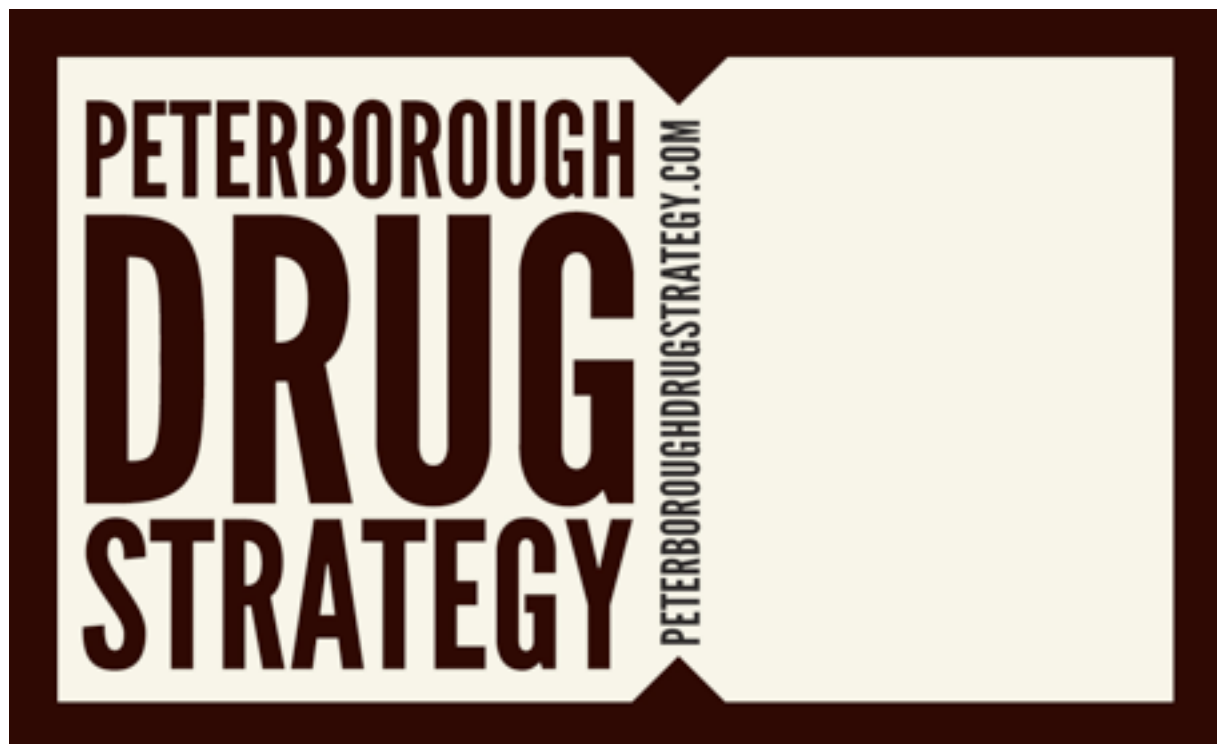


**Recommendations for the Peterborough Drug
Strategy:
Youth Engagement Project,
Final Report.**



Summer, 2011

Forward

The Peterborough Drug Strategy embarked on a youth engagement project from May- August 2011 to invite youth into the discussion on how to reduce the harms associated with substance use in Peterborough.

The four key questions asked were:

- 1. What do you see as the main issues with substance use in your community?**
- 2. Why, when, and for what reasons do youth start using substances?**
- 3. What can be done about substance use?**
- 4. What needs to change in your community order to make this happen?**

The Youth Engagement strategy focused on obtaining information from youth between the ages of 12-24 as well as raising a general awareness of the Drug Strategy and engaging youth in the process of planning and facilitating its activities. The idea was that in order to make recommendations for real change in youth's lives, youth had to be involved in the process.

Who did we talk to?

16 focus groups were held across the city and county engaging roughly 345 youth. The majority of youth engaged were high-school aged or older (ages 15-24), while 2 groups specifically focused on Jr. High (ages 12-14). 11 focus groups were held in the city (270 youth), while 5 were held in the county (75 youth). Surveys were also handed out at some of the focus groups and 119 were received back from youth ages 16-24.

Other engagement activities included in-person outreach (which involved keeping a street journal recording interactions with youth), as well as hosting special events. The outreach and special events engaged an additional 75 youth, including 8 youth who were continually engaged in the process as a youth advisory council.

In total, 440 youth were engaged throughout the summer through strategic efforts, and including surveys, 559 gave their input.

What do we want to know?

Youth respondents came from a wide variety of groups and different demographics and responded through a diversity of formats. All data collected was made clear to be completely anonymous and confidential; to be used only for the purpose of this report and to inform the development of the Peterborough Drug Strategy (PDS).

The two key objectives of the youth engagement project were to:

1. To obtain a youth voice to give input into the development of a drug strategy for the City and County of Peterborough.
2. Raise awareness and create a 'buzz' about the drug strategy among youth so that they would be engaged in and aware of decisions that impact them directly.

Youth Engagement

The youth engagement strategy acted on the assumption that things are not going to change for youth unless they are directly engaged in the process of making that change. Two ladders of participation were referred to in developing the project strategy. Arnstein's ladder of participation (figure 1), measures between non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. The youth engagement strategy aimed to fall in the upper wrungs of 'partnership' and 'delegated power', by allowing youth to directly partner in innovation, leadership and decision making in all activities associated with the youth consultation.

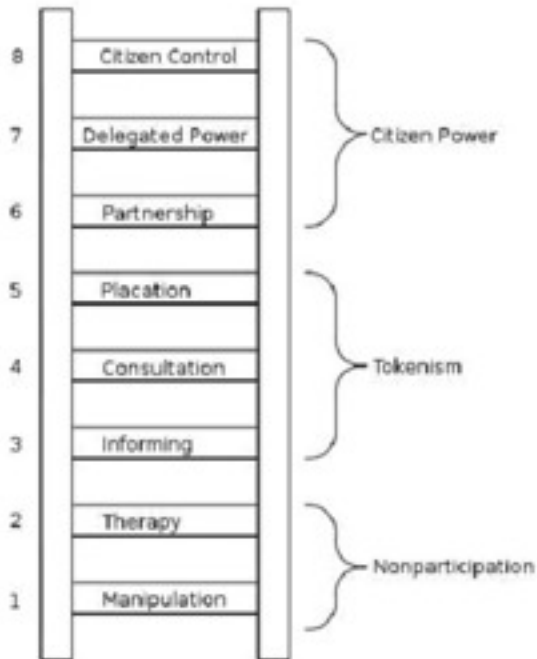


Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of Youth Engagement

Rodger Hart's ladder of youth engagement focuses more on decision making in the upper wrungs. Because of the short time line of this project, it was unrealistic to have youth plan and lead all activities. However, much weight was still put on allowing youth to come up with and implement as much of the strategy as possible. This included helping to plan, organize and facilitate events. Some parts of the project were completely planned and facilitated by youth (top wrung, #8), while other parts consulted with and informed youth of the decisions (wrung #5). There were varying degrees of participation, but youth were included in planning and decision making as often as possible. Primary importance was placed on building relationships with youth and facilitating partnerships with adult allies in the community.

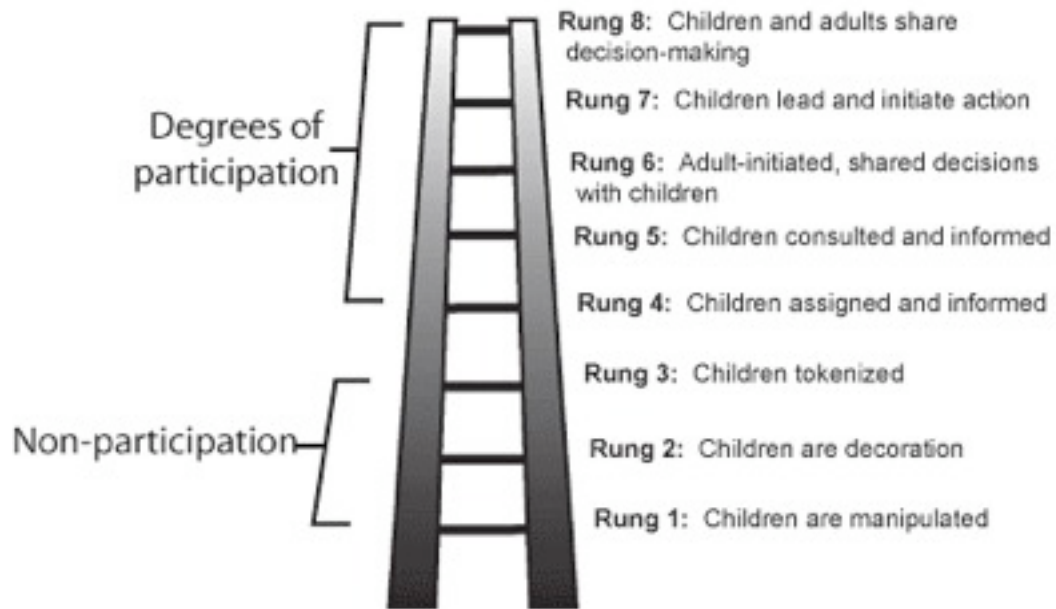


Figure 2: Adopted from Rodger Hart's ladder of youth participation

All planning and implementation of the project involved youth and offered opportunities for them to be directly involved. The project therefore not only served to meet its two goals, but also the very act of engaging youth in decision making and planning processes was an effective first step towards a Drug Strategy.

At one BBQ event, when asked what would make an effective Drug Strategy, one youth looked around and commented: "This *is* an effective Drug Strategy. Keep having events like this."

At the open mic event, when asked the same question, another youth simply replied: "This."

