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TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAMMING AT THE CANADIAN WOMEN’S FOUNDATION

At the Canadian Women’s Foundation, we want every teen to know how to recognize and prevent relationship violence. Over the last 15 years, we have been funding and working with numerous violence prevention organizations towards that goal. Our research shows that the teen years are a critical time to teach violence prevention because the patterns of abuse are often learned early. Moreover, a recent evaluation of our programs revealed that sixty percent of students in a high school with a violence prevention program noticed a decrease in violence and bullying in their school and in the broader community. As such, teen healthy relationship programming is a proven means to reduce and prevent gender-based violence amongst youth.

We also know, from our work funding these programs across the country, that despite the promise and successes of these initiatives, there is a need for a more coordinated effort to bring about systemic, sustainable change. Ending violence against women and girls requires a critical mass of organizations and individuals aligned in purpose and working effectively. In October 2015, with funding from the Status of Women Canada, the Canadian Women’s Foundation launched a 3-year project, Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships, to strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationships in Canada. The project brings together stakeholders from across the field in order to address some of the challenges and barriers in this area of work, and to collaboratively build a shared set of priority action areas to enhance the excellent work already being done in the field. This report provides an overview of the work undertaken within the first half of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not be possible without the funding and support of Status of Women Canada. We would like to thank the members of the Leadership Roundtable, our partners throughout this project, for their guidance, and knowledge, and commitment to the project. We would like to thank the InsideOut evaluation team for helping to ensure the success of the project at numerous levels. We would also like to thank all the individuals and organizations that dedicated their time and energy to completing the national survey, attending the national forum, and developing the working groups that will constitute the second half of the Building the Field project. We look forward to continuing to work with you over the remainder of the project.

1 The evaluation report can be found here: http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/PDF%20-%20VP%20Resources%20-%20CWF%20Healthy%20Relationships%20-%20FULL%20REPORT%20-%20April%2029%202011.pdf
PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken in the first half of a Canadian Women’s Foundation project called Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships. Building the Field, supported by the Status of Women Canada, is a 3-year project (October 2015 - September 2018) to strengthen and enhance the field of Teen Healthy Relationships in Canada. It brings together numerous stakeholders who make up the Teen Healthy Relationship sector in Canada to collaboratively determine the strengths and challenges of the field, and identify the most meaningful opportunities to support the field as a whole and make a contribution to ending gender based violence.

The project thus far includes the following key components:

- Convening a group of key leaders to constitute the Leadership Roundtable
- Mapping the field of Teen Healthy Relationships through a national survey
- Bringing together diverse stakeholders from across the field in a national forum

This mid-term report provides an account of the many conversations, processes, and activities that have made up the first half of the project. It tells the story of the collaborative processes that make up this project and highlights the collective, synergistic spirit that guides the work of the field as a whole. Specifically, the report accounts for the work that the Canadian Women’s Foundation, along with its partners, have undertaken for the past year and half to map, define, and identify opportunities to strengthen and enhance the field of Teen Healthy Relationships in Canada.
INTRODUCTION

BUILDING THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Context

Teen Healthy Relationships programs are a key means of preventing gender-based violence. These programs engage young people on issues of healthy relationships and what they entail. This includes, for instance, recognizing warning signs of abuse, learning how to show mutual respect, healthy conflict resolution, learning how to set boundaries, consent, and deconstructing gender stereotypes. These skills are typically taught through a combination of classroom work, discussions, role-play, and other activities. Trained peer facilitators, usually youth as well as an adult, lead these programs in order to ensure that they are relevant and accessible to teens.

The Canadian Women’s Foundation has been funding and supporting Teen Healthy Relationship programs in Canada for over 15 years, aiding grassroots organizations with capacity building and knowledge sharing. In 2012, we developed a National Learning Strategy around Teen Healthy Relationship programming, funded by Status of Women Canada. In our final report on this initiative we concluded: “The field [of teen healthy relationships] practice is hungry for more coordinated responses, long-term strategies, and policy / advocacy frameworks to help coordinate and strengthen the reach and impact of their collective work.” We recognize our own limitations as a funding organization, and even though we support several well-designed, creative, and effective programs in the Teen Healthy Relationship sector, we realize that systemic change requires a greater coordination of efforts.

