015, as it relates to understanding the current state of the youth-led sector and creating sustainable practices for the current day, January 2018.

While overall rates of violent crime have been decreasing over the past 30 years, violent crimes among youth specifically have increased with racially marginalized youth living in poverty being most vulnerable to experiencing violence (Tewelde & Olawoye, 2013). After a significant increase in gun violence in the City of Toronto during the summer of 2005 (coined the 'Summer of the Gun'), the onus on the provincial government to address violent crime increased. In response, there was a heightened political focus on the impact of violence, racism, and poverty in marginalized neighborhoods as it specifically related to the lives of youth.

As a result of this political focus, the Government of Ontario and United Way created the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) and developed the term 'youth-led' as it related to initiatives that were led by young people. YCF was not the only funding effort to emerge at this time to support young people in addressing issues in their communities. However, the YCF and its evolution into the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) will be used to symbolize the emergence of youth-led as an identified method for organizing.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Youth-led as an ideology has existed longer than the term itself and has been utilized widely to describe a way of empowering youth to work toward social change. In the 1990s there was already the emergence of youth in leadership roles in various socially-oriented organizations. However, the concept of youth-led as a formal method of social action gained momentum with establishment of YCF.

The introduction of YCF sparked decade-long learnings related to engaging youth in leading political, social, and economic action and change. Laidlaw Foundation and FYI have jointly conducted this qualitative research study, and analysed the results along with historical and contemporary research and reports to better understand and utilize these learnings. The purpose of releasing this report is to supplement already existing reports, such as United Way's *Youth Challenge Fund: Preliminary Findings*, to further knowledge related to how the YCF contributed to the development of the youth-led sector, the influence the YCF had on impacted youth violent crime and other social issues, and how the youth-led sector can grow from this knowledge. The findings of this research and analysis are outlined in this report as well as recommendations for increasing the sustainability of the youth-led sector.

Research Methodology

To gather qualitative data on the development and evolution of youth-led initiatives in Toronto, thirteen key stakeholders were interviewed. The group of stakeholders were part of a larger group of identified experts, funders, participants, and/or policy makers in the youth-led sector over the time-period and projects of focus. An initial call for participation was sent out to identified individuals. From there, participants self-selected if they were able to participate in a 1-hour long, qualitative interview either in person or over the phone. Interviews were conducted over a 2 month period (from December 2016 to February 2017) to allow for accommodation of busy schedules. Barriers to participating for the larger group of identified individuals included a lack of time, conflict of interest with current position, and no response to the original email.

The interviews were semi-structured in design and followed the general flow of topics outlined below. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for the interviewer and research participant to engage in a dialogue about the research participant's experiences, observations, and analysis of youth-led initiatives. The interviewers felt that a fully structured interview would limit discussion and would not capture the diversity of experience within the research participant pool.

The interviewer introduced the research project and situated the research participant regarding the timeframe in which they were working and the general flow of the conversation at the onset of each interview. The interviewer then indicated that there would be questions and prompts to guide the conversation.



Verbal permission to record the interview was obtained by the interviewer and confidentiality parameters were reviewed.


Interviews first focused on the individual's experience in the sector, which led into their own definition of what the concept of youth-led means and how it is put into practice. The discussion progressed to the social and political factors that contributed to the development of YCF. The conversation broadened to discuss external factors that contribute to the sustainability of youth-led initiatives and how these factors developed, evolved, and changed from the introduction of YCF to the current state of the youth-led sector and the creation of YOF. The conversation then focused in on internal factors contributing to sustainability and patterns that research participants had observed in youth-led initiatives that were successful in attaining sustainability, and in initiatives that were not. Finally, the interview turned to current strengths and threats to the youth-led sector in Toronto and what research participants thought the future of youth-led initiatives might hold.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer and analyzed for consistent themes across areas of focus using thematic coding and expanded upon using historical and contemporary research and reports. The results of this analysis are discussed in this report.

Research Participant Profile

The thirteen research participants were currently involved in the following initiatives and organizations at the time of the interview: MaRS; Youth Action Network (YAN); United Way of Toronto; The SPOT; Community Empowerment Enterprises (CEE); City of Toronto; ArtReach; Ontario Trillium Foundation; and Young Potential Fathers. Research participants also listed many YCF funded initiatives and other youth-led initiatives that they had previously been involved with either as adult allies, youth leaders, or service users.

Throughout the interviews there were several themes identified across the experience that research participants had regarding their entrance to the youth-led sector. Three participants stated that they had grown-up in neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty, racialized, and/or marginalized populations. These participants all articulated that this experience was the catalyst for their involvement in the youth-led sector. As these participants had lived in neighbourhoods that dealt with multiple issues, they became attune to identifying issues and creative solutions early in their lives. Three participants began their own community initiatives and four participants interacted with or were funded by the Youth Challenge Fund as one of the originally funded projects. Three participants work at an organization that is funded as a Legacy Project of YCF.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Currently, two of those interviewed are still involved with their original initiative. All research participants except one are still involved in some capacity in the youth-led sector in Toronto as policy makers, organizational mentors, capacity-building, independent consultants, researchers, and/or granting bodies. Having experience that spans the entire length of time between the inception of the YCF to the time of the interview allowed the research participants to share a unique perspective and valuable insights related to the evolution of youth-led and the current state of the youth-led sector.

Throughout their collective experiences, the research participants have developed comprehensive ideas regarding the definition of what youth-led means, the sustainability of youth-led initiatives, and the current threats to and future of the youth-led sector, which they shared during their interviews.

Youth-Led and Sustainability

Defining Youth-Led

Little academic research exists that speaks to youth-led ideology and even less attempts to define youth-led at all. When asked to define their understanding of what youth-led means, research participants expressed several different points of view on how to define youth-led as an ideology and in practice, as well as how it is still relevant today. Some research participants struggled to define the concept at all and stated that they knew it when they saw it but couldn't put the concept into words. Despite the varying viewpoints and ongoing struggle to articulate what youth-led is, several characteristics of youth-led remained consistent:


Characteristics:

1. Youth have real decision-making power.
2. Youth-led exists on a spectrum.
3. Youth-led is an ever-evolving concept.

Decision-Making Power

Research participants highlighted several key conditions that must be met for youth to have real decision-making power. One of these conditions was that of access. Specifically, access to policy-makers, funders, and those who can enact systemic change. Additionally, a youth-led initiative was described as being indigenous to community, and engaging in collaboration with community partners such as adult allies and other community programs.

When youth have real decision-making power, the common tokenization of marginalized groups is rejected. To call an initiative youth-led when one youth is used as the face of the initiative while adults hold the power to make decisions and enact change was overwhelming expressed as being in direct contradiction with the

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

youth-led ideology. It is important to emphasize that a youth-led initiative does not exist outside of having adults supporting its function (both internally and externally), but that the youth must have real power to make decisions within the initiative.

Spectrum

Research participants discussed the idea that youth-led exists on a spectrum. This concept was demonstrated by the varying experiences of what youth-led looked like as described by research participants. Youth who lead initiatives require different partnerships and support depending on their age, experience, education, skills, and other influences. While having youth in decision-making positions is undoubtedly important, this can look different depending on the context. It can mean having the youth-voice embedded in the institution or could involve ensuring youth are involved in all steps of program development. Essentially, youth-led efforts require the acknowledgement of the range of value, skills, and knowledge that this demographic can bring to efforts for social and systemic change.

Ever-Evolving

Research participants suggested that youth-led is an ever-evolving concept. It is an ideology that is embedded in the changing social and political context. Youth-led ideology can be visualized as a process where many influences, such as the youth, program mandates, and community, interact with one another to address social issues and create change within communities (Skinner, Speilman, & French, 2013).