It is clear from these comments and from the work that was done that the act of youth engagement contributes directly to the goals of the Drug Strategy. Furthermore, research indicates that there are significant links between the very *act* of Youth Engagement, and decreased alcohol and marijuana use, which were indicated as the top drugs of choice by youth¹. **It is therefore a constant theme in this report that relationship building and engaging youth in the process of making decisions that affect their lives must be a primary factor of helping create a drug strategy to reduce the harms associated with substance use.**

The following report presents the journey of the youth engagement, the findings, and provides a list of recommendations for the Drug Strategy to consider in its final report. The hope is that through the continual involvement of young people directly in the development of a strategy that will impact them, and by incorporating a youth voice, that significant work can be done to facilitate change in the lives of the young people and reduce the harms of substance use in our community.

¹ "What is Youth Engagement?" Youth Engagement, Centers of Excellence for Children's Well-Being

Key Terms:

Adult Ally: A youth worker or adult who was involved in helping to facilitate a focus group, or give input directly associated with youth.

CMHA: Canadian Mental Health Association

Key Informant: A youth who had significant and/or reoccurring involvement in the Youth Engagement project throughout the summer and gave exceptional insight into the issues discussed.

PARN: Peterborough AIDS Resource Network

PDS: Peterborough Drug Strategy

PCCHU: Peterborough County-City Health Unit

PYS: Peterborough Youth Services

YAC: Youth Advisory Council

Youth: A person between the ages of 12 and 24

Youth Informant: Any youth who gave their input at a focus group, event or on the street.

Methodology

The methodology for this project was largely derived from the report “*Building the Four Pillars: Approaches for meaningful and effective community participation in the Peterborough Drug Strategy’s consultation process*”² which included consultation from external communities. The four key questions were used as guiding principles throughout all consultation efforts.

Focus groups were the primary source of information and went through existing organizations or youth groups. To organize a focus group, potential groups were contacted and often visited before a focus group was held. Substantial effort went into building relationships with youth and staff beforehand in order to make the groups successfully engaged. This strategy worked fairly well as youth were familiar with each other, the project and the youth engagement coordinator. The only case where this didn’t work was where interest or understanding of the project was low.

Focus groups were conducted through the following agencies:

The Bridge Youth Center, After school program

The Bridge Youth Center Hub program

“Come Cook With Us” program through St. John’s Anglican Church

STRIVE

Youth Emergency Shelter

² Cheng-Yen Phillips, Cockburn, Kidd, Knight. 2011. “Building the Four Pillars: Approaches for meaningful and effective community participation in the Peterborough Drug Strategy’s consultation process” Produced for: Peterborough Drug Strategy, April 23, 2011.

Down Town Youth Space
Rainbow Youth Coalition
Peterborough Summer Jobs for Youth program (X2)
Norwood Summer Jobs for Youth program
Norwood CAP program
Lakefield Summer Jobs for Youth program
Lakefield Youth Unlimited
Apsley Pentecostal Youth Group

A Youth Advisory Council (YAC) was formed early on in June to help guide the youth engagement process and give ownership to youth. This Council was fairly fluid and informal, comprised of approximately 8 youth who met every other week for the entire project period. Youth gave input directly into the youth engagement process, as well as helped plan and facilitate events, with some guidance from the youth engagement coordinator.

Four events were planned and executed by the Youth Advisory Council. These were an open mic, a movie night in the park and two free BBQs, all in open downtown locations. These events were very successful and also served to help facilitate conversation and obtain input from youth.

Surveys were handed out to youth through some focus groups and were also accessed online. A street journal was also maintained, recording some comments from youth regarding the 4 key questions.

The project did work to meet its second objective of spreading a 'buzz' about the Drug Strategy. However, this was mostly because of the events and was fairly short lived as the youth engagement project only lasted for the spring and summer months. In the words of one youth:

"It can't be a one off program where you got people talking a bit and think you're going to make a change, you just have to keep pushing and pushing. Who knows? Maybe you'll reach somebody" – Youth Informant

It is therefore a strong recommendation from this report to continue engaging youth in the topic of drug and alcohol use and the activities of the drug strategy in a relevant, non-judgmental way.

The Approach:

When obtaining information from youth, especially on the topic of substance use, approach is everything. Youth continually expressed the need for a trusting, meaningful relationship with an adult in order to maintain enough respect for meaningful discussion to occur.

"Making you feel like someone wants to listen to you makes you feel like someone cares"
-Youth Informant

Relationship building, relevancy and visibility among youth that were participating in consultations was thus of key importance to the Youth Engagement strategy.

The approach was always fluid, informal, and adaptable to youth's agendas, while maintaining an appearance of authority to give structure and an understanding that they were a part of something. Providing food at focus groups and some incentives to the youth council and other participant was also considered of key importance.

Four Pillars:

The Peterborough Drug Strategy uses a model based on the 4 pillars of **Prevention, Treatment, Harm Reduction** and **Enforcement**. All information sought from youth and recommendations made were with these in mind. The 4 key partners of the PDS representing these pillars are: The Peterborough County-City Health Unit (PCCHU), The Peterborough Lakefield Community Police Service & The Peterborough Detachment of the OPP, Four County Addiction Services Team (Fourcast), and the Peterborough AIDS Resource Network (PARN).

Youth Service Scene in Peterborough

Peterborough has over the last few years been provincially recognized as one of 6 Youth Friendly Communities in Ontario, and was presented with a Youth Friendly Recognition award in 2010³. However, this creates a paradox, as according to youth, services and activities are significantly lacking and there is little coordination or investment on youth activities. As many youth stated; "there is nothing to do in this town".

One adult ally described Peterborough as having a "patchwork of social services that were well resourced but difficult to reach". Our survey indicated that of the services mention, only 50.6% of youth respondents were aware of them, and 7.6% had used them. While services in Peterborough are statistically significant, many service providers and youth report a lack of coordination and communication between agencies.

Many agencies are involved in youth work in the city, often operating in isolated pockets. There are a number of drop in centers that youth can access, including the Bridge Youth Center, Downtown Youth Space, Get REAL, the REACH center at the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the Rainbow Youth Coalition at PARN for LGBTQ youth.

Addiction specific services include a full spectrum of treatment services through FourCast and an in-custody marijuana cessation program through Park Place for Youth. Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are also available in Peterborough, both city and some county areas.

Youth services and addictions specific services are a barrier for youth in the county, usually due to availability and access, transportation and stigma. Programs noted by youth residing in the

³ The Youth Friendly Community Recognition Program celebrates communities that are taking steps to open their doors to youth by reinvesting in youth play. The 2010 criteria for this designation is: (1) Youth have options for play in their community. (2) Youth are formally connected to the community (3) Facilities are dedicated to youth play (4) It's easy for youth to find information about play activities in the community. (5) The community supports public youth events. (6) The community celebrates and recognizes its youth. (7) The community commits funding for youth play. (8) The community supports positive youth development. (9) The community supports youth volunteerism and leadership development. (10) The community has effective community partnerships. (11) Youth activism and advocacy for play is nurtured. (12) Youth feel comfortable in their own community. (13) Youth can get to the play programs that are offered. (14) Schools support the youth friendly approach. (15) Adults champion the need for youth play. (16) Play is inclusive.

county include Youth Unlimited in Lakefield, the TEACH Centre in Havelock and a number of additional youth groups sponsored by faith groups.

Youth engagement advisory councils exist for 3 agencies: the City of Peterborough, the United Way and PCCHU (PCCHU employs 'youth peers' that are involved in and help guide specific projects). For the most part, however, a coordinated effort to engage youth according to the ladders of participation and significant outreach to youth is sometimes lacking, often due to specific funding requirements and lack of coordination and information sharing between projects.

In June this summer, the Peterborough Social Planning Council released a youth engagement report entitled "Youth Moving Us Forward"; to discuss what needs to change in Peterborough according to youth (under the age of 24), to make Peterborough a more youth friendly community. Their report was based on a Youth Confidence in Learning Initiative through 2 local school boards⁴; a PCCHU project entitled 'Youth Talk'⁵, as well as a recent survey done to measure Youth Resiliency⁶, and input from the city Youth Council⁷. This recommendations form this report are an example of youth engagement efforts collaborated through various agencies.

This report produced 6 areas of recommendations to help create a more youth friendly community, that roll directly into the recommendations that come from the PDS youth engagement project. Key areas identified were: Transportation, A Place for Youth to Meet, Recreation and Sports, Arts Theatre and Music, and Youth Engagement. These recommendations do dovetail with those to be discussed in this report.

⁴These were the Kawartha-Pineridge district school board, and the Peterborough-Victoria-Northumberland-Clarington-Catholic district school board.

⁵ "Youth Talk" was an initiative launched by the Peterborough County-City Health Unit (PCCHU) in 2010 in order to capture a youth voice to community health concerns. Youth in Peterborough city and county were given a camera and trained how to tell a story through photos.

⁶ Resiliency is "the capability to cope successfully in adverse, risky and stress-related situations" (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011) In 2010, the Peterborough County-City Health Unit administered this survey to grade seven and eight students in both county and city schools in order to gain a better understanding of strengths for youth resiliency in local youth. While data from the resiliency survey would have been highly useful to use in this report, it has yet to be released.

⁷ The City of Peterborough hosts a youth council of 10 people ages 14-19.

Substance use among youth:

Substance use has been recognized from the Peterborough community as being a primary issue of concern. Youth, as a demographic have a high frequency of use. Most of the information we have about substance use amongst youth is from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey – a long standing survey conducted in Grade 7-12 classes. In 2011, the Peterborough County City Health Unit conducted a “Youth Smoking Survey (YSS)” with 1,376 students in Grade 7-12 classrooms in Peterborough City and County. Information about the top three substances used (alcohol, cannabis, and prescription painkillers) is summarized in the chart below. (More analysis of the YSS data will be available in the future.)

