
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Youth and community engagement in integrated youth services

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Young people who experience social marginalization, adverse experiences, complex needs or multiple service use, experience mental illness at higher rates than their less vulnerable peers (Farmeret al., 2001; Newton et al., 2012). Young people may use formal clinical services to address mental health concerns but are also likely to require the services of non-profit organizations (NPOs) to address issues of housing, employment, education, recreation, and other social determinants of health, essential in supporting the well-being of young people (Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong & van de Vijver, 2013). The quality of programs that youth access is critical to ensuring a positive impact on young people (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Youth-serving NPOs often have limited access to, and internal capacity to use, research or evaluation information, which means their programs do not benefit from emergent and evidence-based approaches (Mitchell, 2011). Over the past few years, there have been several efforts to overcome these internal and external barriers and ensure that NPOs are well placed to respond to the complex mental health needs of youth in Canada (Despard, 2016).

Wisdom2Action (wisdom2action.org) was funded by Canada's Networks of Centres of Excellence as a Knowledge Mobilization network from 2011-2018 with \$2.6 million Cdn in funding. The focus on not only been on getting research to knowledge users such as youth, community-based service providers and others, but also finding and highlighting the practice-based evidence, often in integrated youth service models. Our approach has also been to entice non-profit service providers into discussions about finding and building evidence for their programs through research, evaluation and networks. Throughout our work we have had a commitment to youth engagement as a principle, practice and youth have led or co-created all projects. Wisdom2Action also provides consulting services and has helped governments and organizations undertake youth engagement projects to enhance policy and practice. A recent project support a government department to examine how to better support the community-based sector in integrated approaches to youth mental health services.

This presentation will include examples of how to implement youth and community engagement in developing integrated youth services.