NEXT GEN ACTION SESSIONS

WHAT WE HEARD

STRATHCONA COUNTY YOUTH STRATEGY PROJECT

MAY 20, 2021

Background: Next Gen Action Sessions

In 2019, Strathcona County Council commissioned the Youth Needs and Assets Report (YNAA) to better understand youth needs in the community. The report recommended six priority areas for the County to consider as it works towards meeting the needs of youth and young adults: communication and engagement, collaboration, mental health, gathering spaces, transportation, and affordability. The YNAA report also proposed an overarching recommendation to develop a youth and community-led collaborative strategy to guide the implementation of other recommendations identified in the report.

As a first step in taking action on the priority areas addressed in the YNAA Report and developing a Youth Strategy, members of the Youth Strategy Steering Committee held engagement sessions with Strathcona County Next Gen (youth and young adults).

Throughout April and May 2021, three online Next Gen Action Rallies were held that focused on the priority areas of gathering spaces, mental health and transportation. In the rallies, Next Gen shared their perspectives on their needs related to the priority areas and engaged in conversation with local community experts whose work focused on the priority areas. This document outlines the key themes and findings from the three Next Gen Action Rallies.

Gathering Spaces

Accessibility is a priority for Next Gen and is characterized by multiple dimensions
Definition: There are multiple dimensions to consider in order to create gathering spaces that are accessible for all Next Gen: Accessible gathering spaces are easy to get to for both urban and rural Next Gen. They have operating hours that cater to the unique needs of Next Gen, do not pose cost barriers, and elicit feelings of inclusion and community.
Increased communication and diverse modes of communication are needed to inform Next Gen about gathering spaces
Definition: Next Gen appreciate the current gathering spaces in Strathcona County and want more people to know about them. A variety of communication platforms should be used to reach Next Gen where they are at and using the modes of communication that they are already using (i.e. social media, texting etc.).
Next Gen want gathering spaces that have flexibility built into them and there are different dimensions to this flexibility
Definition: Individual Next Gen have unique needs and interests and these needs and interests vary at different times and in different spaces. Flexibility is needed in multiple dimensions including levels of staff involvement and supervision, options for things to do, programming and services, and equipment and resources. Next Gen also require a balance between programmed and non-programmed options.
Next Gen go to gathering spaces to experience a sense of community and build connections
Definition: Community is built by sharing common interests and experiences with others. Next Gen in Strathcona County value gathering spaces that provide them with opportunities to meet new people, learn about shared interests, share new experiences, and build community connections.

Mental Health

Next Gen are asking for increased communication about mental health resources and supports using diverse modes of communication and for supports that are easy to navigate
Definition: Next Gen place a high priority on knowing where to go for supports for their mental health and require more communication about available supports through a variety of mechanisms (e.g., school, social media, posters). Additionally, it is important to them that systems and services are easy to navigate as this increases accessibility.
A priority for Next Gen is that mental health supports, and resources are accessible, inclusive and prioritize autonomy
Definition: Next Gen have identified that accessible and inclusive mental health supports, and resources include the following features: there is easy transportation to services, support is anonymous, supports can be accessed in a safe and private environment, the cost of services is affordable, and supports can be accessed by those who don't have internet access.
Next Gen believe there is a need to destigmatize mental health and support seeking
Definition: Next Gen have expressed feelings of fear when thinking about accessing mental health supports and services. They are worried about judgement and being perceived as weak. They are also concerned that their feelings and thoughts will be minimized while accessing supports/services. They shared that there is a need to break down the stigma that is associated with support seeking for mental health.
Next Gen have identified unique experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic that have impacted their mental health and how they are able to access support
Definition: Next Gen as a demographic have unique and diverse needs and experiences. During the COVID-19 pandemic they have experienced isolation from peers, stress of online schooling, stress with family etc. These experiences have impacted the mental health of some Next Gen, affecting their self-esteem and contributing to increased social anxiety and stress. They have been less able to rely on some preferred methods of support, particularly peer-to-peer support.
There is a need to recognize, validate, and respond to the unique experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans, Queer, Two-Spirit, Plus (LGBTQ2S+) and Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) Next Gen
Definition: Next Gen prioritize understanding the experiences of and supporting LGBTQ2S+ and BIPOC communities. They recognize the unique challenges and stigma attached to their experiences of accessing mental health services. Next Gen have identified the need for safe environments for sexual and gender minority individuals.
Next Gen want opportunities to increase mental health literacy for themselves and others
Definition: Next Gen have expressed a need and desire for building mental health literacy. They believe that a universal understanding of mental health is crucial for better supporting Next Gen. Additionally, creating mental health literacy is a way to destigmatize the topic of mental health.

Transportation

Environmentally sustainable transportation options are a priority for Next Gen
Definition: Next Gen care about the impact that various transportation modes have on the environment and are interested in increasing the availability of environmentally friendly options like electric scooters, car sharing and accessible busing (characterized by convenient hours and routes etc.).
Next Gen need consistent and integrated communication about how to get around Strathcona County
Definition: Next Gen stated that it would be helpful for information about Strathcona County transportation options to be shared through various modes (e.g., school, social media, etc.). Communication should include where to go to share feedback on experiences related to transportation in Strathcona County and transportation options in the County.
Next Gen need convenient, safe, and accessible transportation options
Definition: Convenient, safe and accessible transportation options consider the unique needs and experiences of Next Gen, including those who may live in rural areas or may experience transportation-related safety concerns related to gender identity. Accessible transportation would consider the lifestyle factors and needs of Next Gen (i.e., ability to access social, recreational, professional, and educational opportunities).

Overarching Themes

COVID-19 has had significant impacts across all domains of the lives of Next Gen
Definition: Next Gen are experiencing significant changes in their lives across domains including school and social relationships, as a result of COVID-19. These changes, coupled with disrupted milestones, may lead many Next Gen to experience loss and a range of other difficult emotions.
Diversity and inclusion are essential to Next Gen and are foundational to overall feelings of connectedness and support
Definition: Next Gen regard diversity and inclusion as essential, and therefore all programs, services and supports for Next Gen should be considered through a diversity and inclusion lens.
Accessibility is a priority for Next Gen and should be considered across multiple contexts
Definition: Supports and services for Next Gen should consider the unique experiences of diverse Next Gen and should be financially, geographically and technologically accessible. Services and programs should be accommodating and responsive to individualized needs.
Next Gen appreciate and acknowledge that community supports and services exist but don't always know where to learn about them or how to navigate them
Definition: Next Gen acknowledge that supports exist in the community, but communication about these supports need to reach Next Gen where they are at (i.e., public school, home school, outreach school, post-secondary, etc.) and using the modes of communication that they are already using (i.e. social media, texting etc.).
Next Gen experience stigma in a variety of settings and contexts
Definition: Experiences of stigma in various settings such as school, or when talking about mental health or seeking support, were also highlighted as a concern for Next Gen. Next Gen want to experience spaces, services and supports that are free from stigma. When Next Gen are accessing spaces, services and supports, they want to feel free of judgment and labelling and included and safe.
Community building and opportunities for connection are important to Next Gen
Definition: Community building is important for Next Gen and is facilitated by activities and spaces that balance structure and flexibility. Structured creative spaces, arts programs, recreational opportunities, and drop-in programs, etc. provide Next Gen with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities but just as important is the flexibility to have the opportunity to build community and connections in these programs and spaces.