Peterborough and Ontario Students Alcohol Use

	YSS_Ptbo (2011) n=1400	YSS Ontario(2008)	OSDUHS (2009) Ontario n=9112
ALCOHOL			
Age of initiation	14 (drink); 15 (5+drinks)	N/A	13 (drink) 14 (“drunk”)
Use in past 12 mos	55%	50%	58.2% (CI:55.7-60.6)
Frequency of Use	N/A	N/A	Amongst total sample: 10% drinking weekly 13% drink 2-3X/week 23% drunk in past mo
BINGE DRINKING (5+ drinks on 1 occasion)			
Use	79% of users binge drank in past year.	77%	
Frequency of Use (amongst users)			
<1x/mo	38%	30%	1 time in past month 39.3%
1-3X/mo	44%	41%	2-3 times in past month 37.2%
1+x/week	18%	29%	4+ times in past month 23.5%
MARIJUANA			
Age of initiation	15	N/A	14
Use	29%	26.2%	25.6% (CI: 24-27.3)
Frequency of Use (amongst users):			
<1x/mo	35%	31%	1-2X/yr: 26%
1-3X/mo	24%	23%	3-8X/yr: 28%
1+x/week	41%	46%	10+ in last yr: 46%
MEDICATIONS			
Age of initiation	N/A	N/A	more Grade 7,8,& 9 students have used prescription opioids non-medically than cannabis
Use	8% (“prescription and OTC to get high and not for medical purposes”)		17.8% (“opioid pain relievers” non-medically”)
Frequency of Use	N/A	N/A	Amongst users: 10+ in last yr: 26% 3-8X/yr: 31% 1-2X/yr: 43%

Sources: Peterborough County-City Health Unit (2011). *Smoking Profile for a Sampling of Peterborough Area High Schools*. Waterloo, ON: Propel Centre for Population Health Impact & Health Canada. (2008/2009). Youth Smoking Survey. *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey 2009* www.camh.net/research/osdus.html

Other studies tell us that 26.3% of Canadian youth (aged 15-24) reporting using cannabis in the past year - a rate four times higher than adults⁸. Data from the Canadian Community Health Survey suggests that 41.5% of youth in Peterborough report drinking underage, which is 2% higher than for Ontario⁹.

The number of telephone calls to Ontario's central Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment (DART) is an indirect indicator of problematic use of illicit substances. Between 2005-2009, cannabis was consistently the most reported problem substance for Peterborough youth under the age of 16 who accessed treatment services. Youth aged 16-24 who accessed treatment from identified in almost equal measure alcohol or cannabis as their problem substance¹⁰.

⁸ Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey(CADUMS) 2009, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/stat/_2009/summary-sommaire-eng.php#defin

⁹ Peterborough County-City Health Unit (2010). *Community Assessment Report 2010: prepared for the purposes of Healthy Communities*. Peterborough, ON: Author.

¹⁰ Source: Ag-05 Problem Substances by Age Group and Gender for Open Admissions: Site 01 Fourcast-Peterborough downloaded from Drug and Alcohol Treatment Information System (DATIS) database September 16, 2010

Harms associated with substance use among youth:

Over half of youth respondents ranked Peterborough’s drug problem as a 4 or 5 with 1 being “No Problem” and 5 being “Big Problem.”

1	2	3	4	5
7%	4%	36%	28%	25%

*From Peterborough Drug Strategy general survey results:
“Do you think there is a drug and/or alcohol problem in the City and County of Peterborough?”*

The Peterborough Drug Strategy asked youth about harms they had experienced as a result of substance use (theirs or someone else’s). Because of alcohol or other drug use in the past year, 42% of youth had experienced physical assault or hitting, 39% of youth had experienced pushing or shoving, or verbal abuse, or feeling insulted or humiliated, while 32% reported unwanted sexual experiences or unsafe sex.

Youth reported the highest impacts of substance use negatively impacting their friendships or social life in the past year (45%) and over their lifetime (75%), while 63% reported substance use negatively impacting their family over the course of their lifetime. The following charts outline the harmful/ negative effects of substance use reported by 119 of Peterborough youth (aged 16-24) who responded to the Peterborough Drug Strategy survey:

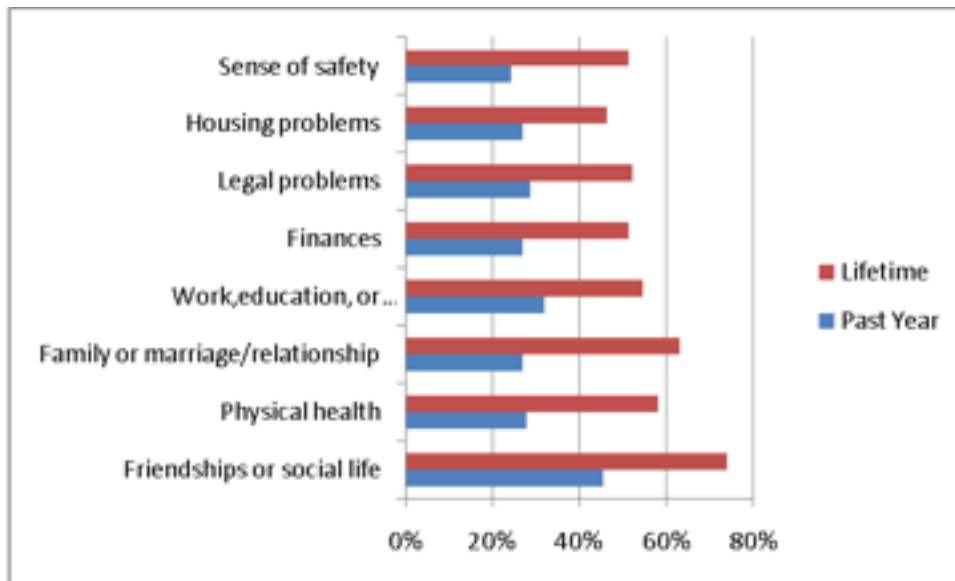


Figure 3: From Peterborough Drug Strategy general survey results: “Please check any areas of your life that have been negatively impacted by substance use (yours or someone else’s).”

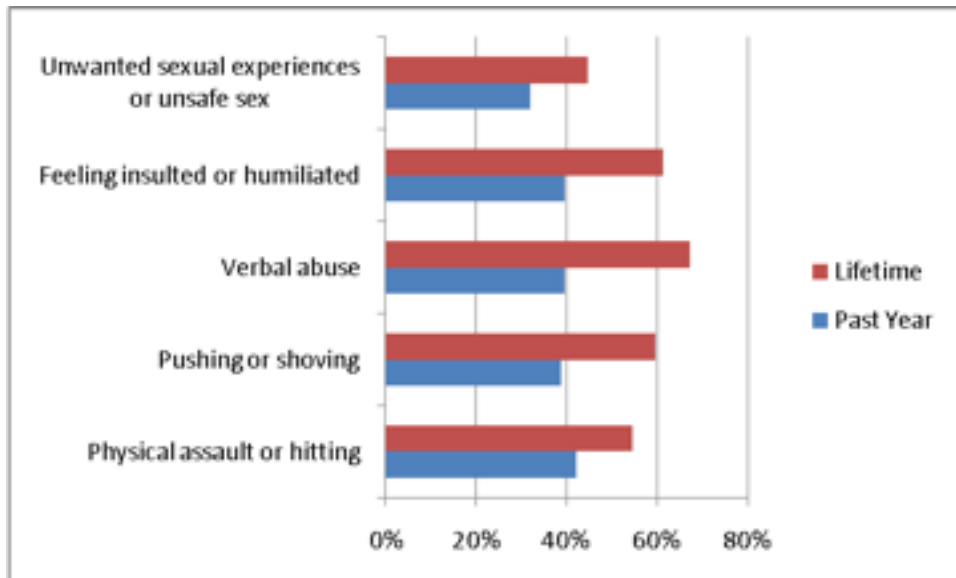


Figure 4: From Peterborough Drug Strategy general survey results, “Because of alcohol or other drug use (yours or someone else’s), you have experienced:”

Some things we know...

While substance use has produced noticeable harms, it is important to note that “many young people try alcohol or illicit drugs without becoming frequent or problem users. Experimentation with drugs and alcohol, in many respects, is considered a ‘normal’ part of a youth’s development, and usually declines as youth reach their mid to late 20s”¹¹. The messaging that youth get about drugs is currently “drugs are bad, don’t do drugs”; and this has been identified as ineffective, both by youth and service providers. A guiding principle of the Peterborough Drug Strategy is “we value compassion over judgment”.

The recommendations produced in this report are based on the four pillars and are not to condemn or condone substance use, but aim to reduce the harms associated with substance use among youth in the Peterborough city-county area.

There are factors that lead to making youth resilient to substance use. Youth that are engaged in activities and have healthy outlets are less likely to engage in substance use. It is known that healthy adult relationships are key in improving success and helping youth make better choices about substance use. As well, much research has shown that those who begin using drugs at an early age (i.e., before age 13 or 14) are more likely to develop dependence and other problems later on in life.

Abuse or poor adult influences/relationships with parents are significant factors in initiating substance use for youth. Poverty and homelessness are also key factors attributed to creating an environment where substance use is more likely to occur. Youth culture and environment, peer pressure and the desire to be ‘cool’ are key issues in impacting a youth’s likelihood to engage in risk-taking behavior.

Drug issues Identified by youth:

¹¹ “Discussion Document- Substance use in the Community” Peterborough Drug Strategy Initiative, April 2011.

In these consultations, the top three substances that came up as most commonly encountered by youth were marijuana, alcohol, and prescription opioids. Crack/ cocaine also came up consistently as a visible issue of concern. Other drugs that were mentioned were: T3s (Tylenol 3)s, other pill drugs (prescription medication), MDMA, ecstasy, salvia, Fentanyl patches, crystal meth, acid, GHB, LSD, special K, and poppers.

“You don’t go looking for drugs, drugs find you here” - Youth Informant

The top two drugs mentioned by youth were marijuana and alcohol. In almost all cases, when compared, the immediate response was that alcohol was worse than marijuana. General perception of marijuana was that it was relatively harmless and in some cases beneficial, many youth did not see a problem with use and were pro-legalization.

“Alcohol is worse than marijuana, definitely. Alcohol makes you all rowdy and do stupid things. With weed it’s like ‘who brought the munchies?’” –Youth Informant

“Asking if marijuana is worse than alcohol is a loaded question, it’s like asking if candy is worse than chips!” - Youth Informant

Oxycontin and crack/cocaine came up most often as problem substances. General perception among youth was that “chemical drugs are bad but marijuana is okay”, and that chemical drugs were what caused most of the ‘problems’.