A strong Teen Healthy Relationships field of practice – with common goals and integrated, complementary approaches – is key to achieving the vision of ending gender-based violence. There are barriers within the sector: organizations have insufficient resources come together as a collective; there are few opportunities to reflect on practice; to devote time to developing shared standards of practice; and to coordinate efforts and resources. The economic barriers facing organizations at this time heighten these challenges. These findings led to the development of Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships, a collective impact project that hopes to alleviate some of these challenges. It aims to do so by creating alignments, enabling communication, and enhancing knowledge sharing towards a sustained contribution to ending violence against women and girls in Canada.

This Initiative: Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships

Collaborative approaches to addressing complex social problems such as gender-based violence are more effective and long lasting than isolated efforts. This is the approach that guides our current project, Building the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships, in which we seek to bring together the diverse stakeholders who make up the field. They include: non-profit program delivery organizations, funders, philanthropists, government representatives and programs (federal, provincial, and municipal), scholars, and research institutes, youth groups, and more. Our project aims to strengthen the links and relationships between

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these different stakeholders in order to facilitate greater coordination, communication, and knowledge sharing amongst them. We follow the social-ecological model towards violence prevention, which takes into account the interconnected ways that individual, relationship, community, and societal factors contribute to perpetuating as well as preventing violence (Figure 1). The model suggests that in order to effectively and sustainably end violence, interventions must simultaneously address all four levels. Therefore, the Building the Field project brings together organizations that address Teen Healthy Relationships from multiple different perspectives.

Our three-year project includes several activities that fall under three large categories:

1. **Conduct Research**: In order to build the field of Teen Healthy Relationships, it is necessary to first map the work currently underway in the sector. As a part of this project, we are working with our partners to develop a preliminary picture of the people, organizations, programs, policies, and initiatives that are concerned with Teen Healthy Relationships across Canada.

2. **Convene Two National Meetings**: We recognize the value of face-to-face meetings, and will be convening two national meetings with stakeholders from across the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. These meetings will facilitate relationship-building and knowledge-sharing amongst stakeholders and also provide the opportunity to collaboratively identify action areas to strengthen the field.

3. **Implement Action**: Once the key action points are identified, working groups will create pilot projects to actualize these priority areas. The Canadian Women’s Foundation will support the working groups to pilot and implement some of their most meaningful action plans.

The Building the Field project is envisioned as being led by “the field” itself. The Canadian Women’s Foundation’s role is that of catalyst and convener. We offer support and facilitate knowledge sharing within the field by conducting research with our partners, and organizing conversations in person and online, to make possible the kinds of relationship-building and network formation that are vital to strengthening the field as a whole. The project is designed, however, to be owned and led by those individuals and organizations who constitute the field. This horizontal, relational approach ensures the efficacy and future sustainability of the project, and indeed, of the field as a whole.
The project so far (in a nutshell)

Since the Building the Field project was initiated in October 2015, our main activities have included:

• Convening the Leadership Roundtable
• Creating a national database of organizations and individuals working in the field
• Conducting a National Survey to map the field of Teen Healthy Relationships
• Organizing a National Forum to bring together diverse stakeholders from the field
• Collaboratively developing key action areas for strengthening the field
• Creating working groups for each action area

This report will describe these milestones in greater detail, providing information about the key activities and outcomes of the first half of the Building the Field project.

LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

The Building the Field project began in October 2015. Our first activity was convening the Leadership Roundtable, a national advisory committee that guides and collaborates on project activities. As mentioned above, the project was designed to be directed by those who make up the “field” of Teen Healthy Relationships. Therefore, when convening the Roundtable, we sought to be as inclusive as possible in terms of representing the different sectors that make up the field, as well as representative of all the different contexts in which these programs take place.

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

The Leadership Roundtable guides the Building the Field project as a whole, in addition to supporting individual project activities. The first half of the project comprised several activities conducted primarily by the Leadership Roundtable, along with InsideOut, our evaluation consultants. The activities included:

1. Creating a national database of stakeholders across all four sectors: non-profit service providers, researchers and academics, funders and philanthropists, and government policy makers. We envision that this database will grow over time as new, interested individuals and organizations are identified.
2. Exploratory consultations with 15 stakeholders from each of the identified sectors that make up the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. We gathered preliminary insights on the trends and challenges, influential actors, and opportunities for strengthening the field. The consultations overwhelmingly stressed the importance of inclusivity. They advised the Roundtable to ensure the representation of diverse perspectives, particularly those of youth and culturally, racially, and gender diverse people and communities.
3. A National Survey was sent to stakeholders in the national database with the aim of creating an overall picture of the field. Through the survey, we wanted to better understand who makes up the field of Teen Healthy Relationships, what their priorities, challenges, and gaps are, how they currently interact and collaborate with one another, and what they consider as opportunities to strengthen and support the field as a whole.
4. A National Forum, held April 4-5, 2017 in Toronto, brought together multi-sectoral representatives from across Canada to collaboratively review and discuss results from the survey. The aim was to collectively identify 4-6 crucial action areas to strengthen the field, and to create preliminary working groups that will further explore these priorities and create pilot plans to strengthen the field as a whole.
OUR PARTNERS

The project was initiated with three partner organizations, in addition to the Canadian Women’s Foundation, each of which was represented at the Roundtable. Over the course of the past year and a half, additional partners have joined the project and helped guide it by means of their participation in the Roundtable. Our current partner organizations include:

- **The Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre** is a community-based women’s organization that provides immediate service delivery and works towards social change;
- **The British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres** is the umbrella association for 25 Friendship Centres throughout the Province of British Columbia;
- **Partners for Youth**, a New Brunswick-based organization, works to engage youth facing challenges and obstacles in their lives so that they may become capable, connected, and contributing members of their communities;
- **PREVNet** is a national network of organizations and researchers committed to collaboration to stop bullying in Canada;
- **The National Association of Friendship Centres** is a network of 118 Friendship Centres and seven Provincial and Territorial Associations from coast-to-coast-to-coast;
- **The Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre** is a community partnership initiative, located within the University of Winnipeg, which provides educational and capacity building opportunities for children, youth and families.

The Leadership Roundtable is a non-hierarchical advisory group. Decision-making is through consensus. The structure of the Roundtable includes a rotating voluntary chairperson. This horizontal structure supports and enhances the collaborative spirit that guides the *Building the Field* project as a whole. The Roundtable includes the following individuals who represent our partner organizations listed above:

- **Anuradha Dugal** is Director of Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation;
- **Arwen Sweet** is the Provincial Program Coordinator for the Healthy Relationships for Youth Program at the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre;
- **Jarita Greyeyes** is Director of Community Learning and Engagement at the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre at the University of Winnipeg;
- **Jeannette MacInnis** is Manager of Health and Ending Violence Initiatives at the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres;
- **Jennifer Rankin** is Research Officer, UAKN Secretariat at the National Association of Friendship Centres
- **John Sharpe** is CEO of Partners for Youth;
- **Keetha Mercer** is Program Manager of Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation.
- **Kelly Petrunka** is the Executive Director for PREVNet;
- **Lucille Harper** is the Executive Director of the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre;
- **Peggy Moss** represents the advisory committee for the Teen Healthy Relationships granting program and the Canadian Women’s Foundation;
- **Suzanne Laver** is the Violence Prevention and Support Worker for youth with special needs at Partners for Youth;
- **Dr. Wendy Craig** is Professor and Head of the Department of Psychology at Queen’s University.
MAPPING THE FIELD: 
THE NATIONAL SURVEY

The National Survey was created to better understand the current state of the field of Teen Healthy Relationships in Canada. By doing this, we wanted to:

- Create a map of all the individuals, organizations, projects, and initiatives currently underway across different contexts, sectors and geographies in Canada.
- Learn about the goals and objectives of each stakeholder, as well as the kinds of challenges and barriers they may face in achieving them.
- Identify areas for improvement and intervention in order to overcome challenges and strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationships

Our evaluation partners, InsideOut, developed the survey with the input of the Roundtable. It was sent to 501 potential stakeholders from the four identified sectors: non-profit program providers, researchers and academics, funders and philanthropists, and government and policy makers. We received a total of 132 completed surveys. Of these:

- 73% were from non-profit program providers;
- 12% were from university or community-based researchers;
- 11% were from people working in the government or public sector; and
- 4% were from people working in philanthropic organizations.

This suggests that the “field” is comprised primarily of non-profit program providers, and that these organizations are most deeply invested in strengthening the field. However, it might also indicate the limitations of our own reach and network, showing that additional engagement is required with funders, philanthropists, the public sector, and government.

