

Priorities Committee Meeting_Sep18_2018

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**The Slab****Report Purpose**

To provide the Priorities Committee an update on what we learned from "The Slab" prototype.

Strategic Plan Priority Areas

Economy: n/a

Governance: n/a

Social: A strong community is inclusive and fosters a positive lifestyle for Strathcona County residents. Inclusion of youth through opportunities for meaningful connections and opportunities to be healthy and active contributes to a sense of belonging. Providing available, accessible, and affordable recreation and leisure opportunities connects youth and creates a stronger sense of community. Inviting community partners to participate expands the County's ability to respond to the changing needs of youth in the community.

Culture: Promoting youth inclusion in activities that integrate the arts into community life contributes to diverse perspectives and improves the quality of life and wellbeing of youth.

Environment: n/a

Other Impacts

Policy: 2013-2030 *Strategic Plan: Becoming Canada's Most Livable Community*, goal 1: build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents, goal 5: foster collaboration through regional, community and governmental partnerships, and goal 6: provide facilities and services that are available and accessible to residents.

Social Framework: A platform to unlock the ingenuity of the community, May 2017

Legislative/Legal: n/a

Interdepartmental: n/a

Summary

The 2016 Community Talk public engagement found that only 59% of youth believe people in Strathcona County are healthy physically, mentally and emotionally. Only 61% of youth aged 11-17 feel they belong and are connected meaningfully to others in the community. Social isolation has been shown to adversely affect mental health, life expectancy as well as numerous other social facets. Improving youth outcomes is complex. We assume that much of the solution exists outside of services and relies upon relationships and resiliency within the community.

It has been noted by Council that some Strathcona County youth "fall through the cracks". It has also been noted that in a community of almost 100,000 people, Strathcona County does not have a specific drop in youth centre in either rural or urban areas where youth can connect, be safe, "hang out" and pursue interests, free of charge.

"The Slab" prototype was an opportunity to explore this need further. A prototype is a preliminary model of something and is a way to make ideas tangible, to learn through making and to quickly get feedback from the people you are designing for. The Slab offered a space where youth could connect, learn, volunteer, innovate and mentor each other.

Several tents housed a lounge/board game area, a recreation area and an area for karaoke and music. With a mix of passive programming and marquee events, the Slab was opened from 12:00 noon to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and from 3:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays.

The space allowed for testing, learning and evaluating in order to examine what kind of youth drop-in space might resonate for rural and urban youth in a way that was interesting and relevant. The Slab sought to achieve these objectives by creating opportunities for engagement and empowering youth to learn leadership and relationship skills through innovative projects, events and mentorship. A variety of mediums were tested to achieve this including recreation, arts and culture and mentorship. Slab summer interns and volunteers were on-site each day and evening and assisted in running the space and encouraging youth to participate.

What we saw:

- Through the summer the Slab saw 224 unique participants, with an average of 10 to 20 youth each day, ranging from 12 to 17 years of age. The largest amount of youth the Slab saw in one day was 50 youth. In the planning and initiation of the Slab, Slab interns connected with 17 community partners, 9 local businesses and 5 County departments.

What we heard:

- The physical space, including the central location, ease of access, and consistent hours decreased barriers for the youth to hang out and pursue interests.
- Flexibility with activities created successful interactions between staff, volunteers and youth.
- Having mentors and volunteers on-site created a safe, fun and positive "vibe".
- Promotion and marketing was successful when meeting youth where they were at. For example, Social media was identified as the way youth heard about the Slab and interactive polls and social media posts allowed youth to identify activities they wanted at the Slab which made the space theirs.
- Inviting community partners and local business to participate was mutually beneficial; the Slab was able to raise their profile with their partnership and youth were exposed to diverse opportunities. Community partners and businesses received a greater awareness of the youth in the community and had opportunities to engage with them in a meaningful way.

Recommendations moving forward:

Recommendations to build on the success of the Slab include having multiple locations across the County (urban and rural) where youth are already gathering and continuing to have young adult mentors to facilitate the space at each location.

Enclosure

1 The Slab