“As long as you’re not doing hard drugs you’re okay. My parents let me smoke pot, as long as I don’t do anything else. But my parents gave up.” - Youth Informant

“Oxy’s are a big problem, people are smoking, grinding, snorting.” - Youth Informant

“Crack houses are an issue for youth. You can get pot, ecstasy; it’s not uncommon for people to bring date rape [drugs]. Kids get into these houses because all of their friends go there to hang but it becomes a really bad environment for them.” - Youth Informant

MDMA was not commonly cited except as a party drug. Youth who talked about using MDMA were under the impression that it was a purer form of ecstasy. The same youth also talked about other drug related issues at parties such as date rape drugs or getting ‘ruffed’¹².

Where do youth get information about drugs?

Most youth reported that they were more likely to talk to friends or family members to find out about drugs, while the internet was usually cited as a secondary source. Some noted that they talked to their dealer for information. Many youth learned about drug and alcohol use from VIP/ DARE (police delivered in-school education programs) but referred to these programs as more of an awareness exercise and not their primary source of information when considering substance use. It was pointed out more than once that many youth were very likely to try a drug without knowing anything about it, regardless of the consequences.

¹² “roofies” is a slang name for Rohypnol, a date rape drug.

“A lot of people just try it without getting information, it’s just there and they’re like ‘might as well give it a shot and see what happens’. People don’t really care that much” - Youth Informant

Why do youth start using substances?

The most commonly cited starting point for youth was related to family dynamic. “It all comes back to family”; either problems at home, parent’s use in front of or with their kid, or a lack of concern for what their child did.

“It all starts with the parents. If the parents are crappy then the kids don’t know what to do, and they don’t have hope. There’s a lot of emotional abuse going on, between parents and from parents to kids” - Youth Informant

Family environment and where a youth grew up had a lot to do with whether or not a youth chose to use substances, or used in a problematic or addictive way. There were many factors, however, and varying family dynamics, that attributed to a young person’s use. Whether a youth came from a supportive home or not didn’t always determine whether they used, but for what reasons they used, how they used, what type of drug they used, for how long and if it became addictive. Home life came up as the most significant factor that would cause a youth to initiate use, while peer groups and social environment influenced to what extent youth used.

“Family is the most important thing in your life, but when your family treats you like shit, that starts something. In my family, I get shit on all the time” - Youth Informant

Friends and peer pressure was the second most commonly cited reason for use. As one youth stated:

“Your parents may introduce it to you but it’s your friends who really push it” - Youth Informant

Peer pressure, was also not discussed in the conventional term. Youth stated that peer pressure was not forced, but more to do with culture and environment. If your friends are doing it, you “might as well try it”.

“You can call it peer pressure but it was more like curiosity” - Youth Informant

“It’s not really peer pressure, it’s not forced; you see everyone doing it (drugs) and it’s exciting.” - Youth Informant

Self-pressure to try substance use, among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth particularly, was cited as more prevalent than peer-pressure.

“There is more pressure inside your self, but it’s also perpetuated by society. Self-pressure is worse than peer-pressure though.” - Youth Informant

Many youth also cited boredom, curiosity, depression, and stress as a main reason for use. A reoccurring theme was that youth don’t know their purpose and don’t feel they have anything to offer or put their hope into. Whether it was rooted in family issues or not, when something happened in their lives that was not positive, substance use was a common place to turn.

“It’s hope, people have no hope. So they turn to pills. These are good kids but their family life sucks. They have no hope. They need something to find their hope in other than pills.”
- Youth Informant

“The problem isn’t addiction or even the culture that produces and fuels addiction; it’s where we find our hope. When we find ourselves unloved, unnoticed and hopeless, we turn to anything in order to get this quick fix of love, attention and what is only a false hope of something better. Only with true hope and true love can we beat addictions because everything is just another addiction.” - Youth Informant

Many youth that were into dealing or using drugs expressed that they felt as though their life didn’t have value so it didn’t matter if they used, or felt that because of their circumstance this was their only option.

“People do drugs if they feel like they need to fill an empty hole in their lives. Depression, self-pity, peer pressure” - Youth Informant

In this case, youth engagement that opens up relevant spaces for youth alongside people that are invested in their lives would be an effective strategy. Targeting strengthening family structure is noted as key in implementing change as well (see recommendation #2, #4 and # 19). To youth, substance use becomes a problem when the substance became reliance or an addiction.

“When it moves away from being ‘Ya, I’m going to do that with my friends’ to ‘I’m having problems at home and this is how I’m going to deal with that’; that’s when it becomes a problem and risks getting into harder stuff” - Youth Informant

“You get to the point where addiction becomes more important than a lot of other things.”
- Youth Informant

What factors into a youth avoiding or overcoming substance use?

Most youth cited major life occurrences as being the main motivation for stopping use, or risk-taking behavior associated with use:

“Rehab, intervention, getting a job, going to jail, being legal drinking age, having a baby, these things help stop it. When drugs and alcohol take over your life and you choose to seek help.”
- Youth Informant

“The biggest motivation to quit is seeing bad things happen to other people.” - Youth Informant

“I used to let my friends drive me drunk, but my friend died last year in a car accident. Now I don’t get in the car.” - Youth Informant

A key factor for most youth to stop use was a supportive, healthy adult relationship. Almost every youth talked to that had been into drugs or around drugs and either stopped or avoided use, had some one in their lives giving them hope and instilling value in them (e.g. parent, aunt, uncle, mentor, pastor etc):

“Youth that don’t have encouraging supports are very confrontational to adults because they don’t trust them. They need to build trust more effectively.” - Youth Informant

“When I needed to quit, I talked to my uncle.” - Youth Informant

For some youth, stopping use was talked of as an internal battle that needed to be overcome by personal strength. Without a supportive adult though, this was next to impossible.

“Be taught properly and know who you are. If you aren’t able to know who you are that defines you, you’re going to look for something else that defines you” - Youth Informant

All youth, however, pointedly stated that “you can’t help a person unless they want to help themselves. People aren’t going to stop unless they want to.”

What can be done about it? What needs to change in your community order to make this happen?

Youth were given a list of focus areas on the survey that would be most effective in reducing the harms associated with substance use. Of the 16 focus areas suggested, the three most prevalent among youth were to “Provide supports to help people who use drugs to stabilize their lives and/or prevent relapse” (42 respondents out of 119), “Prevent people from “falling through the cracks” of our service system” (33 respondents out of 119) and “Foster a community culture that promotes activities and opportunities that are drug and alcohol free” (31 respondents out of 119)

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Provide supports to help people who use drugs to stabilize their lives and/or prevent relapse		36%	66
Prevent people from "falling through the cracks" of our service system		31%	57
Address the causes of substance use		29%	53
Foster a community culture that promotes activities and opportunities that are drug and alcohol free		29%	54
Increase range and access to treatment options		26%	48
Improve public awareness and knowledge about substance use		24%	44
Increase supports to prevent and/or delay substance use		23%	43











Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Improve supports that help families deal with substance use		23%	43
Strengthen individual skills to help people make healthy choices about substance use		22%	40
Reduce drug related public disorder and crime		22%	41
Reduce the supply and availability of illegal substances		21%	38
Improve and coordinate efforts across health, social, and justice systems		20%	37
Reduce negative attitudes and judgment around drug use		20%	36
Expand emergency services for people who are actively using substances		18%	33
Create alternative justice measures for people who use substances		16%	29
Reduce the risk taking and negative health impacts of substance use		11%	21
Other, please specify:		7%	12
Total Responses			184

Figure 5: From Peterborough Drug Strategy general survey results, 119 respondents, youth ages 16-24

Providing supports and preventing people from “falling through the cracks” are both reactive measures, while fostering a community that promotes drug and alcohol free activities is proactive.

The top three proactive themes that kept coming up among youth were:

- 1. Youth want more places where they can go, where they can feel safe and not be judged**
- 2. Youth want more people that actually care about their lives**
- 3. Youth want more events that are fun and free that they could partake in.**

The main thing to note is that when youth are engaged in making the change, and feel like their lives and opinions matter, they are likely to help in the facilitation of change in themselves but also in others.

It is therefore a strong recommendation of this report to engage youth in opportunities to be involved in forming and facilitating both proactive and reactive measures to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and drug use.

A Note on Youth Engagement:

Throughout this report, the reoccurring theme is that true change occurs when youth are engaged in forming and facilitating the project, policies and programs that make these changes. A serious question for service providers is: what does youth engagement look like? Although there is much literature about youth engagement and a desire to engage youth in implementing projects and decision making, youth engagement is often done poorly and is a struggle to engage youth in a meaningful way, while still adhering to project guidelines.

Practically speaking, youth engagement can take a variety of forms, boiling down to the two outlets of providing space for youth to engage and adults who make meaningful, caring investment in their lives and take their opinions seriously. Throughout these recommendations, practical suggestions for implementing youth engagement have been included.

**suggestions have been made in green italics*

Recommendations

The following 12 recommendations are based on the key areas highlighted by youth. All recommendations fall under the following themes and are based on the four pillars: Places/ activities for youth that are free, accessible and non-judgmental; people that care; relevancy and practical action; youth engagement and employment.

(1) marijuana is not the problem

marijuana was seen as being a normalized part of most youth's lives, and often family members were the first to introduce youth to marijuana at a young age. Visibility and availability of the substance was noted as high.

"marijuana is everywhere, on the streets, at friend's houses. I've picked up joints off the ground! But weed is not the problem; it's the other stuff that's the problem." - Youth Informant

The general perception about marijuana was that it was easy to get and had low consequence in terms of use. marijuana was generally seen as a healthier option to drinking and smoking cigarettes, or “drugs light” as one youth worker described it. Most youth recommended the legalization of marijuana as an effective strategy to reduce the harms associated with drug use.

“Legalize marijuana. It will help the whole problem. People wouldn’t trespass as much; people wouldn’t skip class as much.” - Youth Informant

*“If the law would change and legalize marijuana, hard drug use would go down for sure.”
- Youth Informant*

Adult use and medicinal marijuana often came up as supporting the case that it was ‘not a big deal’ and was actually beneficial for health.