Defining Sustainability

In addition to discussing what youth-led means, research participants also addressed the ambiguity of the concept of sustainability as it relates to youth-led initiatives. The lack of systems in place to support youth-led initiatives for the long-term was an issue cited by multiple research participants as the key component contributing to the finite nature of these initiatives. However, although sustainability has often been assumed to refer to the initiatives themselves, the research participants challenged this notion. They discussed the idea that the skills learned by the youth who were involved in the youth-led sector are the sustainable component of these initiatives rather than the staying power of the initiative itself. Additionally, the changes (on community and system levels) that the youth contribute to either through their initiatives or by utilizing the skills they gained are also components of the sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

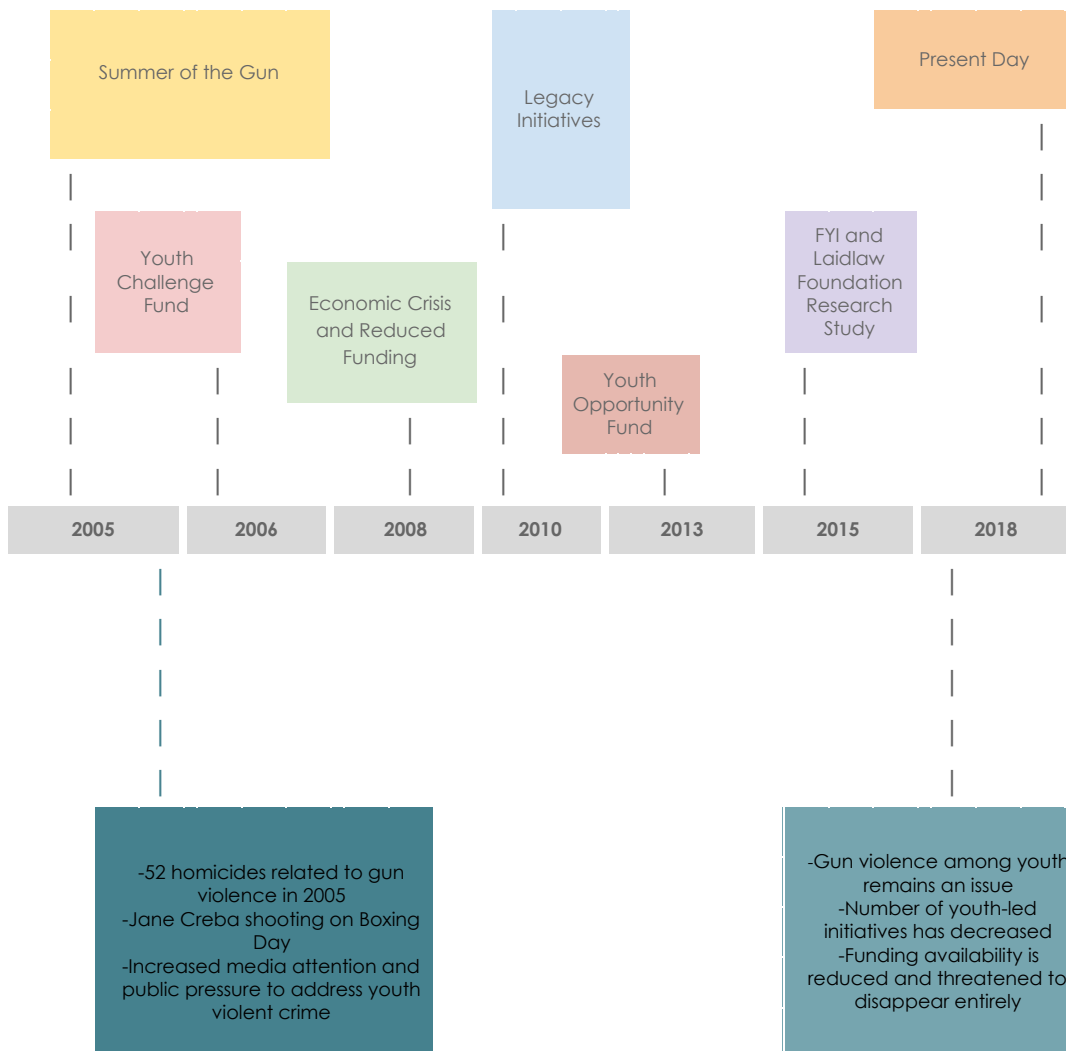
Despite a variety of experiences and opinions regarding what youth-led and sustainability truly mean in relation to this sector, all research participants had multiple learnings to contribute to the discussion on the development, evolution, and, learnings from the last decade of youth-led initiatives in Toronto. To situate this discussion, this report will first discuss the emergence of youth-led as an ideology as it relates to the development of the Youth Challenge Fund (YCF), the legacy



initiatives derived from YCF, and finally, the emergence of the provincial granting opportunity- the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF).

Timeline of Events

The below chart shows the timeline of major events in the youth-led sector beginning from the Summer of the Gun until the present day.



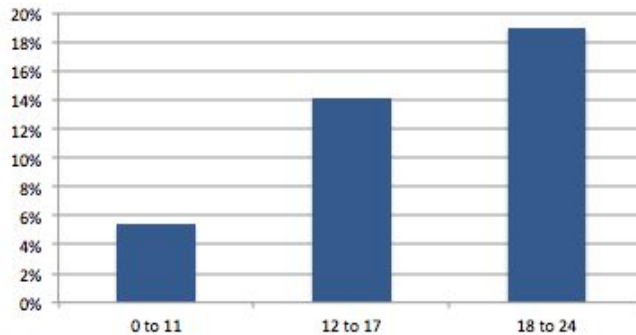


Youth Challenge Fund Context

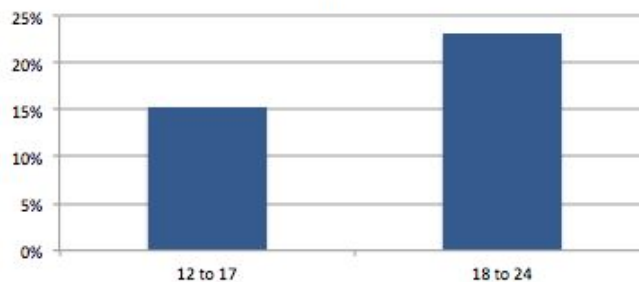
Gun Violence

During the Summer of the Gun in 2005, youth under the age of 25 accounted for 38.5% of the total number of victims of violent crime and 38.4% of the total number of perpetrators of violent crime (Toronto Police Service, 2005). It is important to note that Toronto Police Service does not publically share statistics related to youth under the age of 11 who perpetrate violent crime.

Youth Victims of Violent Crime by Age




Youth Perpetrators of Violent Crime by Age



Continually rising rates of gun violence among youth, specifically involving individuals from marginalized communities such as Toronto’s Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), were cited by multiple research participants as a key factor leading up to the development of YCF. Several research participants noted specific issues around racism and systemic barriers for Black youth as factors in the increase in violent crime.

During the Summer of the Gun, 52 of the 79 homicides that occurred in Toronto in 2005 were as a result of gun violence, many of which involved youth (Doucette,

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

2012). When 15-year old Jane Creba was shot and killed during the Boxing Day shooting on Yonge Street, a large media response to this shooting increased public awareness and outrage about the issue of gun violence (Carniol & Teotonio, 2005; Toronto Star, 2005; Evans, Teotonio, & Carniol, 2005; Diebel, 2005; Ferguson & Gillespie, 2005).

In addition to the awareness that the Summer of the Gun brought to the issue of gun violence in the city, the notable public figure Pinball Clemons was also speaking out about this issue at the time. He was a well-respected athlete and public figure who had grown up in neighbourhoods that were facing increases in gun violence. One research participant said that Pinball Clemons added more awareness and urgency to the issue in the city at the time.