The responses from the survey confirmed much of the project team’s initial knowledge of the field. They also provided us with new insights into the different ways in which stakeholders understand the goals, objectives, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening the field. Here, we provide an overview of notable findings from this survey.
LOCATING THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

One important outcome of the survey was that it allowed us to paint a preliminary (and approximate) picture of the geographic scope of Teen Healthy Relationship work in Canada. While the table below is necessarily limited because it only represents the information we received from the 132 individuals who completed the survey, it is nonetheless useful to know what the field looks like in different provinces across the nation (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>THR work...</th>
<th>Number of...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occurring in each Province overall</td>
<td>That is exclusively provincial in scope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Manitoba</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (schools we assume)

Table 1: Geographic scope of THR work in Canada (as represented by survey participants)
LEADERS IN THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The survey asked respondents to reflect on the individuals and organizations they consider most influential in the field, which they would turn to for information and guidance. Understanding who is regarded as a leader in the field helps us identify the existing formal and informal networks that make up the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. The top five most frequently named organizations are: The Canadian Women’s Foundation, Girls Action Foundation, YWCA, PREVNet, and Red Cross. It is important to note the influential organizations are not necessarily those that are applying the most effective practices, as the survey did not measure that. It is possible that the Canadian Women’s Foundation’s position reflects – at least to some degree – the fact that we were sponsoring the survey.

The organizations named cover a wide range of areas of focus, from promoting healthy dating relationships amongst teens specifically to addressing gender-based and sexual violence more broadly. They also focus on sexual and reproductive health, sexuality and gender identity, as well as mental health and youth engagement. At the broader end of the spectrum are organizations that work to strengthen families and create healthy communities. The range of different mandates indicates the cross-cutting nature of Teen Healthy Relationship work and speaks to the importance of healthy relationships as fundamental to different aspects of well-being.

WHAT DID THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS TELL US?

The State of the Field

- **Teen healthy relationships programming is a national undertaking with deep roots**
  Survey responses hailed from provinces all across Canada, and the Northwest Territories, showing that Teen Healthy Relationship work takes place all across the nation. Most organizations operate primarily in a single province or territory, while a few work nationally. From our survey, it appeared that most national projects involve either the philanthropic sector or the government. In addition, most organizations have been involved in this work for a long time - an average of 30 years - indicating their long-term dedication to the work.

- **Teen healthy relationships programming is delivered by many kinds of non-profit organizations**
  These programs are offered by organizations that provide services for women and girls, organizations that address sexual and domestic violence, organizations focused on community health services, and youth development organizations that focus on building young people’s capacities and promoting their well-being. We also heard from program providers that work closely with Indigenous communities and immigrant communities, as well as others that work with family services, crime prevention and more. This indicates the wide reach and relevance of Teen Healthy Relationship programming. It is worth noting that, when organizations were asked about the relative importance of Teen Healthy Relationship programming to their work, this revealed further detail. The majority responded that the work is either a significant focus of their organization, or not a focus but part of the work, but only two respondents wrote that Teen Healthy Relationship programs are the exclusive focus of their work.

- **Teen healthy relationships programs reach a range of youth in different settings**
  These programs are offered to youth in urban as well as rural settings, low-income youth, Indigenous youth, newcomers and immigrant youth, teens who have experienced, witnessed or perpetrated violence, those who identify as 2SLQBTQ+, and more (see Figure 2). Moreover, these programs are offered in co-ed settings, as well as girls-only or boys-only groups. Most of these programs (78%) take place in schools, but several are also offered in after school and community-based settings. Despite this strong connection with formal education, only one respondent reported receiving funding from a Ministry or Department of Education.
The Potential Impact of the Teen Healthy Relationships Field

- **Teen healthy relationships programming can enable organizations to have an impact on many different levels**
  
  When organizations were asked about the impact they hoped to create, their answers fell into three broad categories: impact at the systemic level, at the community level, and at the individual level. System level impact refers to the hope of changing both policy as well as social norms by achieving greater gender equality, preventing gender-based violence, promoting a culture of consent, and preventing discrimination against particular youth populations. At the community level, organizations hope to improve relationships between teens and their parents, eliminate violence and bullying in schools, support healthy relationships between students and school staff, and create more inclusive and safer neighbourhoods. Finally, at the individual level, there are two main categories of desired outcome: increased knowledge and skills, and increased resilience (see figure 3). This aligns with the ecological model that we use to view the field.