“My aunt uses [marijuana] for medical purposes, but that contributes to the thought of ‘why can’t other kids use it if adults are being told to use it’” - Youth Informant

*“People start smoking because of peer pressure, stress or curiosity. [Weed] makes people normal, have fun and not have to think about your problems. It mellows you out”
- Youth Informant*

“A lot of people take pills for sleeping. Weed is way better for you than that” - Youth Informant

A popular theory is that marijuana is problematic because it is a ‘gateway’ to use of other substances. Smoking cigarettes came up among youth as more of a ‘gateway’ than pot, because it was the culture of substance use, not the actual drug that caused youth to continue use and experiment.

An interesting insight from one youth was that ‘it’ came down to a circle of trust. If your main trust relationships were built with those who were involved in substance use, (family member, dealers, older friends) then you were more likely to follow in use. Youth are citing a lack of trusting adult relationships in their lives, so having a trust relationship with a dealer can be an avenue into increased drug use.

*“Marijuana is a gateway drug but not because of the drug. Smoking pot is not the gateway. Marijuana is a gateway drug because of the dealer. People go to their dealers to get pot and then their dealer says: ‘hey, have you ever tried E?’ That’s how they get into other stuff. You build a relationship with your dealer. Some people trust their dealer more than other adults.”
- Youth Informant*

Recommendation #1: Provide outreach to youth in terms of trusting, adult relationships that realistically address the issue of substance use, including marijuana.

In addition to more trusting adult relationships, there was a demand for more realistic education and statistics about marijuana. Youth who felt that marijuana was ‘okay’ but were being told by adults that it wasn’t, wanted to be given good reasons as to why smoking pot was bad.

On the other hand, there were some youth that considered their own experience with marijuana as being highly addictive and problematic, and were very concerned about marijuana use amongst youth:

*“marijuana can be just as hard as the other stuff. It’s laced to be used to sell other drugs”
- Youth Informant*

“Is marijuana addictive? Yes. I’m a recovering addict. It’s the high that becomes addictive. And it’s cheap. My dad introduced it to me when I was 11. I was a full time addict by the time I was 15.” - Youth Informant

There was an underlying request for more realistic education offered about marijuana use. The reality is that most youth do not see it as a problematic substance, and in fact argue the health benefits, using medicinal marijuana as an example and that it is a better alternative to many other substances. However, as one youth noted:

“[Marijuana] is not something that you can say ‘oh, it’s nothing, don’t worry about it’. It affects your brain chemistry; it affects your nervous system.” - Youth Informant

Realistic education about marijuana use includes the acknowledgement of pot as a more normalized part of youth’s lives, while also providing statistics and practical feedback on how marijuana impacts your life and how to manage, reduce or refuse use.

Recommendation #2: Provide realistic education about marijuana use, and engage adults with youth in the conversation about the legalization of marijuana, and the implication of marijuana use on their own lives. Speak from experience, and give youth real reasons to think otherwise.

Involve youth in the process of developing educational opportunities and carrying them through. Involve youth in presenting information to their peers. Be open about own experience so that youth feel they can be open with theirs.

(2) Drug Paraphernalia:

Some youth also expressed concern at the prevalence of drug paraphernalia and that it was promoting use. Youth that were strongly pushing for the legalization of marijuana also argued that there should be age restraints put on the buying and use of pot, as well as the buying and using of drug paraphernalia, such as bongs.

“If you allow them the smoke dope, they would still need to adhere to rules, just like smoking rules.” - Youth Informant

“There should be an age limit for drug paraphernalia.” - Youth Informant

*“They are opening a lot of stores that advertise drugs... You can buy salvia at a corner store.”
- Youth Informant*

Recommendation #3: Place an age restriction on the buying of drug paraphernalia, and, if marijuana is legalized, on purchasing and use (similar to cigarette restrictions).

(3) Alcohol:

Youth drinking was also discussed as a cultural norm, and so admittedly is harder to deal with directly. One major trend with alcohol was that it is tightly linked with home life and family dynamics.

“Why do I drink? Because I have family issues! Just to calm me down so I don’t go to jail. It’s not a solution! It’s just having a way out of an issue: my problem with my family is that none of them care. Nobody talks to each other.”

Alcohol was particularly brought up as an issue of concern in the counties. Youth in Lakefield remarked on drunk driving and “youth traveling in packs drinking” as common concerns. Youth in Apsley cited drinking as the major substance use in their community.

“Underage drinking is a huge problem. It’s easy to get alcohol; if you’re underage you can just get an older friend or a parent to buy it for you.”

While youth could not think of a specific way to target alcohol use, targeting the family and providing supports for youth from a young age were regarded as the most effective way to ensure safer alcohol use among youth.

Recommendation # 4: Target families of youth with support related to alcohol education, providing alternatives and managing use. Create spaces for families to engage and learn about issues related to alcohol use together with youth, while building relationships and having fun as a family.

Engage youth in the discussion of how they want to have this conversation with their parents and families, make youth engagement part of an ongoing dialogue in programming.

(3) Pills are everywhere.

Opioids are seen as a huge problem and were cited the most often as a problematic substance among youth. Statistically, 17.8% of Ontario students had used opioids in 2009, 20% of whom had used more than 10 times, while an additional 31% had used 3-9 times that same year.¹³ In Peterborough the growing prevalence of opioids was a pressing concern:

“Oxy’s are a big problem, people are smoking, grinding, snorting...” - Youth Informant

“People take advantage of prescription drugs to get high off them.” - Youth Informant

“Oxys are a very physical drug. Lots of pain, dying pain.” - Youth Informant

“Oxys are the worst. Kid’s get exposed to things a lot earlier than they used to. It’s pretty easy to get [drugs] now, and it’s all over the media. Kid’s think that doing drugs makes them more mature.” - Youth Informant

¹³ OSDUS study, 2009 from “Discussion Document- Substance use in the Community” Peterborough Drug Strategy Initiative, April 2011.

“Pill drugs are the most problematic; kids are dropping out of school because of drugs. There is also a general increase of alcohol in the schools.” - Youth Informant

*“[Oxys] are not so much drug culture, they’re prescribed! People aren’t looking to get stoned!”
- Youth Informant*

Opioids were reportedly encountered mostly in schools and on the streets. Some youth in the counties had had less exposure and were unaware of the issue. Opioids have notably much less visibility than marijuana, alcohol and in the counties particularly, even other drugs such as crack/cocaine.

Recommendations for opioids are to make them less accessible. Youth believe that it’s becoming a huge problem and has serious implications. It is easy to get, easy to use, easy to sell and highly addictive. Youth noted that high movement of opioids on streets could be reduced if checks were put on pharmacies as well as in schools.

“If you could get paid the same amount for [Oxy’s] through a drug recycling program, people wouldn’t be so inclined to sell them. People sell them for the money, and they get a good price. If they got as good a price from the pharmaceutical companies they probably wouldn’t sell them on the street so much” - Youth Informant

Recommendation # 5: Reduce accessibility and availability of opioids through interventions at the high-school level, as well as placing restrictions on pharmacies and how the drugs are prescribed. Promote drug-recycling programs with monetary incentives to sell drugs back instead of moving them on the streets.

Engage youth by getting high-school students to design the recycling programs and promote opioid restrictions to pharmacies. Provide avenues where youth can tell their stories about opioid misuse in a productive way to bring down accessibility and harmful effects.

Methadone

A majority of youth who discussed and were familiar with methadone treatment stated strongly that methadone “had to go”. Methadone for the most part was seen by youth as a very negative program allowing people to maintain their addictions, and use the system to sell their ‘carry homes’, while often still taking other drugs. Youth that knew about methadone were insistent that people knew how to manipulate the system, and that methadone was ‘just another drug’ to be taken advantage of.

“Methadone clinics don’t help. They just get people more hooked. The best way to get someone off is to put them in a room for three days with blankets, a pillow and some food. That’s the best way to do it.” - Youth Informant

“Methadone started off good but now its worse- it’s sad they just let anyone on it now. And if you’re not getting it from the clinic you are on the street buying peoples carries.” - Youth Informant

These perceptions highlight the need for greater education and training to go out around methadone treatment programs. Statistically, research shows that methadone is an incredibly

effective treatment program for many overcoming addictions. Currently, education that youth are receiving about methadone is watching friends and family take advantage of the program. Education that highlights the benefits of methadone treatment will be essential for changing youth opinion about it.

Recommendation #6: Introduce more education for youth and families about the success factors of methadone treatment, to reduce perception of methadone as ‘just another drug’. Encourage a more in-depth screening process for individuals receiving treatment at methadone treatment centers.

Treatment options

Providing a treatment facility was something that often came up among youth as an important step, especially those with lived experience or who were close to someone with lived experience. Frustrations were expressed in terms of waiting lines and distances travelled in order to access rehabilitation services. If a person was ready for treatment, treatment needed to be accessible. It was also recommended that a rehab centre be not ‘just’ rehab, but also offer a holistic approach to healing. This is included in the recommendation of ‘places to go’.

“We need more than a rehab center, somewhere people can go where there’s a structure or routine. When I think Rehab I think safe, I think clean, but also I think action. I think eating meals together, being together. I think family.”- Key Informant

Fourcast does offer treatment options for youth, however they received mixed reviews. Youth who had had good experiences with counselors spoke well of Fourcast, while youth who had had a single bad experience wrote off the whole organization. Referral based services were also deemed by youth as ‘unhelpful’. As outreach options and relationship building with trusted, caring, non-judgmental adults are strong recommendations of this report; providing personal connections with youth to connect them to treatment options would be highly beneficial.

“There should be more outreach programs. For example, Fourcast ... but you need to know about it or get referred, that’s not helpful” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #7: Provide treatment services for youth in Peterborough who are looking to heal from or overcome addictive behaviours. Treatment options should be more than a bed, but should be effective in restoring youth to their whole person to reach their full potential. Treatment programs should be closely linked to the community in order to bridge the gap for youth to move towards a more stable life with education, employment and housing. Treatment services should also be closely linked to youth outreach and relationship building.