Government Response

In 2006, the provincial government, lead by Dalton McGuinty, responded by establishing the YCF which offered grants to youth-led initiatives addressing needs in the 13 priority communities. United Way partnered with the government and private donors to raise almost \$42 million dollars to be distributed through the YCF over three years. YCF specifically sought to fund initiatives that addressed gaps and inequalities faced by Black and other racialized youth in Toronto as these groups had been heavily impacted by the increase in violent crime (Grenaway & Gibson, 2017).

After the significant cuts to social programming that occurred under the Harris government, the Liberal leadership was focused on distancing themselves from this ideology and on repairing some of the damage that had been done during Harris's leadership. This focus resulted in an abundance of funding for social programs, which benefited the youth-led sector until the economic crisis of 2008.

Social Atmosphere

Multiple research participants stated that between the social events, political atmosphere, available funding, and multiple advocates, the setting was conducive to a large monetary investment in youth-led programs. The media coverage and expressed urgency of the situation pushed the government and United Way to distribute YCF funding in an expedited and widespread manner. This method of funds distribution had both advantages and disadvantages, and supplied the sector with a multitude of learning opportunities that both contributed to and deterred the sustainability of the youth-led initiatives of the time.

One research participant also identified the emergence of a demographic of young people with lived experience who were in the midst of completing or had just completed post-secondary education. This demographic had a level of expertise and legitimacy gained through education which they used to clearly articulate their lived experience and the experiences of other youth in their communities. This ability to



articulate youth identified problems by youth themselves contributed to the growing voices of individuals advocating for increased attention to youth social issues.

Youth Challenge Fund Successes

The successes of YCF lie largely in its function of bringing the youth-led ideology to the forefront of the nonprofit sector. However, including individuals and groups most affected by oppressive conditions in developing community-level solutions was not started by the YCF. Research participants discussed extensive experience with youth organizing and making change in their communities long before this granting opportunity was created. What YCF did do was promote the idea that youth have the potential to create solutions and programs that address issues in their communities through action in the nonprofit sector. By requiring that youth programming incorporate youth voices throughout all processes, YCF brought a level of legitimacy to the contributions that youth could make.

YCF also gave youth access to individuals with the power to make real, systems-level change. One research participant described the value of youth being granted spots at tables that had been unattainable before the funding of youth-led initiatives. Another research participant spoke of the difference between engaging youth in programming and giving youth space to create systems level change with the YCF allowing for both the latter and the former to happen. The introduction of YCF and funding of the initiatives that came with it opened many doors for youth leaders to engage in social and political change at the community level and influence policy and program development at the provincial level. As youth often do not have access to space where organizational development and strategies for community programming happen, opportunities to influence these decision making process are invaluable (Skinner et al, 2013).

YCF also brought visibility to young leaders where previously youth contributions had been undervalued and largely ignored. One research participant described the the sector as being more open and inclusive for youth to get involved. Youth voices were increasingly valued and included in conversations within the city and in organizations as a result of the initiatives funded by the YCF.

Finally, one research participant commented on the ability of some youth-led YCF funded programs to reach youth who may not typically choose to engage in programming. The participant gave the specific example of an art-based program that managed to engage a group of 8 young men who had all experienced violent crime as either victim or perpetrator and 7 of whom had been incarcerated. This example demonstrates the success of a particular youth-led initiative in engaging with young involved with violent crime where other programming has failed.

A large, light blue graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of two overlapping arrow shapes pointing to the right.

Youth Challenge Fund Challenges

As YCF had been created with a sense of urgency, there was pressure to distribute funds quickly. A grant review team was hired in October 2006 and had started to distribute grants before 2007. The speed at which the need was identified, the money was collected, grants were distributed, and programs commenced meant that all involved were learning as they went. While there were also benefits to youth-led initiatives receiving funds quickly, some research participants described the challenges of lacking an established framework for beginning the funded initiatives.

Since there were no existing frameworks on how to support youth-led initiatives and the needs of youth leaders had never been articulated formally at the commencement of YCF, there was confusion as to how to meet the needs of the new youth leaders. Initiatives funded by the YCF tended to be purely youth-led and had little adult influence. This lack of adult involvement meant that youth leaders were operating initiatives entirely independently. Youth were also tasked with navigating formalized processes that were unfamiliar to them with no guidance from adult industry professionals.

Youth also felt that they were not always able to express when they did not know how to carry out certain tasks such as budgeting, project management, and building and maintaining external relationships. One research participant described an inherent power imbalance between the grantors and the grant recipients that created barriers for youth to reach out and ask for support or admit that they were not equipped with adequate knowledge to successfully complete tasks associated with leading an initiative.

There were only a few learning opportunities available for YCF funding initiatives including an Integrative Thinking course offered through the Rotman School and Grant Writing 101 workshops that initiative leaders could attend. Limited opportunities for learning and skill development left some youth leaders unprepared for the challenges of running an initiative.

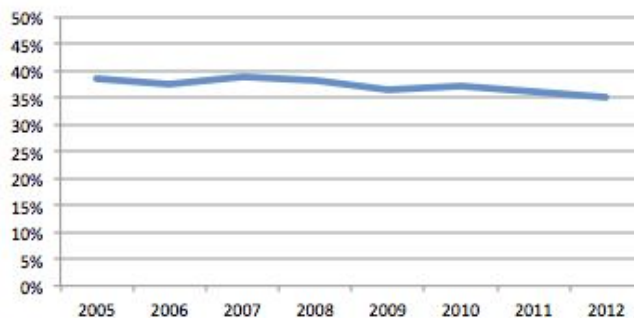
Additionally, all initiatives had to have a Trustee to hold their allocated funding. However, the relationships between funded initiatives and their Trustees varied across the recipients. A Trustee could act only in the capacity of a financial institution that released funds when requested and supported in the reconciliation of expenses or as a financial Trustee by providing coaching to the initiative leaders, teaching about the sector, explaining financial processes, etc. The variation in how Trustees carried out their role meant that some youth were provided valuable learning for the youth-led sector and opportunities for capacity-building in tandem with grants, while others were largely left on their own.



The initiatives also lacked an established evaluative process which limited the youth leaders' ability to understand which aspects of the initiative were working and which were not. Lack of evaluation also meant that the initiatives were not able to document or share data that would be useful for obtaining additional funding. One research participant noted that few organizations or college and university programs offered any support in learning how to plan and carry out evaluations which created a barrier for youth leaders to build the necessary skills to establish evaluations.

The challenges the YCF faced appear to have impacted the ultimate goal which was to address violent crime among youth. Despite the money that was invested into youth-led programs and the immense time and effort dedicated to the running of these programs, youth violent crime appears to have remained fairly consistent between 35-38.9% of overall violent crime being perpetrated by youth as demonstrated by available Toronto Police Service statistics from 2005 to 2012. One research participant suggested that since systemic issues related to Black and other racialized youth had not been fully addressed, the right projects had not been funded by YCF.

Youth Violent Crime by Year



Youth Challenge Fund Learnings

The learnings from YCF revealed internal and external factors that contribute to or deter sustainability in individual initiatives.

Internal Factors

While internal factors followed many themes as described by research participants, presence of factors was largely individual to the specific youth-led initiative. Not all initiatives were affected by the same factors or responded to them in the same way.

A large blue arrow pointing to the right, located on the left side of the page.

Factors that Increased Sustainability

- The new demographic of youth emerged with post-secondary education and lived experience who were ready and able to create social change. These youth were already successfully running youth-led initiatives and community programming that were only in need of funding. As there was an already established tendency of young people in marginalized communities to develop solutions to problems affecting their community, the groundwork for successful youth-led initiatives was already present before the introduction of the YCF.
- The ability to access the few available learning opportunities, such as Grant Writing 101, that were offered to the youth leaders contributed to skill development necessary for youth leaders to sustain their initiatives.