- **Researchers across Canada are working on issues that impact the field of Teen Healthy Relationships**
  
  Researchers are working on multiple pertinent issues including teen dating violence, bullying, violence prevention, healthy social and emotional learning, and digital and media literacy. Within these, they engage with the underlying factors contributing to these issues, the means of preventing violence and harmful behaviours, promoting consent and positive relationships, promoting online safety, and the impact of technology on youth cultures and relationships. Given the pertinence of this work to Teen Healthy Relationship programming, we feel that bringing researchers and academics in closer contact with program providers will help bridge the gaps between theory and practice, bringing greater depth to both sectors.
Fragmentation and silos within the field

- **Funding for Teen Healthy Relationship programs is fragmented and piecemeal**
  When non-profit service delivery respondents were asked to name the main funders of their Teen Healthy Relationship work, the 86 respondents named over 70 distinct funders or sources of funding. In most cases, organizations receive funding from multiple sources. Philanthropic foundations and provincial/territorial governments were the most frequently mentioned groups of funders (33% and 27% respectively). The United Way/Centraide was the most frequently mentioned single funder of Teen Healthy Relationship work (15%). Overwhelmingly, the philanthropic foundations named are local or provincial, rather than national.

- **With so few respondents from the government and public sector, more work is needed to engage with policy makers**
  The survey received very few responses from government and public sector representatives, indicating insufficient engagement of these powerful influencers within the field. The small number of responses we did receive indicates that their priorities include preventing domestic and sexual violence, reducing risk factors and promoting teens’ capacity for healthy relationships, reforming educational curricula, improving mental health services for youth, and improving data collection and decision-making with respect to youth well-being.

Challenges facing the field of Teen Healthy Relationships

There was considerable consensus amongst the survey respondents about the kinds of challenges facing the field. These include:

- Complex societal issues such as cyberviolence and hypersexualization of girls.
- High expectations on program providers, and the lack of resources to support them.
- Policy makers insufficiently prioritize Teen Healthy Relationship work.
- Lack of training for program providers such as teachers and facilitators.
- Lack of evidence about successful programs.
- The different sectors that make up the field are working in isolation from one another.
- Funders lack real understanding about the nature of the work.
Respondents also raised other issues. The top three themes from their comments are:

- **Systemic challenges**
  These tended to focus on addressing the root causes of violence. They advocate applying an intersectional framework to address issues such as patriarchy, racism, classism and other oppressive systems. Other system-wide issues include the lack of shared definitions about healthy relationships, the fact that school-based programming is inconsistent, and that there is insufficient focus on primary prevention.

- **Funding-related issues**
  These include the lack of sustainable funding overall as well as for specific aspects of programming, including operational, travel, and program delivery costs. Several respondents noted that the available funding is not sustainable, and there is a lack of long-term commitment from funders. Some pointed to the fact that there is insufficient evidence of the effectiveness of programs, and that improved monitoring and evaluation is necessary for better funding.

- **Unmet youth needs**
  Here, respondents pointed to issues such as the education sector's lack of prioritizing students' social health, in which they include subjects such as teen violence, consent, sex, 2SLGBTQ+ issues, and more. Respondents also mentioned the limited programs in rural areas, especially in community-based settings outside schools. Related to this, participants also commented on the lack of engagement with youth when developing and offering these programs, and argued for the need to engage young people as leaders, stakeholders and experts.

**Opportunities for Strengthening the Field of Teen Healthy Relationships**

During the preliminary stakeholder consultations prior to the survey, we identified five key opportunities for building the field. We offered these five areas in the survey, as asked respondents to rank these in terms of highest and lowest priorities. Improve sustainability of funding and engage with teens on program and policy development emerged as the clear frontrunners. The overall ranking was:

- **Improve sustainability of funding**
  Respondents stressed the need for long-term funding to ensure the sustainability and efficacy of programs. Some suggested changing funding orientation towards the core mission of an organization rather than specific projects. Finally, they advocated for the need to build better funder relationships.

- **Engage with teens to facilitate their input into program and policy development**
  Respondents advocated engaging youth by increasing peer-led programming, involving them in the development and evaluation of programs, and in the context of participatory action research. They stressed the need to ensure that youth engagement is respectful and inclusive of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

- **Undertake more collaborative, cross-sectoral and cross-regional efforts**
  Respondents suggested developing cross-sectoral collaborations. They stressed the need to bridge gaps between theory and practice, outlining a need for increased collaboration between researchers and program providers.