Engage youth in the building and design of rehabilitation programs, to define the needs, and define what this community should look like. Engage the community in discussing effective forms of rehabilitation and how to integrate services into the community well to support youth.

Youth Centers and Programs

Youth Unlimited in both Lakefield and Peterborough were repeatedly cited as the best outreach programs for youth. Their success factor was that they provided safe, fun places of non-

judgment as well as staff that showed a vested interest in care in the lives of young people. The TEACH centre in Havelock was also cited as an effective program, and the Down Town Youth Space (DYS) was cited as helpful as well.

As a recommendation, more youth centers are not the solution. Many youth, after discussing the option of more youth centers for a while came to the conclusion that actually they probably wouldn't go there. Youth were very particular about what kind of places they would go to. On one hand, anywhere where they could hang out, on the other, no where that felt supervised or where they would be judged.

“Drop in centers work! It just takes a lot of patience. The ones that don't work are where the staff don't care.” - Youth Informant

There were some constructive criticisms of the youth centers as well. It was particularly noted that there should be stricter regulations and focus on substance use in some drop-in centers, for it to be more effective. It was also noted that centers were only open for certain hours and had an age restriction.

Recommendation#8: Support drop-in centers and staffing, particularly Youth Unlimited in Peterborough and Lakefield, and the formation of the drop-in center through the TEACH center in Havelock. Support and provide extensive training for staff around the issues of substance use, youth resiliency and sensitivity training. Continue to engage youth in the creation of ongoing use of these spaces.

Programs that offered a bit more substance for youth were also recommended. A key youth informant brought up the Transitional Life Skills (TLS) program that used to be offered through Ontario Works as an example of a program that worked and should still be there. A key aspect of this program was the staff that are willing to go above and beyond to help youth make changes in their lives.

“TLS was awesome- it was a program through OW. I had a worker; they helped me do anything I didn't know how to do. [Some of the teachers] are like that at the Carriage House. If you need help with anything, even if it's a bad trip, then they'll help you. That's all I hear in class all the time is people talking to them. There needs to be more people like that.” –Key Informant

The John Howard Society was also referenced as something that 'worked' for youth with addiction issues. Its programs, however, were notably reactive.

“You need more programs like John Howard. They're good. There's not even a long waiting list. You just go in and they take you. They have pretty cool groups” - Youth Informant

There was also a demand among youth for a place that young adults could go, particularly those with young children, for support. Youth that didn't have healthy support at home or means to find work found themselves in unhealthy places with little guidance of where to go or what to do. It was recommended that there needs to be “something between Kinark and the Bridge” for older youth to participate in. Youth requested more supports, not necessarily in the form of services, but with people who were invested in them and spaces they could go.

Recommendation #9: Create more, safe creative spaces for youth to gather that are supervised by staff who are youth-friendly, non-judgmental and have a vested interest and care for the lives of youth. There is a gap for a drop in center for young adults, particularly young families.

Engage youth in the creation and ongoing support of these spaces, allow them to define what 'safe', 'fun', and 'non-judgment' means to them.

Sports, Activities and Events for Youth

Alternatively to youth centers (which some youth stated they would not attend), many youth expressed that the most effective way to reach them was through fun, coordinated activities and events. Ideas youth expressed were paint-balling, bowling, free swimming pools, free parking lot concerts, more sports teams and BBQs where they can just hang out but have some supervision.

"Boredom is a big problem; people are just walking around with nothing to do. Eventually you'll just try it (drugs)" - Youth Informant

"We need more stuff to do; like events with free stuff. Bands with good music, not a full blown concert but smaller, free events." - Youth Informant

"Art, football, even bowling, I don't know more activities that people can do. They may go smoke up still but at least they have an option." - Youth Informant

"Like kids in the park- they have fun stuff to do, climbing frames and balls to play with... where are OUR balls to play with?" - Youth Informant

"It feels like old people are against young people in this town. They make it feel like all the problems in the world are because of teenagers in Lakefield."- Youth Informant, Lakefield

The top recommendation that kept coming up was free sports teams. Finances were cited as a major barrier for youth looking to join a team, or engage in other activities such as art or drama, and so youth from lower income families often felt like there was little or no accessibility to being active.

"Sports are key, keeps kids away from drama." - Youth Informant

"If people were outside, they would be doing sports more often then doing drugs." - Youth Informant

Recommendation #10: Organize free and accessible sports teams for young people, especially in the summer months. Create a culture of recreation through free programs, events and activities for youth, and engage youth in the process.

Have youth leaders act as assistant coaches and referees. Get youth to help with the promotion and formation of the teams/ leagues.

Outreach and Youth Engagement

Youth indicated strongly that it was not just more programs that would help, but adults that cared and were engaged in their lives. When presented with a series of recommendations such as in this report, it is often difficult to determine where to start: what programs and suggestions to begin with and how they should take form.

The starting point is to start talking to youth, not as an isolated project but as an ongoing dialogue. Outreach programs were noted as something that works incredibly well to connect youth with programs that would have an actual relevant impact on their lives. Outreach is a proactive approach, instead of youth ending up there as part of a court order or treatment program.

“If you do drug’s you’re ‘so bad’, so you just stick with the drug people. It’s fine to say drugs are bad, but what do you do if you are into drugs? Where are the supports for those people? There is a lot of judgment and stigma; you don’t know who to talk to for help” - Youth Informant

Outreach programs are not effective when staff are judgmental or imposing their values on youth. Outreach programs that are effective are community based leaders and are involved with youth but non-judgmental.

“You need more outreach workers, people you can trust. People who you feel like you can tell them anything and they won’t judge you or report you” - Youth Informant

Youth engagement takes outreach to the next level, equipping staff to meet the needs of youth while allowing youth to express their needs and help facilitate programs and policies of change. Continual and ongoing outreach efforts are essential for lasting impact. Outreach staff should be young, open minded and non-judgmental, able to meet youth where they’re at and demonstrating care and compassion for their lives that is legitimate.

Recommendation #11: Create positions of youth outreach to carry on the efforts the Peterborough Drug Strategy youth engagement objectives through the various partners. Integrate outreach efforts throughout different levels of the youth social service sector, and ensure there is a coordinated effort among agencies that deal with youth in providing these programs.

Engage youth in outreach efforts and advertising for different programs and events. Create both formal and informal avenues of youth engagement through increased outreach efforts. Have staff meeting with youth to facilitate ongoing dialogue.

Youth service hub

Youth in the counties expressed a significant barrier to seeking services or counseling regarding substance use because of stigmatization: “Everyone knows each other business” and people can tell when you are going into counseling

“Teachers, some of them listen to you but some of them are really bad. You can only really talk to your friends; you can’t talk to your guidance counselors. There less people in small towns, you know everyone here so it’s harder to tell them stuff. Everybody’s in your business. If you tell one person everyone knows” - Youth Informant

Recommendation# 12: Implementing a social service hub-model in the counties to reduce stigma and provide a wide range of services for youth. Include everything from counseling and probation, to after school tutoring, a canteen and drop in hours.

Engage youth in each county as to how and where this should happen. It will look different for each county area and if youth are involved in the creation of the hub, and give input into what services should be offered, then they will use it.

Transportation:

Transportation and accessibility were mentioned as a significant barrier for youth in the counties for accessing services. There is one bus from Peterborough to Lakefield every day, and no daily buses to Peterborough from other county areas.

“They’re opening a youth centre in Havelock but if you don’t have transportation it’s difficult. People walk [from Norwood], but it’s dangerous” –Youth Informant, Norwood

“There should be more buses in Lakefield.” –Youth Informant, Lakefield

In Peterborough, accessible transportation for youth who were out late or using was brought up as a potential harm reduction strategy.

“Transportation is a big issue. There should be cheaper cabs for youth and later buses that run, in case they’re using late at night and don’t want to tell their parents, etc.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #13: Increase availability of transportation in county areas, both within counties and from counties to Peterborough. Provide cheaper, more accessible transportation services for youth in Peterborough city.

Counseling

Counseling, while recommended by some youth as affective, was also cited as an ‘older theory’ that doesn’t necessarily work for all youth. The primary concern from youth was feeling that there were people who were significantly and constantly invested in their lives, that they had supports from the community that really cared.

“Counseling doesn’t work for me, that’s an older theory, but people aren’t going to change unless they want to.” - Youth Informant

“I’ve seen a couple friends go through CAS workers to help with drug counseling... many friends are still doing it [drugs] though so I don’t think it worked.” - Youth Informant

“There should be more free drug counselors. Free counseling services in the school or elsewhere, mobile counseling.” - Youth Informant

Various recommendations came up around how to provide creative, accessible and non-judgmental counseling services both in and outside schools as well as in the counties.

“Guidance counselors can give advice but they’re just there for school advice, for counseling not for actual life stuff. They can be good for crisis situations, but peer counselors are good for continual emotional support.” - Youth Informant

“There’s got to be more long term counseling. Counseling services in this city are not long enough; they don’t give the opportunity for people to actually heal from what they’ve gone through.” - Youth Informant

“There should be programs where youth who are not on drugs can come in and encourage kids who are healing. It would be a really good tool because a lot of youth feel that counselors are too old, and can’t connect.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #14: Creative youth-led counseling or support services in the schools that are accessible and applicable to youth’s lives. Counseling should be long term and focused on the whole person. Provide more non-academic supports in schools.

Peer Counseling:

Youth often noted that they were more likely to listen to someone who was close to their age, understood their lives and had some lived experience with substance use. Peer counseling in schools was recommended as a way to reach youth where they were at, particularly youth who were not considered ‘at risk’.

“Some kids have everything that most other kids could ever dream of but for whatever reason they are unhappy with their lives and risk everything just to get this addiction, this high. That’s a rebellion issue. What can be done for these kids-- because they are in school, and they do keep up in their school work-- is to have like, peer counselors who can give continual emotional support, life support.” - Youth Informant

“Peer mentorship could be like a course for extra credit, come with training on counseling etc. They have peer tutoring for academic stuff but not life stuff.” - Youth Informant

You could have an in-school drop in centre for peer mentors; a place where peer mentors could ‘staff’ during their spares. Rooms where they can go in private to talk, but don’t do it in a way to encourage kids to skip class.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #15: Involve older youth with lived experience in peer-counseling opportunities. Provide youth the opportunity to gain credit via co-op or volunteer hours through peer-counseling programs.

