Promoting Community Belonging

Identifying and Exploring Youth Programs and Organizations that Promote a Sense of Community Belonging

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Presentation Outline

- Key Terms

- Current Project

- Data Collection

- Main Findings

- Future Suggestions

Defining Key Terms For Research

- Defining 'Community' and ' Community Belonging' can be a difficult process, which adds to the complexity of straightforward research in these areas.

  - Technical definitions & Subjective definitions

- This is mind, technical definitions were carried through from the previous research that this project developed from.

Community - Defined

- Community can be defined as…

- "A group of individuals who share common characteristics, interests, values or geographical settings that perceive itself as distinct in some respect from larger society."

Community Belonging - Defined

- Community Belonging can be defined as...

- "The degree to which an individual is connected and / or attached to their community. This sense of connectedness is based on participation and social attachments among individuals within the community and interactions with the community as a whole"

The Current Project

Project aimed to explore existing community organizations and programs that create the conditions to enable, promote and/or establish a greater sense of community belonging for at-risk youth

Research Specifics

- Individuals 12-18

- Research Areas: Haliburton, City of Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland

- Exclusion: Sports Teams & Programs, Religiously Based Programs

Haliburton

City of Kawartha Lakes

Northumberland

Research Questions

1. What types of youth programs / organizations best promote community belonging?

2. Where are these types of programs / organizations located throughout Northumberland, Haliburton and the City of Kawartha Lakes?

3. How are these programs / organizations structured in terms of barriers and commonalities?

Methodology

Collection of Population Characteristics

- General information about research areas: Age Characteristics and Area Demographics

  - Statistics Canada

- Youth Crime Statistics (number of offenses committed, offenses discharged and rates of reoffending)

  - Crime Analyst, OPP

Literature Review

- Determine Indicators of community belonging

- Determine what types of programs best promote community belonging for youth

  - Online, PsycINFO, Scholars Portal, Google Scholar

Methodology

Environmental Scan

- Physical distribution of programs that met inclusion criteria
  - Online, multiple terms, Google and Yahoo search engines

Interviews

- More in depth look at the programs available for youth
  - Boys and Girls Club of Kawartha Lakes – Identified Community Belonging
  - 4H Club of Kawartha Lakes/ Haliburton – Identified Indicators of Community Belonging

Boys & Girls Clubs of Kawartha Lakes

Kawartha Lakes - Haliburton 4-H

Findings - Indicators

Q- *What terms indicate that programs may promote community belonging*?

It was essential to first determine terms that could indicate that a focus on belonging.

Trends in previous research has noted the following terms may indicate, imply or allow for youth to establish a positive sense of community belonging:

- *Participation, Social Attachments, Social Interactions, Social Cohesion, Social Inclusion, Integration, Equality, Recognition, Participation, Support Networks, Positive Peer Interaction, Positive, Staff-Youth-Family Interactions, Fostering Personal Skills, Interpersonal Relationships* and *Connectedness.*

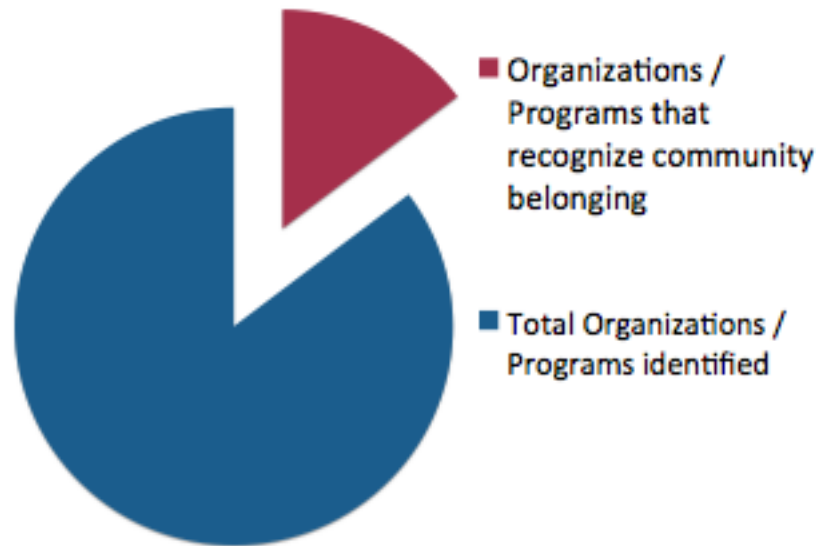- Community Belonging is subject to wide range of terms

Findings – Best Youth Programs

Q- *What types of youth programs best promote community belonging?*

- Previous research supports a diverse range of program types that hold the ability to enhance ones sense of community belonging.