Factors that Deterred Sustainability

- There was a level of fear, lack of understanding of needs, and/or ego that hindered youth leaders who had received funding asking for helping. This barrier to articulating the individual and initiative's needs prevented many leaders from accessing the assistance they would have needed to develop skills and receive support to ensure sustainability in projects.
- Research participants described burnout as another significant barrier to sustainability. Individuals working in the youth-led sector rarely work only one job, and may have multiple roles within jobs due to lack of funding. This contributed to the exit of some youth leaders from youth-led initiatives.
- Many youth leaders also led initiatives that addressed causes personal to them. As a result, they were not only managing an initiative and all the logistics that come along with it, they were also managing the emotional impact of their work personally as well as assisting others to manage the emotional impact of what was happening in their communities which contributes to burnout. For this reason, some young leaders chose to move on from the youth-led sector or from their specific initiative and find another role in the sector.
- Youth leaders also move out of the sector when they are no longer youth. The sustainability of an organization is compromised internally when the leader who envisioned, developed, and obtained funding for an initiative has left the initiative.

External Factors

External sustainability factors were largely circumstantial and dependent on all the factors occurring in a relatively short span of time. The combined influence of different factors was necessary to cause a perceptible effect in influencing the development and implementation of youth-led initiatives.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Factors that Increased Sustainability

- The massive media attention to the Jane Creba shooting brought increased awareness to the dire need for youth services. The Liberal government's willingness to contribute funds to social services was necessary for youth-led initiatives to begin and were then sustained through continued public interest in some communities that became invested in the initiatives.
- Partnerships and collaboration with external organizations contributed to sustainability for initiatives through the pooling of resources. Financial collaborations as well as relational collaborations where initiatives can share knowledge and resources have become a way for youth-led initiatives to continue existence.

Factors that Deterred Sustainability

- Lack of supports to go along with the funding that initiatives received prevented many youth-led initiatives from succeeding long term. Outside of being required to have a financial Trustee, there were no structured supports or best practices established around what should be available to youth leaders. The urgency in which the initiatives were funded did not allow time to create systems that would promote sustainability for youth-led initiatives.
- Most projects received only 2-3 years worth of funding which also hindered sustainability. Research participants stated that youth leaders generally required at least one year to learn how to lead an initiative and many were still learning how to navigate the sector when their grant period came to a close which prevented them from sustaining their initiatives.
- There was the lack of successive funding opportunities available to ensure continuity of the initiatives.

Additional Learning about Sustainability

Multiple research participants in granting positions in YCF expressed that the greatest learning was related to the importance of incorporating four key things in youth-led initiative programming to promote sustainability, sectoral and/or systemic change.

Four Key Components Needed to Promote Sustainability:

1. Initiatives that are indigenous to communities and the youth leaders.
2. Collaboration with adult allies and supports.
3. A vision and strategy for real change.
4. Relationships that prevent working in silos.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Legacy Initiatives

In 2010 United Way released a Request for Proposals for Legacy Initiatives. This granting opportunity was created to provide a new, successive round of funding for initiatives originally funded through YCF. The number of grants to be handed out was significantly lower than that of the original number when YCF was released with a total of 17 legacy projects funded.

Challenges


There are several reasons that the amount of grants released dropped between 2007 and 2010 as discussed by the research project participants. First, the economy had suffered a significant loss in 2008. This loss was felt especially in the social services sector as there was less money to be allocated and, historically, this sector is one of the first to receive financial cutbacks. In addition, the urgency around creating solutions to gun violence in the city had slowed down so there was less public pressure, and therefore less political will, to dedicate time and funding to the cause.

As well, a theory presented by some of the participants was that youth-led, like many trends in the granting world, had passed its time of notoriety and there were newer concepts being funded by the larger funding bodies. So, focus and priority had shifted from youth-led initiatives and onto the next new thing.

Finally, YCF had received some negative press at that time for not achieving outcomes related to its original goal of addressing youth violent crime to a scale matching the financial resources it had distributed. This had, in some participants' experiences, resulted in the common practice of blaming the young people who had been in charge. There was a sentiment circulating at the time of 'I told you so' from those who had been unsure of the young leaders capacities from the introduction of YCF. Rather than looking at the external factors that contributed to initiatives' failures, the blame was put on the young people who had received grants.

One of the research participants stated that the Legacy Initiatives were where the challenges identified during the first phase of YCF were fully expressed. While there were learnings from the originally funded initiatives, there was not adequate time to stop and take stock of the learnings and create processes and supports based on these learnings. Instead, the initiatives needed to continue to be funded.

Individuals who were given legacy grants were young, energized, and wanted to make real, systemic change. However, these individuals were still not supported through the challenges, barriers, and discouragement of the sector by adequate mentors. Tied to this was the continued issue of burnout and disillusionment with change initiatives.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

There were also challenges related to the various approaches to leadership that youth leaders employed. One research participant expressed that the sector chose to celebrate and open doors for certain leaders while others worked towards change in a less celebrated way. The majority research participants highlighted the development of egos among some youth leaders as one of the challenges that began in the initiatives funded through YCF and grew with the Legacy Initiatives.

Opportunities

While the challenges of YCF were magnified in the Legacy Initiatives, opportunities for impactful change were also amplified. As the Legacy Initiatives developed, more changes were made to several aspects of supporting the youth-led sector that significantly contributed the understanding of sustainability as it relates to this sector.


Firstly, many trustees and/or organizational mentors came forward and expressed confusion around what their role was supposed to be, which sparked an opportunity for the development of the mentorship role. Some mentors had simply managed the initiatives finances while others gave initiatives space in their institution and mentored them through the process of setting up and running their own programs. Organizations began to see the need for organizational mentors who took a wrap-around approach to supporting youth-led initiatives and began to incorporate this work into their overall mission and daily activities.

Youth leaders also began to realize what their gaps in knowledge were and had the ability to better articulate what they needed from their organizational mentors and/or trustees. They were also able to begin to seek out capacity building opportunities and with organizations beginning to realize the impact of providing these opportunities, young leaders were able to access them.

With a smaller pool of funded initiatives in the Legacy component of YCF, more cross-initiative collaboration began to happen. Youth leaders realized that they needed to work together to share their learnings and resources as this would increase their opportunities for sustainability. They also began to realize that by collaborating they were able to present a united voice in some instances to make larger scale changes.

Sustainability

Young leaders also began to realize that they were not going to be able to run their initiatives forever as youth. This was largely because many of the leaders of the Legacy Initiatives were beginning to approach ages or life stages that did not coincide with the definition of a 'youth' as specified by various policy-making bodies. This prompted them to begin to consider what would happen with their initiatives when they were no longer leading. This brought awareness to and discussion

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

around succession planning and what that needed to incorporate to sustain the initiatives and their work.

Internally, there were several factors that seemed relevant to sustainability that were highlighted through the Legacy Initiatives beyond the learnings from the original YCF initiatives. Key components were the existence of a strategic plan or vision for the initiative, shared organizational knowledge and memory that was supported by a sound succession plan for leadership, and a support system (whether it be internal to the organization or external to the work the young leader was doing).

These learnings have translated into significant development throughout the sector over the last few years. Organizations such as Artscape, FYI, and Youth Action Network (YAN) have developed specific supports to ensure the sustainability of youth-led initiatives and the youth-led sector. Artscape is an urban development organization that supports young artists, creative entrepreneurs, and creative placemakers through programs that include providing physical space and mentorship to participants (Artscape, 2015). FYI provides a safe space for youth to develop leadership skills that allow them to achieve their goals through programs that provide mentorship, skill development, support network development, and financial assistance (FYI, n.d.). YAN is a youth-led organization that supports over 100 community led initiatives through programs that offer networking, tools, mentorship, and educational workshops (YAN, 2017). These organizations help fill essential needs for sustainability in the youth-led sector.