Enforcement: Greater accountability from police, teachers and other authorities.

One key recommendation from youth was greater and more consistent accountability from authoritative figures, including teachers, parents and the police.

A particular complaint, especially in the counties, was of a lack of authority in dealing with drug use. Youth were annoyed that they still got busted for possession of marijuana, while they felt that police, teachers, principals and other authority figures didn’t really crack down on drug use.

“There needs to be more of a focus on drug use, in schools especially. Kids need to know that it’s a problem. Right now, kids get suspended for stupid things, not for smoking up. They need to know that it’s not okay to smoke pot. Once I saw a teacher come out and turn a blind eye with kids smoking up right behind her. That’s not okay.” – Youth Informant, Norwood

“Teachers not recognizing [marijuana use] is like an invitation for kids to do drugs. School becomes a safe place where people can smoke up and not get in trouble.”

“Smoking sections should be checked-up on; especially if there’s a teacher that smokes, they should go out sometimes.” - Youth Informant, Lakefield

“Make teachers take drug and alcohol awareness training so they can tell when people are high and actually do something about it.” - Youth Informant

There was a recognized need for a greater and more approachable police presence in the city, and particularly in the county. Youth in county areas recommended almost unanimously that there should be more enforcement from police, more police presence and much lower tolerance of drugs in school and on the streets.

“People just need to get busted. There’s so much stuff that goes around here and nobody gets busted. Get patrol, actual cops in our town. I rarely see an OPP up here, we need our own cops.” - Youth Informant, Norwood

“I think the law needs to step it up a bit for those who get pinched. I think they need more time [in prison].” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #16: Greater police presence and mechanism for accountability for youth from authority figures in the county (teachers, parents, police, town officials, etc.) into the issues associated with substance use that youth find harmful.

Enforcement: Reducing Stigmas

Another key concern that came up among some key youth informants was that if the youth had family that had been involved in drugs and addictions, then the police would make assumptions based on that person’s family. This was seen as stigmatizing and discouraging to youth, especially if they were trying to get away from that lifestyle or identity.

“I find that because I come from a family of users that’s all that people see when they look at me: the kid from a drug filled life.” - Youth Informant

Youth also expressed that the way police talked to and treated them was incredibly important, and they were very unappreciative of officers that make judgments, or were insensitive to their situation. Police should be regarded as outreach workers, to build up rapport and respect, and to act as authority figures with compassion and understanding in the lives of youth.

Recommendation #17: Increased sensitivity and approachability training for the police force, as well as an increased police presence and harsher consequences that shows the seriousness of drug use, not just for marijuana use, especially in the county.

Provide avenues for youth with lived experience or from families of lived experience to share their stories with authority figures and advocate for their lives.

Enforcement: reduce visibility and availability of substances.

A primary concern raised by youth about drugs in Peterborough were their visibility and availability. Youth constantly expressed that it was easy to get drugs, they could get them quickly and that was a major concern.

Places youth reported seeing drugs were: parties, school, downtown, the mall, street corners, bars, the movie theater, skate park, the bus terminal, people you look up to, pathways, street corners, train tracks, walking out the front door, Stewart Street, Aylmer Street, bus stops, school, and just walking around.

“I know people that sell drugs walking down the street.” - Youth Informant

“If I stepped outside I could get some drugs in like, 5 minutes.” - Youth Informant

“It’s everywhere. It’s not only on the streets and in the schools but in our homes.” - Youth Informant

There was also a desire for greater police crackdown on dealers and those who were moving harder drugs. As marijuana is not seen as a main concern for youth, there is a frustration that police come down so hard on possession of pot when there is ‘harder stuff’ moving around.

Perception from youth is that the system has ‘no teeth’ and is easy to get around and get away with illegal behavior in regards to substance use.

Youth were asking for a greater police presence and harsher consequences, while having more sensitive interactions with police officers. This was especially true in the county areas.

“Police should do more road stops, RIDE programs, back alleys, more street patrol, bicycle cops, more cops in the alleys. People get away with too much both before and after they’re convicted.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #18: Reduce availability and visibility of drugs through greater police presence and harsher consequences for dealers. Have more RIDE Programs and creative barriers to drug movement that will especially crack down on dealers and those moving harder drugs.

Families and Environment

Many youth cited parents’ use of alcohol or other drugs as the starting point for use or the normalization of use.

“My parents smoke pot so I’m not going to listen to them. You’ll listen to someone who is going to tell you the honest truth and you don’t hate.” - Youth Informant

“The main issue here is home life. Here, parents just don’t care. My parents care, but a lot of my friends have issues, and it’s mostly because their parents have issues or their friends are doing it.” - Youth Informant, Norwood

It is important to note in this section, that when dealing with recommendations to help reduce the harms associated with substance use that impact youth, the whole family needs to be involved. Family dynamic heavily impacts a youth’s use attitude toward substance use, and therefore a strategy that is focused on family is recommended. There was a noted gap from youth regarding supportive family programs. One program that came up was the ‘Come Cook with Us’ program; which was regarded as very successful by youth.

Recommendation #19: Support programs that involve the whole family in supporting youth. Meet youth and families where they are at and provide services and outreach programs in low income housing complexes and at strategic points in the city. Create spaces and programs that support family unity on issues such as substance use and environment.

Create space for ongoing input and discussion from families and youth on the topics that most impact them, how programs can be revised and issues that are cropping up. Allow for ongoing dialogue and input from youth to be part of the programs.

Poverty and Housing

Poverty is also a significant barrier for youth. This is not only because of income, but also because of influence, environment and how a kid grows up.

“It’s all about where you grow up. If you’re growing up in the ghetto where everyone around you is either smoking up, doing drugs or dealing drugs, 9 times outta 10 you’re going to grow up and start dealing too.” - Youth Informant

Youth who grew up in unstable living conditions or found themselves on their own at a young age, cited housing as one of the greatest barriers for youth dealing with issues of substance use.

“There is a lot of homelessness because of addiction to drugs or alcohol.” - Youth Informant

“You can’t really afford nothing on welfare. The only places you can find are crack-beds.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #20: Provide more supportive housing options for youth that are safe and affordable. Provide more assistance in bridging the gap between homelessness youth and youth on assistance, and getting youth into a stable living environment.

Rooming houses particularly were cited as problem zones for youth trying to stay clean, as there were often a heavy influence of substance use around. Youth aged 11-14 from a focus group in Tallwood housing complex’ were able to readily identify buildings, floors and apartments where people “use and sell pot”. These kids were able to recognize problem areas of drug use, and asked for greater police presence and security in helping the issue.

“There should be monthly rooming house inspections. There are a lot of rooming houses where people shouldn’t be in those houses. Friends stay and are hiding.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation# 21: Provide security options for low income housing complexes that house youth to ensure their buildings and homes are clean and safe.

Engage youth in helping to ensure that their living environments are safe by talking to youth in various rooming houses and complexes about what they see as the problems in their area and how they can be better supported. Allow youth to make specific recommendations according to their needs.

Healthy adult relationships/ mentorship

Having healthy adult relationships and people that care about your life came consistently throughout all youth consultations. Mentorship is the most effective model known by service providers to reach youth at risk, and is a proven model that works to improve a child or youth’s development significantly over the period of a one year relationship.

There are three mentorship programs in Peterborough. Their biggest barriers are funding and finding mentors. One of the Peterborough Drug Strategy’s guiding principals is that “everyone has a story and everyone is part of the solution”. Mentorship programs work in effect, to involve the whole community in assisting in the healthy development of young people.

“Siblings, Grandmas, Uncles, Mentors can be a support. Someone who has set that bar really high.” - Youth Informant

“Support works. Honesty works. Don’t bullshit. Never say no - just give them the exact facts, how to be safe while using it; teach them how to use smart and have better things going on.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #22: Increase funding and support for mentorship programs in Peterborough. Include substance specific training for all mentors.

Relevant presentations and programs in schools

Many youth expressed issue with the educational programs that were presented in schools. VIP and DARE were talked about as informative but not significantly effective when it came to youth making choices about substances. It was stressed that education needs to be more relevant and more consistent throughout high-school.

“In schools, have a more honest approach. Don’t try to scare us. They drill it into us that [drugs] are the worst thing in the world, then you get into high-school and everybody’s doing it. VIP and DARE programs are just to scare us” - Youth Informant

When it came to school programming and education, youth were more interested in hearing real stories and real consequences of drug use. It was recommended that presenters be people with lived experience and closer to youth’s age.

“When I hear ‘drugs and alcohol’ I think of people trying to come in and convince us to ‘not do stuff’. When police tell me not to do drugs it just makes me want to do it more.” - Youth Informant

“Well do you have any personal experience? What’s your story? Maybe be more open about where you’re coming from and kids will want to talk to you about their stories too.” - Youth Informant

Another concern youth expressed was that seeing what drugs looked like and how they were made in school presentations actually encouraged drug use.

“If you do anything, like a program on harder drugs, you’re just going to make people more interested in that stuff. I didn’t know anything about harder drugs until the police or MADD came in and showed me and I was like “wow! This stuff is real!” - Youth Informant

The more ‘real’ adults were about their own experience, they younger and closer to youth’s mindset a person was, the more likely youth said they were to listen.

Recommendation #23: Create more relevant education programs around drug and alcohol use that engage youth and people with lived experience. Provide avenues for older youth to share their stories, and the real effects of substance use on their lives.

More Jobs and employment opportunities

A major barrier for youth was availability of jobs. Youth felt that it was very difficult to find work, and so the temptation for getting involved with drug money was higher.