- This includes:

    1. *Programs that focus on the mentioned indicators*
    2. *Programs that encourage parental involvement*
    3. *Educationally-based programs*
    4. *Arts programs*
    5. *Youth development programs*
    6. *Youth mentoring programs*

Findings – Environmental Scan

Q – *Where are these types of programs within the research areas?*

- Organizations / Programs that recognize community belonging
- Total Organizations / Programs identified

- 33 organizations, and multiple programs offered through these organizations were identified across the research areas NOTE: this is not an exhaustive list of all the programs offered in the research areas

- 6 of these organizations had a recognized focus of community belonging
    - The rest specified indicators

Findings – Environmental Scan

Q – *Where are these types of programs within the research areas?*

- Programs were not physically distributed equally throughout the research areas (programs clustered in one area)

- Availability to certain programs is not equally distributed. (Ex. A program may be offered in Northumberland at multiple locations but have no sites in Haliburton or the City of Kawartha Lakes) Ex. YMCA

Findings – Barriers

Q – *What barriers to participation do youth face? What's similar between the programs?*

- Most common barriers youth faced were <u>financially</u> and <u>accessibility</u> related

- 16/33 organizations noted financial costs associated with their programs

- Programs were clustered in certain areas
    - Haliburton – Central Haliburton
    - The City of Kawartha Lakes - Lindsay
    - Northumberland – Cobourg, Port Hope

Findings - Commonalities

- Little focus on evaluation tools, are these programs succeeding in what their main goals are?

- In many cases, online information is not sufficient to properly inform the general public or youth of the programs offered

- Programs that do specify community belonging as a focus tend to receive funding from the government

- Majority of programs focus on youth development

Summary

To sum everything until this point we now know..

- Community Belonging has the ability to mitigate youth crime

- There are many indicators and types of programs that could lead to enhancing youths sense of belonging

- BUT… of the programs identified, a small amount display an awareness of community belonging

- Youth face large barriers in participation to programs in the specific research areas

Suggestions

Noted barriers and accessibility issues fall in line with previous research

What can be done?

Address these barriers
- Provide transportation from local schools to youth programs
- Determine if public transport makes programs accessible to youth
- Address public transport findings accordingly; youth discounts? route changes? weekend routes?

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Suggestions

Many youth that could benefit from these programs may be unaware that they exist, or may be misinformed

What can be done?

Work to make these programs more aware to youth

- Outreach: Bring local programs into schools, capture youths interest and connect them with others who show interest in the same programs

- Website construction in each area to inform youth of local programs

- One of the most important steps is to get the youth <u>through the door</u>

- Continue to investigate programs within the research areas, the findings of the current research are not exhaustive and there is still much more to be explored

Suggestions

Many programs may be unaware of the significance/impact of community belonging can have for youth

What can be done?

Work to bring awareness to these programs

- Visit them, inform them and let them know the significance that community belonging can have for youth

- When this was brought up with the 4H club, I received a positive response

Suggestions

- INVOLVE THE YOUTH!

- This research that has continued over the past 3 academic years. There has been a consistent trend in looking at youth's well-being and helping them to succeed by mitigating their criminal involvement, yet youth themselves have not been directly involved

- Question them. What does community belonging mean to them? How is this best supported in their eyes? What type of programs would they like to see in their communities and what barriers do they personally face?

Suggestions

- Take what the youth say and incorporate this into the development of an 'ideal' program, along with addressing the barriers found through this research

- Follow program structure similar to that of the Boys and Girls Club of Kawartha Lakes OR work with the school boards within the research areas and develop programs that can be offered in those environments

- This addresses accessibility and possibly financial barriers if school boards assist with funding.

- Youth can participate with their peers, and open their social circles to other students

- Sense of belonging in school environment and hopefully carried outside of it

- Proven successful with a program offered at Haliburton Highlands Secondary School (Mindfulness Martial Arts) – now part of the curriculum TLDSB

Mindfulness Martial Arts

- Program aims to help youth with learning and behavioural challenges through enhancing self-control, self-regulation and discipline

- Focus on cognitive-behavioural therapy techniques, yoga and martial arts

- First offered as an after school program for students attending HHSS

- Youth who participated in the pilot project reported that they felt that they belonged

- MMA is now integrated into the educational curriculum at HHSS. Students receive credit for completing the program, do not have to arrange for additional transportation, and experience multiple benefits from participation

The Boys and Girls Club

- Recognize the importance of community belonging and their programs/ facilities are structured to best support the success of youth

- They take suggestions from youth to include in future programs and events

- They offer an environment that has something for everyone

- They have an area dedicated to helping youth with school work

- They encourage parents involvement to a certain point – but not to overshadow the youth

- Their staff see the potential in these youth

- They've address barriers, they provide transportation, $ support when its needed, and it's located in an area that is walking accessible to the local schools in Lindsay

Thank you!

Thank you for attending