Youth Opportunity Fund

Evolution of Youth-Led and Sustainability

There was a lot of learning that came out of the YCF and its legacy initiatives that caused youth-led initiatives and ideology to evolve. These learnings prompted many of those involved in YCF to reflect upon what success in relation to sustainability really means on the systemic and individual levels. From these reflections on the successes, challenges, learnings, and opportunities of the YCF, several things began and continue to change in the youth-led sector.

Youth-Led

The understanding of youth-led has evolved from meaning youth running initiatives on their own, with no support beyond a financial trustee (for legal reasons), to youth being in leadership positions with a voice and change-making power with the necessary support to learn how to build necessary skills and navigate the sector. This shift in understanding has allowed for the increased involvement of adult allies and other supports.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

Through increased exposure and opportunity to showcase skill sets, youth have become more recognized for the unique perspectives and abilities that they bring to the sector. This is largely a result from YCF, the Legacy Initiatives, and the access gained to larger audiences and tables. However, this still has a long way to go. Youth are rarely viewed positively as society tends to focus on issues of youth bullying and violence (Skinner et al, 2013). One of the research project participants discussed the view that youth is a transitory stage where the goal is the move them from being youth to being adults in the sector. By beginning to frame 'youth' as being a stage with legitimate abilities and ideas rather than one of delinquency that can advance the nonprofit sector, sustainability will only be increased as youth-led continues to evolve.

Sustainability

The original concept of sustainability in the youth-led sector has been challenged by multiple research participants throughout the interview process. Originally, sustainability of a youth-led initiative was cited in relation to the staying power of the original initiative. This concept, however, has evolved through the observation of and reflections on YCF and the impact it had on the young leaders and funded initiatives. Multiple research participants noted that while not many of the initiatives originally funded by the YCF still exist, many individuals involved in the leadership of youth-led initiatives are still in the sector. These individuals are now the policy makers, organizational leaders, and mentors in the youth-led initiative network. Sustainability may not be intuitive to the initiatives themselves, however, the individual leaders have built on their experiences and continued to grow their skill set thus contributing to the sustainability of the sector on a larger scale.

Several research participants also challenged the concept that youth should be tasked with the responsibility of addressing systemic, long-term, and far-reaching issues in their community. They suggested that youth-led is a fallacy that simply transfers blame from the body with power (whether it be the government or for-profit organizations) to youth. By tasking youth with developing solutions to these systemic issues these bodies can say they tried to address the issue by providing funding for those most affected by it and determine that the failure was not one of the system but rather of the youth.

Context of YOF

As cited by one research participant, innovation comes from disruption. This disruption can be social, political, or individual and can occur at any level of the system. Much like the atmosphere around the emergence of YCF, an increase in violence in the City of Toronto preceded the release of YOF. Specifically, one participant discussed the Danzig Street mass shooting in Scarborough where two youth died and 23 people were injured as being the catalyst for the implementation of YOF. While this incident was not on the same scale as the Summer of the Gun and didn't receive the same attention as the Jane Creba shooting on Yonge Street,



there was still an awareness that violence was, once again, rising in the youth community. Additionally, barriers to employment and education were cited by multiple research participants in relation to the emergence of YOF.

The government responded to the increase in violence with funding once again but this time, they conducted a 30-day consultation process that engaged multiple stakeholders in the youth-led sector. From that process came the Youth Action Plan. One result of this plan was the development of YOF in 2010 as a fund for youth-led initiatives. This plan was provincially, rather than municipally, focused and funded initiatives with the incorporation of the learnings from YCF, the practices that had been developed by organizations supporting youth-led initiatives, and the current context in which youth were living. Where the YCF focused on racialized youth as this was the demographic who were facing multiple, complex challenges at the time, the YOF expanded their reach beyond racialized youth to incorporate a more collaborative approach to sectoral and systemic change.

Learnings Applied

When YCF emerged, youth-led had been newly established as a formal ideology. Organizations had involved youth in leadership opportunities previous to this, but there was no research or understanding of what the theoretical and practical groundings of youth-led were. Due to the experience of YCF and continued learning through YOF, the sector now has an understanding and underpinning ideology of what youth-led can and should look like. These learnings were and continue to be applied to the development of the supports around YOF.

Successive Granting

In the design of YOF, the idea of successive granting was adopted. One of the greatest challenges to sustainability of youth-led initiatives in the context of YCF was that there was one large amount of money allocated to the initiative and once that was gone, financial resources were scarce, if not non-existent. YOF now implemented a 3-tiered granting opportunity that opened up the chance to test any idea and if it has success then to apply for more money to grow the idea. This successive granting opportunity is one answer to problem of project-based funding that has influenced the challenges of sustainability in the youth-led sector.

Defined Mentorship

YOF recognized the importance of true mentorship for youth-led initiatives even in its early stages. The learnings from YCF and the evolution of the youth-led sector have been applied to defining the role of the mentorship through agencies beyond simply holding financial resources. Organizational mentors, partnership platforms, and trustees for youth-led initiatives have developed more robust support systems. One research participant described the role of an organizational mentor by splitting



it into two responsibilities: logistical/teaching responsibility; and emotional responsibility.

Full departments and certain organizations focus specifically on offering logistical capacity-building supports specific to the needs of not just the youth-led initiatives but the young leaders themselves. Beyond offering workshops, these organizations also assist youth-led initiatives in developing and managing financial systems that allow for sustainability. The organizational mentor must provide guidance around navigating the sector. There is also the hard skill development that must be supported by organizational mentors. This is best described by contrasting the role of a trustee versus an organizational mentor. In trusteeship, the youth-led initiative relies on an organization for their charitable number and the organization is financially responsible for the funds the youth-led initiative receives. In a sustainability-promoting organizational mentorship role, the organization works with the young leaders to set up financial systems that they can utilize and understand.

When addressing the emotional responsibility, it is important to note that most young leaders who develop their own initiatives do so out of lived-experience. This means that the emotional impact of the work they are doing is elevated by their personal connection to the cause. As well, one research participant noted that the continued issue of violent crime meant that youth leaders and their friends and family may continue to experience the very violence in their daily lives that they are attempting to address in their initiatives. For this reason, an organizational mentor cannot simply support the 'business' side of the initiative. As burnout was cited by multiple research participants as a significant barrier to sustainability in the sector for youth, young leaders need someone who supports the emotional experience of the leading an initiative in addition to the logistics.

Relatedly, many young leaders emerge from marginalized communities and may lack available adult role models. They may feel disenfranchised and 'othered' by many people in their lives. To take on the role of an organizational mentor without acknowledging the role as a caring adult in the young leaders lives, there is the risk of perpetuating cycles of abandonment and experiences of oppression.

This learning has been incorporated into YOF through accessing various organizations that have developed this approach to mentorship and creating partnerships with them. With the receipt of a grant through YOF, young leaders become part of the Agency Mentorship Program at FYI and receive full wraparound support. This included capacity-building workshops, financial support and a consistent adult partner to meet with and discuss issues in the initiative with.