“It’s hard to get a job here so youth just hang around, anywhere that’s free to hang out.” - Youth Informant

“There needs to be more jobs; especially for people who don’t have grade 12. They need full time jobs.” - Youth Informant

“Barriers to employment are like, having a criminal record, not having the skills to go talk to people. A lot of employers judge on your appearance.” - Youth Informant

It is a consistent theme in this report that youth who are engaged in meaningful activities are more likely to make changes in their lives and the lives of others. Meaningful employment opportunities engage youth and help prevent harmful substance use as a life style.

“If I had a job, I would probably stop moving drugs.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #24: Provide and create more meaningful employment opportunities for youth. Engage youth in recognizing their potential creatively. Create employment programs for youth who have not completed their high school.

Getting the word out/ advertising

At the end of a consultation, a final question for youth was how to get the word out and create a more effective messaging campaign. The key theme that was brought up around advertising

was youth engagement. “If there’s one thing that kids really want it’s to know that their opinion matters” Some of the things that youth said were:

“Take a proactive rather than a reactive approach. Stick it on cigarette packs, in Juvi, teachers, guidance counselors” - Youth Informant

*“If someone was in the mall and walked up to me with a pamphlet I would walk away”
“Big posters that are vibrant and simple work well.” - Youth Informant*

“Advertising would be best anonymously, say it the nicest way possible without making them feel awkward. [Posters] should be simple, straight forward and effective. Nice and simple without a big story.” - Youth Informant

“Flyers and stuff help only so much, it needs to be more hands on.” - Youth Informant

There was also some feedback around anti-drug messaging and commercials. Youth stated that the best way to advertise would be to involve youth in both the design (on logos, and in advertising, such as commercials) as well as sporting the design (wearing on hats, t-shirts, helping to advertise, etc.)

“Cool slogans could help get the word out, clothing with that stuff on. “See this hat? I love wearing hats. I never go to school without one. And you can get things printed on the back. That would be cool.” - Youth Informant

“Things to change would be the anti-drug advertisements. Youth in the city look at them and say ‘yeah, so what?’ They take drug addicts and make them feel so impersonal. Make it personal- make it say ‘Here, we’re actually here. We actually want to listen to you.” - Youth Informant

“What do [drug users] do other than drugs? Watch TV! Make sure you get the message out to the media. Don’t do it as a normal TV ad, do it in a way where kids actually know they can go there and that it will be a safe place. You look at some of these TV ads and say ‘and I should care, why?’” - Youth Informant

“Have youth from the city sit down with a commercial designer and get ideas from them. If you sit down with a normal designer you’re going to get a normal commercial. Have a focus group with kids.” - Youth Informant

Recommendation #25: Engage youth in the development and campaigning of messaging about substance use.

Conclusion:

This report drew out the major themes and recommendations expressed from a four month youth engagement and consultation effort from the Peterborough Drug Strategy. This report is in no way conclusive, but begins the conversation of what it means to engage youth in the discussion around substance use in Peterborough city/ county, and incorporate a youth voice into the Peterborough Drug Strategy.

The main themes to be drawn are the following:

- (1) Youth expressed a desire for more free spaces and events that could occupy them that are safe, fun and non-judgemental.
- (2) Youth expressed a desire for more contact with adults in their lives that cared, and outreach workers that had an obvious vested interest in their lives, were relevant to their lives, and could talk to them realistically about these issues. Relationship building and ongoing support is of key importance in building rapport with youth.
- (3) The youth engagement strategy itself was effective in working towards meeting the goals of the drug strategy to reduce the harms associated with substance use in the community. It was strongly recommended that avenues for youth engagement around the topic of substance use be continued even after the youth engagement section of the consultation comes to a close.
- (4) Youth desired more accountability with authority figures in their lives (parents, teachers, police, etc.) and a greater effort towards reducing availability of illegal substances, with the exception of marijuana, which was recommended to be legalized.
- (5) Family and environment were of primary importance in impacting youth's decisions around substance use. Peer pressure was a secondary source. Programs and policies should focus on the family as well as peer influence, and creating a culture of resiliency around substance use for youth. Issues of poverty and housing need to be addressed to make effective change in the lives of some youth.
- (6) In order to make change in youth's lives in the way they understand and engage in substance use, youth must be engaged in the process and implementation of recommendations. Youth engagement should be a continual part of the drug strategy, because youth engagement in itself is a drug strategy.

Engaging youth in the conversation around substance use and what can be done about it came up as the most important factor among youth to help reduce the harms associated with substance use. This can be done by embedding youth engagement into the social service network in Peterborough, or creating positions for youth engagement. Throughout all recommendations, facilitating ongoing dialogue with young people as to how youth engagement should be done and how policies and programs should move forward is considered of utmost importance to implement an effective drug strategy for youth in Peterborough.

Summary of Recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Provide outreach to youth in terms of trusting, adult relationships that realistically address the issue of substance use, including marijuana.

Recommendation #2: Provide realistic education about marijuana use, and engage adults with youth in the conversation about the legalization of marijuana, and the implication of marijuana use on their own lives. Speak from experience, and give youth real reasons to think otherwise.

Involve youth in the process of developing educational opportunities and carrying them through. Involve youth in presenting information to their peers. Be open about own experience so that youth feel they can be open with theirs.

Recommendation #3: Place an age restriction on the buying of drug paraphernalia, and, if marijuana is legalized, on purchasing and use (similar to cigarette restrictions).

Recommendation # 4: Target families of youth with support related to alcohol education, providing alternatives and managing use. Create spaces for families to engage and learn about issues related to alcohol use together with youth, while building relationships and having fun as a family.

Engage youth in the discussion of how they want to have this conversation with their parents and families, make youth engagement part of an ongoing dialogue in programming.

Recommendation # 5: Reduce accessibility and availability of opioids through interventions at the high-school level, as well as placing restrictions on pharmacies and how the drugs are prescribed. Promote drug- recycling programs with monetary incentives to sell drugs back instead of moving them on the streets.

Engage youth by getting high-school students to design the recycling programs and promote opioid restrictions to pharmacies. Provide avenues where youth can tell their stories about opioid misuse in a productive way to bring down accessibility and harmful effects.

Recommendation #6: Introduce more education for youth and families about the success factors of methadone treatment, to reduce perception of methadone as ‘just another drug’. Encourage a more in-depth screening process for methadone treatment centers.

Recommendation #7: Provide treatment services for youth in Peterborough who are looking to heal from or overcome addictive behaviours. Treatment options should be more than a bed, but should be effective in restoring youth to their whole person to reach their full potential. Treatment programs should be closely linked to the community in order to bridge the gap for youth to move towards a more stable life with education, employment and housing. Treatment services should also be closely linked to youth outreach and relationship building.

Engage youth in the building and design of rehabilitation programs, to define the needs, and define what this community should look like. Engage the community in discussing effective forms of rehabilitation and how to integrate services into the community well to support youth.

Recommendation#8: Support drop-in centers and staffing, particularly Youth Unlimited in Peterborough and Lakefield, and the formation of the drop-in center through the TEACH center in Havelock. Support and provide extensive training for staff around the issues of substance use, youth resiliency and sensitivity training. Continue to engage youth in the creation of ongoing use of these spaces.

Recommendation #9: Create more, safe creative spaces for youth to gather that are supervised by staff who are youth-friendly, non-judgmental and have a vested interest and care for the lives of youth. There is a gap for a drop in center for young adults, particularly young families.

Engage youth in the creation and ongoing support of these spaces, allow them to define what 'safe', 'fun', and 'non-judgment' means to them.

Recommendation #10: Organize free and accessible sports teams for young people, especially in the summer months. Create a culture of recreation through free programs, events and activities for youth, and engage youth in the process.

Have youth leaders act as assistant coaches and referees. Get youth to help with the promotion and formation of the teams/ leagues.

Recommendation #11: Create positions of youth outreach to carry on the efforts the Peterborough Drug Strategy youth engagement objectives through the various partners. Integrate outreach efforts throughout different levels of the youth social service sector, and ensure there is a coordinated effort among agencies that deal with youth in providing these programs.

Engage youth in outreach efforts and advertising for different programs and events. Create both formal and informal avenues of youth engagement through increased outreach efforts. Have staff meeting with youth to facilitate ongoing dialogue.

Recommendation# 12: Implementing a social service hub-model in the counties to reduce stigma and provide a wide range of services for youth. Include everything from counseling and probation, to after school tutoring, a canteen and drop in hours.

Engage youth in each county as to how and where this should happen. It will look different for each county area and if youth are involved in the creation of the hub, and give input into what services should be offered, then they will use it.

Recommendation #13: Increase availability of transportation in county areas, both within counties and from counties to Peterborough. Provide cheaper, more accessible transportation services for youth in Peterborough city.

Recommendation #14: Creative youth-led counseling or support services in the schools that are accessible and applicable to youth's lives. Counseling should be long term and focused on the whole person. Provide more non-academic supports in schools.

Recommendation #15: Involve older youth with lived experience in peer-counseling opportunities. Provide youth the opportunity to gain credit via coop or volunteer hours through peer-counseling programs.

Recommendation #16: Greater police presence and mechanism for accountability for youth from authority figures in the county (teachers, parents, police, town officials, etc.) into the issues associated with substance use that youth find harmful.

Recommendation #17: Increased sensitivity and approachability training for the police force, as well as an increased police presence and harsher consequences that shows the seriousness of drug use, not just for marijuana use, especially in the county.

Provide avenues for youth with lived experience or from families of lived experience to share their stories with authority figures and advocate for their lives.

Recommendation #18: Reduce availability and visibility of drugs through greater police presence and harsher consequences for dealers. Have more Drive Programs and creative barriers to drug movement that will especially crack down on dealers and those moving harder drugs.

Recommendation #19: Support programs that involve the whole family in supporting youth. Meet youth and families where they are at and provide services and outreach programs in low income housing complexes at strategic points in the city. Create spaces and programs that support family unity on issues such as substance use and environment.

Create space for ongoing input and discussion from families and youth on the topics that most impact them, how programs can be revised and issues that are cropping up. Allow for ongoing dialog and input from youth to be part of the programs.

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Recommendation #25: Engage youth in the development and campaigning of messaging about substance use.