Effective Interventions for Building Resilience among At-Risk Youth

This Research to Practice Brief summarizes key considerations from the recent literature review, *What are effective interventions for building resilience among at-risk youth?*

This brief also demonstrates the alignment between literature review findings and the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) granting framework and identifies places to find evidence-informed program ideas that fall within the scope of the YOF priorities.

The Issue

Some children and youth in Peel are growing up in challenging circumstances that make it hard for them to stay on a positive trajectory into adulthood. Certain factors, such as exposure to family violence, substance abuse, mental health issues, poverty, discrimination, marginalization and living in foster care can lead to poor outcomes for our youth. These experiences put youth at risk of engaging in violence themselves, conflict with the law, low educational attainment and self-harming behaviours.

The purpose of the review was to identify effective approaches to building resilience among at-risk youth to support them as proactively as possible. The findings are intended to support youth-serving organizations with program development and applications for future funding opportunities.

Resiliency and the Social-Ecological Model

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, *resilience* is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in a culturally meaningful way. The *social-ecological model* can be used to understand resilience as a concept that goes beyond individual characteristics to include adaptation of systems surrounding the individual. To effectively build resilience and prevent violence and poor outcomes, strategies at the individual, family and community level should be considered.
Findings

The research evidence revealed consistent themes for interventions at the individual, family, and community levels:

*Individual level* - interventions focused on building the child or adolescent’s social, emotional or personal competence were efficacious for building resilience. For youth in foster care, helping them to define their own outcomes and contribute to the development of the services they receive can build self-esteem and self-efficacy, and in turn build resilience.

*Family level* - having a stable emotional connection and a predictable relationship with an adult caregiver are strong predictors of positive adolescent outcomes. Effective interventions included family-centered concepts such as positive parenting, family management, and parent-child communications.

*Community level* - fostering connectedness with community resources and people in one’s neighbourhood can build resilience beyond individual and family factors. Three types of promising strategies for building resilience at the community level are suggested: building social capital, service learning, and organized community youth activities.

Implications for Practice

Based on the research and discussions about applicability and transferability to the Peel context the following actions should be taken:

1. Build the following components into strategies and initiatives that intend to build resilience in youth:
   - Build upon youth’s social, emotional and personal competence skills.
   - Promote self-efficacy of youth through helping them to define their own outcomes and involving them in the development of services they receive.
   - Offer parenting programs that include family-centered concepts such as positive parenting, family management, bonding and parent-child communications.
   - Ensure that each youth served has at least one secure relationship with an adult caregiver that is predictable and stable.
   - Support youth in their ability to build social capital and connectedness with resources in their community.
2. Enhance the empirical evidence base for the effectiveness of resilience building interventions at the community or systems level. More research and evaluation is required for determining effectiveness and impact. Sharing of evaluation results, particularly for interventions that draw upon the community as a source of resilience through building social capital, service learning and organized community youth activities is encouraged.

3. Focus on the environment and systems surrounding youth to build resilience. Resilience should not be thought of or portrayed as an individual characteristic.

4. Use terminology such as “marginalized youth”, “youth with multiple barriers” or “youth in challenging contexts” as opposed to “at-risk youth”. This supports the shift in identifying solutions beyond the individual level to the broader environment and system.

5. Consider additional cultural factors specific to Peel and the transferability of school-based interventions to the community setting when implementing programs or initiatives.

Alignment with Provincial Direction

In 2012, the Ontario Youth Action Plan was released as a key blueprint for action against youth violence in Ontario. Central to the action plan is the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF), a $5 million annual funding program that provides grants and capacity-building supports to grassroots groups and organizations serving youth facing multiple barriers to economic and social well-being. This funding is an important opportunity for the advancement of community-based violence prevention efforts in Peel Region.

The Fund Granting Framework is based on five outcomes from the Government of Ontario’s Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario’s Youth Succeed. There is significant alignment between effective or promising strategies identified in the literature review and the granting framework. Community organizations may consider using the strategies identified in the review when developing programs and referencing this review as evidence when applying to the YOF to strengthen their application.

The following chart includes strategies identified in the review organized by relevant outcomes from the granting framework. Resources for program ideas that fall within the scope of the framework are also included.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOF Granting Framework Outcomes</th>
<th>Strategies or initiatives identified in the review</th>
<th>Resources for program ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Supportive Friends and Family</td>
<td>Youth have families and guardians equipped to help them thrive</td>
<td><em>No specific intervention fits directly under this outcome. Having basic needs and essential resources are foundational to ensure well-being and would enhance access to all other strategies or programs.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Youth have at least one consistent caring adult in their lives</td>
<td>Offer parenting programs that include family-centered concepts such as positive parenting, family management, bonding and parent-child communications. Ensure that each youth served has at least one secure relationship with an adult caregiver that is predictable and stable.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth form and maintain healthy, close relationships</td>
<td>Offer parenting programs that include family-centered concepts such as positive parenting, family management, bonding and parent-child communications. Ensure that each youth served has at least one secure relationship with an adult caregiver that is predictable and stable.</td>
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<td>Civic Engagement &amp; Youth Leadership</td>
<td>Youth are engaged in their communities</td>
<td>Build upon youth’s social, emotional and personal competence skills. Promote self-efficacy of youth through helping them to define their own outcomes and involving them in the development of services they receive.</td>
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<td>Coordinated &amp; Youth Friendly Communities</td>
<td>Youth know about and easily navigate resources in their community</td>
<td>Promote self-efficacy of youth through helping them to define their own outcomes and involving them in the development of services they receive. Support youth in their ability to build social capital and connectedness with resources in their community.</td>
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Resources for program ideas:
- [Public Health Agency of Canada Best Practice Portal](#) - a searchable list of prevention and health promotion interventions that have been evaluated and have the potential to be adapted and used.
- [Public Safety Canada’s National Crime Prevention Centre](#) - includes tools and resources for evidence-informed, cost-effective crime prevention initiatives and a listing of current programs across Canada.
- [Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development](#) - a U.S. resource that identifies outstanding violence and drug prevention programs that meet a high scientific standard of effectiveness.
- [Project Oracle](#) - a U.K. based children and youth evidence hub that aims to improve outcomes for young people in London by building capacity to develop and deliver evidence-based projects.
- [CDC Community Guide – Violence Prevention Focused on Youth](#) – a U.S. resource that helps professionals choose programs and policies to improve health outcomes. They have completed a number of systematic reviews to identify effective interventions to address youth violence, summarized [here](#).
Looking for tools to support the development or adaptation of a program?

Visit the PeelThinkShare website for tools and resources that can help you to develop or adapt an evidence-informed program.

Check out Understanding Evidence, a resource created by the CDC to help with evidence-informed decision making with a specific focus on violence prevention.

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**PeelThinkShare Research to Practice Briefs**

This is one in a series of Briefs prepared by the Community Health Initiatives Team, Region of Peel, Health Services in order to support community-based organizations in the Peel Region with accessing and using high quality research evidence.

The intent of these Briefs is to present the key evidence-based findings, considerations for implementation and links to more resources to support evidence-based practices and actions in the community.

These Briefs and other resources can be found at: [www.peelthinkshare.ca](http://www.peelthinkshare.ca)

Is there a topic that you are interested in, that has not been covered in our Research to Practice Series yet? Let us know by emailing [peelthinkshare@peelregion.ca](mailto:peelthinkshare@peelregion.ca).

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