Introduction of Evaluation

Another aspect of YOF that was integrated based on learning was the required evaluation of the impact of the youth-led initiatives. This allowed granting bodies to



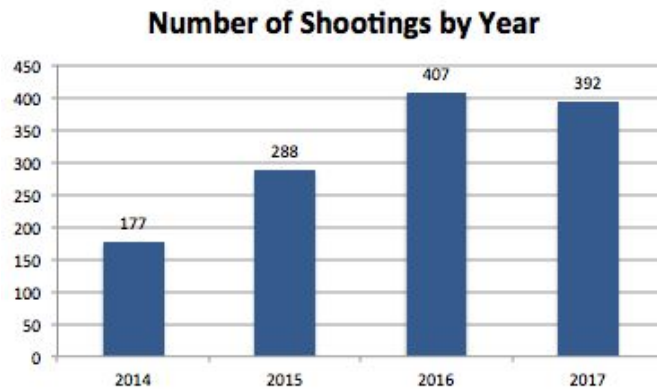
collect data on whether initiatives were achieving the outcomes they intended and also encourages youth-led initiatives to engage in ongoing evaluation and adaptation of programming. This promotes sustainability among these initiatives as they find out throughout the duration whether they need to make changes to increase the outcomes their programs. Evaluations can also be valuable tools for applying for additional funding for initiatives.

Current State of the Youth-Led Sector

In addition to significant funding issues, the youth-led sector continues to currently experience additional challenges. Gun violence had been the original catalyst that sparked the development of the youth-led sector and this issue continues to impact the youth-led sector to the current day.

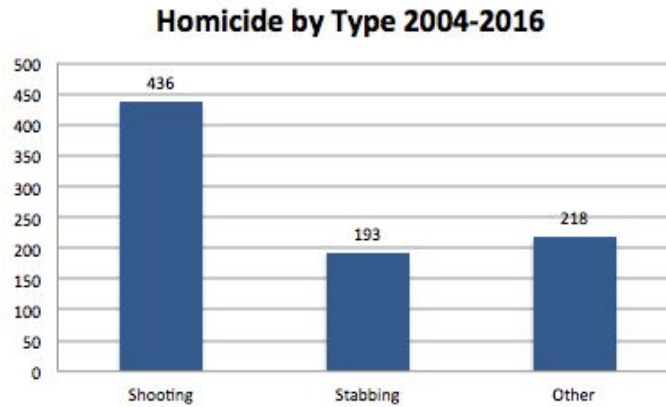
Gun Violence

Violent crimes have been decreasing and homicide rates have been fairly consistent over the last 30 years overall in Toronto, but the rate of violent crimes among youth have increased (Tewelde & Olawoye, 2013). As well, incidences of gun violence have continued to rise in recent years. According to Toronto Police Services (2017b), incidences of gun violence have more than doubled between 2014 and 2017.

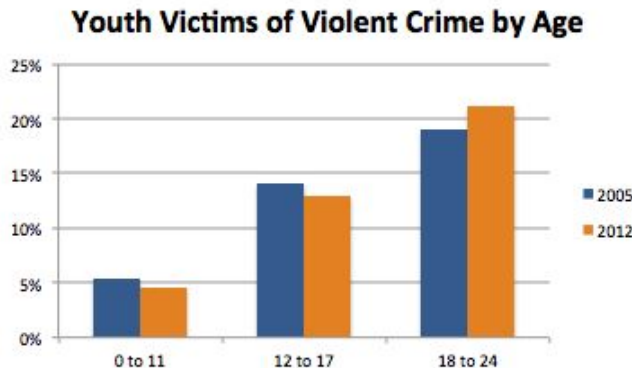




Gun violence as related to homicide has also remained a prevalent problem according to available statistics with shootings accounting for more than half of all homicides from 2004 through 2016 (Toronto Police Service, 2017a).

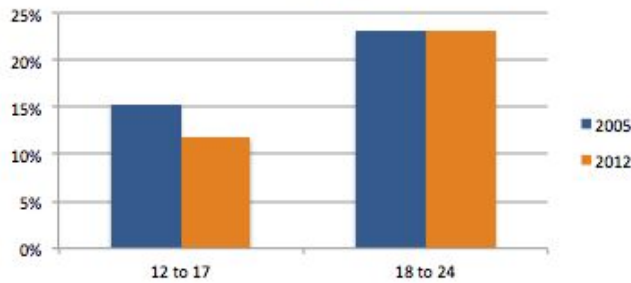


Youth involvement in violent crime as either the victim or perpetrator has remained high. According to the most recent available statistical data from Toronto Police Service, youth under the age of 25 represent 38.8% of the total number of victims of violent crimes in Toronto and 35% of the the total number of perpetrators of violent crime (Toronto Police Service, 2012). It is important to note that statistics related to youth under 12 who have perpetrated violent crimes are not publically shared by Toronto Police Service. These statistics demonstrate that there has been no change in the number of youth who are victims of violent crime between Summer of the Gun and 2012. There was also only a small decrease of -3.4% in youth perpetrators of violent crime in 2012. At the time of this report in 2018, Toronto Police Service had not released an Annual Statistical Report that provided at breakdown of youth violent crime since 2012.






Youth Perpetrators of Violent Crime by Age



Statistics Canada (2017) reported that youth age 12 to 17 represented 9.1% of the total number of individuals charged with a violent crime in 2015, a decade since the Summer of the Gun, and 10.1% in 2016. These statistics demonstrate that there has been a -6.2% decrease in violent crime among youth as of 2015 and a -5.2% decrease as of 2016 compared to statistics from 2005 provided by Toronto Police Service. However, caution must be used when comparing these numbers as Statistics Canada and Toronto Police Service classify violent crime differently and there may be discrepancies between numbers. As well, Statistics Canada only provides data regarding youth aged 12 to 17 and not youth 18 to 24. This lack of data represents a significant gap in knowledge and demonstrates the decreased attention that is currently being paid to youth violent crime.

Neighbourhoods that currently experienced the greatest concentration of assaults and homicides have been tracked by Toronto Police Service up until 2016. The top 10 neighbourhoods that experienced each assault and homicide in 2016 coincide closely with Toronto's currently identified Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA). Of the top 10 neighbourhoods for assault, four (West Hill, Woburn, York University Heights, and Downsview-Roding) are NIA and three (Moss Park, West Humber-Clairville, and Clairlea-Birchmont) are directly beside a NIA. Other neighbourhoods in the top 10 for assault were Waterfront Communities, Church-Yonge Corridor, and Bay Street Corridor. Of the top 10 neighbourhoods for homicide, four (Scarborough Village, Weston, Victoria Village, and York University Heights) are NIA and four (Malvern, South Riverdale, Bendale, and West Humber-Clairville) are directly beside a NIA. Other neighbourhoods in the top 10 for homicide were Kensington-Chinatown and Church-Yonge Corridor.

The neighbourhoods currently in the top 10 for assault and homicide that fit within or next to current NIA largely coincide with the Priority Neighbourhoods identified between 2005-2013 in the aftermath of the Summer of the Gun, with the addition of Moss Park and South Riverdale. This data suggests that the areas originally

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

identified as neighbourhoods where youth experienced increased amounts of violent crime remain the same today at similar levels of severity.

While media attention and public awareness regarding gun violence is not as widespread as it was during the Summer of the Gun, news outlets continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining focus on gun violence and violent crime in Toronto (Doucette, 2017; Wright, 2017; Wright & March, 2017). However, the continuing issue of violent crime specifically among youth has not yet been brought to the forefront of public awareness.


Risk Factors

Since the implementation of YCF, risk factors for youth involvement in violent crime have been identified. While there is no one factor that definitively causes youth to become involved in violent crime, there are some known factors: a deep sense of alienation and low self esteem; little empathy for others and impulsivity; oppression and feelings of not belonging to the larger society; belief that they have no way to be heard; no sense of hope (McMurtry & Curling, 2008); and inadequate support in areas such as employment, education, family wellbeing, and social inclusion (Tewelde & Olawoye, 2013). These factors are often present among youth living in marginalized communities who have few or no resources available to them. One research participant supported the idea that these risk factors increase incidents of violent crime among youth by stating that some youth find it easier to get a gun than a job.

Black youth in particular are vulnerable to involvement in violent crime as they experience high rates on unemployment, high dropout rates in high school, and are overrepresented in rates of care with Children's Aid Society (CAS) (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2018). Some research participants also said that there is a lack of culturally specific programming available for Black youth that meet their specific needs and combat racism. These factors contribute to the current risk for Black youth to become involved in violent crime. Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan was recently announced in 2017 and made a number of recommendations for ways to support Black youth which included culturally specific programming and promoting anti-violence during community outreach.

Youth-Led Initiatives

The issue of violent crime has remained a problem among the youth in Toronto, particularly among young, racialized men living in impoverished communities (Tewelde & Olawoye, 2013). Therefore, despite the decreased amount of public attention, gun violence among youth is an issue that has not gone away since the Summer of the Gun and continues to impact the youth-led sector. However, as stated previously, the number of youth-led initiatives funded by the government through the YOF has decreased in number. This means that although the original issue of gun violence that the YCF sought to address in 2005 has not significantly

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

changed, youth-led programming has become scarcer. Several research participants stated that the youth-led sector has been used as a scapegoat when assessing the current trends in violent crime as the youth-led initiatives funded by the YCF and YOF have not eliminated youth violent crime. The research participants maintained that with more support from adult allies and continued funding, these youth-led initiatives have the potential to be more sustainable and have a greater impact on the community.

Threats to the Youth-Led Sector

Research participants outlined the most pressing threats to the youth-led sector as being loss of funding, burnout, and loss of mentorship. These factors affect the success and sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

Loss of Funding

The most prominently referenced threats to the youth-led sector expressed by research participants were the limited availability of funding and, relatedly, that funding is a disappearing trend. As cited by several research participants, granting exists in a cycle and is influenced by the social and political atmosphere so while there is currently funding for youth-led initiatives, this funding may no longer be available at any time. This fear of losing funding and being unable to secure alternative funding has been echoed in other reports that interviewed individuals working in frontline roles in youth organizations (Skinner et al., 2013). Research participants expressed concern that youth-led initiatives are a dying trend in the sector and with that, funding opportunities will begin to diminish making sustainability of youth-led initiatives exponentially more challenging.

Relatedly, the lack of compensation that young leaders receive severely impacts their ability to continue to do youth-led work. Eventually, many leaders need to find more lucrative endeavours or return to school to grow their skill set in a way that is seen as legitimate by the greater society. The lack of recognition in the sector and beyond of the work of young leaders in their initiatives and the transferable skills that they develop poses a serious threat. This contributes to youth feeling that they must move on from youth-led initiatives to legitimize their skill set and education to gain viability in the employment sector.

Burnout

Also threatening the youth-led sector is the on-going concern of burnout. Burnout has been acknowledged as an issue since the onset of the YCF in 2005 and was cited by multiple research participants as a current issue. Specifically, burnout is affected by the personal nature of the work that young leaders are taking on this impacts their ability to sustain initiatives.

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, located in the top left corner of the page.

Loss of Mentorship

There is also the current, and ongoing, threat of a disappearance of support on the organizational mentorship side of youth-led initiatives. This is influenced by funding availability for organizations that fill this need in the sector. The role of an organizational mentor is no small task, so much so that whole departments have been dedicated to this role and must have established best practice methods. As well, without conscious effort to provide mentoring for youth that does not recreate oppressive power structures, mentors may be ineffective or even damaging (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017). This means that for organizations to take on this role, there needs to be adequate funding to train mentors and sustain this type of support. Without this, organizational mentors may lack training to do their job effectively as well as fall into a tough position where they are offering these capacity-building, financial, and emotional supports in addition to an already stretched programming roster specific to their mandates.

Future of the Youth-Led Sector


Based on the interviews conducted, there are several key themes that came out of research participants' perceptions regarding the future of the youth-led sector. These themes exist around the integration of technology into youth-led initiatives, the advocacy-driven nature of initiatives, the diversification of funding, and collaborations with partners.

Technology

It is not unknown that young people's lives continue to exist more and more not just in our physical world but also in online spaces. This has already begun to affect the nature in which youth-led initiatives operate. There is a whole new way of organizing that incorporates meeting in online spaces. This can expand the reach of youth-led initiatives beyond their community creating a broader spectrum of experiences and larger impact municipally, provincially, nationally, and, potentially, globally. This also reduces the need for youth-led initiatives to find and maintain a physical space for their program.

Advocacy Work

Some research participants said they have also begun to see an increase in advocacy work versus the traditional program-based change initiatives that have dominated the youth-led sector until this point. One research participant spoke about the need for more of this advocacy work as Black youth and other youth still have unmet needs and experience gaps in services. Additionally, this generation of

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

young people have been brought up in a world where critical analysis and understanding why things are the way they are is even more prominent in the news and education. This has prompted more intellectually driven campaigns for change than ever before.

Diversification of Funding

The era of innovation and social entrepreneurship has emerged and with this, youth are beginning to explore different and new ways to fund their initiatives. While granting is not yet obsolete, youth are becoming financially savvy and have found that there are different ways to use money to support their initiatives. They are beginning to become active players in the economic system earlier than ever before. This will likely have impacts on the youth-led sector as well as the way that granting exists.

Collaboration

Finally, collaboration with others will be a key element for sustaining the youth-led sector. Toronto Police Service (2017c) released *Action Plan: The Way Forward* report that calls for increased youth programming as well as collaboration and communication with youth workers and the youth themselves as necessary for modernizing the way that Toronto Police handle youth crime and increasing positive engagement with racialized youth. One research participant suggested the need for collaboration with jails and schools to help youth involved in crime to reintegrate back into education and increase educational outcomes. As well, research participants cited united fronts between various youth-led initiatives as a strategy for increasing the collective impact that can be made by these individual initiatives. Collaboration with private and public organizations will be a necessary element for ensuring the continued relevance and sustainability of youth-led initiatives while addressing gun violence in Toronto.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the successful future of youth-led initiatives, this report provides a list of five recommendations based on the views of the research participants and the analysis of the success and challenges of the YCF.

1. Funding

Continue developing more successive granting opportunities and/or introduce opportunities for core funding options to ensure the continuity of initiatives and avoid the disruption or ending of successful programs. YOF has begun to make these types of granting opportunities available and more of these opportunities are



necessary to address concerns related to successful initiatives dying out due to lack of continuous funding.

This funding must also be sufficient for the adequate financial compensation for young people in leadership positions. Addressing the burnout of youth leaders will create an environment conducive to the development of leadership skills and the long term commitment of youth leaders to their initiatives. As this issue has been ongoing since the inception of YCF initiatives in 2005, it is well past time that youth leaders are compensated adequately for the work they do.

2. Mentorship

Leaders in the organizational mentorship space must collaborate further to develop best practices regarding the mentorship, training, and support provided for youth leaders. Since YOF funding was implemented mentors have expressed confusion regarding their roles which highlights the need for established practices. Inadequate support and the threat of losing mentorship support are a large concerns for youth-led initiatives as learning opportunities and support from adult allies are essential for youth to develop the skills necessary to lead initiatives.

Promote the understanding that youth-led doesn't mean lead without supports from adult allies. A significant challenge for the YCF was the lack of adult ally support for youth-led initiatives. To ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, youth must have the power to make decisions within their initiatives but also receive support and mentorship from adult allies.


3. Valuing Youth

Continue to validate the skills and unique perspective that youth bring to the sector. A large part of the success of the YCF was to bring youth voices into the spotlight and acknowledge the contributions that youth have to make to their communities. This validation must continue and increase in initiatives funded by the YOF.

Recognize the skills that young leaders acquire through initiative leadership as transferrable to other employment opportunities. Sustainability of the youth-led sector is contributed to by the continued involvement of individuals who ran youth-led initiatives who are now seeking employment as adults. By valuing the skills these individuals acquired through involvement in youth-led initiatives the sector as well as the individuals will benefit.

4. Innovation

Embrace technology and other innovative ideas as assets to the youth-led sector. The ever-evolving nature of this sector demands the acceptance of the innovative ideas that youth leaders bring to their initiatives. Technology is an area

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

where youth have knowledge and expertise so the acceptance of their skills in this area will increase their confidence and capacity to independently run initiatives.

5. Sustainability

Embed youth-voice in organizational leadership. By continuing to place youth in leadership roles and including their voices in larger conversations, youth leaders will have increased access to individuals with change making power for youth.

Creative collaborations between youth-led initiatives, adult allies, and other community partners will be necessary to sustain the youth-led sector as well as allow the sector to become more effective at creating wider social change.

Provide physical spaces for youth-led initiatives to exist. While physical space has become less important as youth-led initiatives becoming increasing focused on online programs, physical space is still necessary for many programs and activities. Allowing youth space to come together in person is valuable and necessary to ensure sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

Teach youth leaders how to plan and carry out program evaluations with a focus on qualitative data collection and analysis. As less funding becomes available for youth-led initiatives, the ability to document and share the successes and areas of growth of initiatives becomes an increasingly important skill for youth leaders.

6. Gun Violence and Racism

The continued issue of gun violence among racialized youth living in marginalized communities means that YCF did not fully realize its initial objective to address youth violent crime. Refocusing on the original goal of reducing violent crime and gun violence among youth must become a priority for future youth-led initiatives. Achieving this goal will necessitate continuing to address issues identified in Ontario's Youth Action Plan developed in 2012 and incorporating new strategies from Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan developed in 2017.

Conclusion

While overall violent crime rates in Toronto have been declining over the past 30 years, violent crimes such as homicide and aggravated assault are increasingly common among youth. This justifies the need for intervention, especially among marginalized youth living in Toronto's NIAs who may be more vulnerable to experiencing violence. This continuation of violent crime among youth since the Summer of the Gun in 2005 means that youth-led initiatives are still relevant today. Ensuring sustainability of past and future initiatives is therefore of the utmost

importance and requires immediate attention. Maintaining the YCF Legacy Initiatives and current new initiatives funded by the YOF should be a priority for all stakeholders in the public and private sector.

Bibliography

Albright, J. M., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2017). Applying a Social Justice Lens to Youth Mentoring: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Practice. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 59(3-4), 363-381.

Artscape. (2015). About Artscape. Retrieved from <http://www.torontoartscape.org/about-artscape>

Carniol, N. & Teotonio, I. (2005). Seized gun linked to shootout; Pistol taken from suspect arrested after Yonge St mayhem Police believe at least two weapons were used in street fight. Retrieved from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/thestar/doc/438907421.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Dec+30%2C+2005&author=Naomi+Carniol+and+Isabel+Teotonio+Staff+reporters&pub=Toronto+Star&edition=&startpage=A.01&desc=Seized+gun+linked+to+shootout%3B+Pistol+taken+from+suspect+arrested+after+Yonge+St.+mayhem+Police+believe+at+least+two+weapons+were+used+in+street+fight>

Diebel, L. (2005). We all have to act to push for change. Retrieved from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/thestar/doc/438907152.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Dec+31%2C+2005&author=Diebel%2C+Linda&pub=Toronto+Star&edition=&startpage=A.18&desc=We+all+have+to+act+to+push+for+change>

Doucette, C. (2012). Toronto's sad history of gun-related violence. Retrieved from <http://torontosun.com/2012/07/28/torontos-sad-history-of-gun-related-violence/wcm/c2d9b453-4d50-45b2-8ac7-160e5ff9e807>

Doucette, C. (2017). HOMICIDES 2017: Most of Toronto's victims killed by guns. Retrieved from <http://torontosun.com/news/local-news/homicides-2017-most-of-torontos-victims-killed-by-guns>

Evans, P., Teotonio, I., & Carniol, N. (2005). Girl's slaying has 'touched each one of us'; Hundreds gather to mourn Yonge St. victim Many undeterred from New Year's revelry. Retrieved from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/thestar/doc/438907190.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Dec+31%2C+2005&author=Patrick+Evans%2C+Isabel+Teotonio+and+Naomi+Carniol&pub=Toronto+Star&edition=&startpage=A.21&desc=Girl%27s+slaying+has+%27touched+each+one+of+us%27%3B+Hundreds+gather+to+mourn+Yonge+St.+victim+Many+undeterred+fro>

[m+New+Year%27s+revelry](#)

Ferguson, R. & Gillespie, K. (2005). John Tory backs street cameras; Kwinter likes idea of more surveillance Council meeting on shooting urged. Retrieved from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/thestar/doc/438907488.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Dec+30%2C+2005&author=Rob+Ferguson+and+Kerry+Gillespie&pub=Toronto+Star&edition=&startpage=A.07&desc=John+Tory+backs+street+cameras%3B+Kwinter+likes+idea+of+more+surveillance+Council+meeting+on+shooting+urged>

For Youth Initiative. (n.d.). Youth Programs. Retrieved from http://www.foryouth.ca/youth_programs

Grenaway, C., & Gibson, S. (2017). Youth Challenge Fund: Preliminary Findings. United Way: Toronto, ON.

McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). A Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/english/documents/youthandthelaw/rotoofyouthviolence-summary.pdf>

Ministry of Children and Youth Services. (2018). Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/mcys/en/2017/03/ontarios-black-youth-action-plan.html>

Skinner, A., Speilman, C., & French, C. (2013). Youth Led Community Organizing: Impacts and Challenges. Retrieved from <http://laidlawfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Impacts-web.pdf>

Tewelde, Y., & Olawoye, L. (2013). From Analysis to Action: A Collective Approach to Eliminate Youth Violence. Retrieved from <http://www.yorku.ca/act/reports/ReducingYouthViolence.pdf>

Toronto Police Service. (2017a). Homicide. Retrieved from <http://data.torontopolice.on.ca/datasets/homicide>

Toronto Police Service. (2017b). TPS Crime Statistics-Shootings. Retrieved from <http://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/shootings>

Toronto Police Service. (2017c). Action Plan: The Way Forward Modernizing Community Safety in Toronto. Retrieved from <https://www.torontopolice.on.ca/TheWayForward/files/action-plan.pdf>

Toronto Police Service. (2016). Toronto Neighbourhoods 2016 Crime. Retrieved

A large, solid blue arrow pointing to the right, positioned on the left side of the page.

from

<http://data.torontopolice.on.ca/datasets/toronto-neighbourhoods-2016-crime/data?orderBy=Assault&orderByAsc=false>

Toronto Police Service. (2012). 2012 Annual Statistical Report. Retrieved from <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2012statsreport.pdf>

Toronto Police Service. (2006). 2005 Annual Statistical Report. Retrieved from <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/files/reports/2005statsreport.pdf>

Toronto Star. (2005). Voices. Retrieved from <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/thestar/doc/438900939.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Dec+29%2C+2005&author=&pub=Toronto+Star&edition=&startpage=A.06&desc=Voices>

Wright, A. (2017). Gun violence isn't just a U.S. problem-and Canada isn't immune. Retrieved from <http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/gun-violence-isnt-just-a-u-s-problem-and-c-anada-isnt-immune/>

Wright, A., & March, L. (2017). Toronto gun violence is the crisis no one is talking about. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/07/28/toronto-gun-violence-is-the-crisis-no-one-is-talking-about.html>

Youth Action Network. (2017). Propellor. Retrieved from <http://youthactionnetwork.org/##>