- **Increase capacity for evidence-informed practice**
  Respondents spoke of the need to better understand the impact of Teen Healthy Relationship programming. Evidence of best practices and long-term impacts can benefit program development and delivery, as well as assist in the funding process.

- **Enhance funder and service provider capacity for program evaluation**
  Respondents stressed the need for both program providers and funders to increase their capacity for program monitoring and evaluation so that the impact and effectiveness of programming can be better understood and measured.
LIMITATIONS OF THE NATIONAL SURVEY

We recognize that the responses reflected in the survey may not be representative of all the nuances and diversity of the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. In particular, the following challenges may have impacted the data we gathered:

- **Data gathered primarily reflected program providers’ perspectives**
  Most responses to the survey were from the non-profit program providers’ sector, with very few responses from researchers and academics, government representatives and policy-makers, and philanthropists and funders. This means that their perspectives and priorities were not entirely represented in the survey results.

- **Misrepresentation and misunderstandings**
  During the review of the data, it became apparent that some respondents might have misidentified their sector, or misunderstood some of the questions.

- **Scope**
  Although the survey revealed several important insights, 134 responses are not representative of the field as a whole. Some perspectives were less represented, or entirely lacking.

THE NATIONAL FORUM FOR BUILDING THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL FORUM

The first national forum for the Building the Field project was held in Toronto on the 4th and 5th of April, 2017. It brought together approximately 70 stakeholders from different sectors and regions across Canada to understand, discuss, and connect with others in the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. Since the attendees were invited to the forum by means of participating in the national survey, everyone present was familiar with objectives of the project: the need to strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. The dedication of the participants, and their commitment to the project, was evident for the entire duration of the forum. It was made clear in their passionate discussion of research findings from the survey, the salient questions posed throughout the forum, and in the final creation of the working groups by the end of the two days.

OBJECTIVES

Reflecting the collaborative spirit of the project, every aspect of the two-day forum was designed to increase communication and participation amongst the attendees. The overarching goal for the Canadian Women’s Foundation and the Leadership Roundtable was to underscore the message that the participants at the forum are representative of the field of Teen Healthy Relationship. In other words, the forum cemented the message that every participant at the meeting is integral to the field, and that it is only through their collective actions and consensus that the field as a whole can become stronger and more sustainable. To this end, the objectives of the forum were:

1. **Build relationships** between champions and key stakeholders operating in the Teen Healthy Relationships field.
2. **Begin to develop a shared understanding** of the current state of the Field by sharing the field mapping research findings.
3. Develop 4 – 6 preliminary action plans (supported by working groups) to address opportunities for building and strengthening the field.

4. Lay the foundation for a multi-sectoral steering committee to support the ongoing work of the initiative as a whole.

These objectives were conceived to contribute towards the goals and objectives of the Building the Field project as a whole, which include:

1. Enhance and strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationship programs through a national collaborative approach, thereby contributing to ending gender-based violence in Canada.

2. Facilitate increased collaboration among those operating within the Teen Healthy Relationships Field to increase and strengthen links and relationships between these stakeholders and thereby establish greater coordination, alignment, communication and knowledge sharing.

As the primary objective of this meeting was to collectively identify action areas for strengthening the field and form working groups to actualize them, this report will focus primarily on the collective activities and conversations that made up the majority of the forum. However, the forum also included significant knowledge sharing from our various research and academic partners, in an effort to bridge theory and practice.

- InsideOut gave a presentation on their preliminary evaluation of the Canadian Women’s Foundation Teen Healthy Relationships national granting program.
- Dr. Wendy Craig of PREVNet presented her research on the development of the brain, and the ways in which trauma and healing can each have a lasting impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of youth.
- Dr. Kristin Blakely gave a keynote talk about the recent rise in anti-feminist, “men’s rights” activism in Canada, and the incursion of these groups into gender equality spaces including the United Nations.

SHARING RESEARCH AND LEARNINGS

Members of the Roundtable presented the most salient outcomes of the survey with a focus on engaging forum participants to situate themselves within the data, to reflect on it, and make it more tangible. The aspects of the survey deemed most important for the participants included:

- What are organizations seeking to accomplish through healthy relationships work?
- What are the main issues and challenges facing the field?
- What are some of the main opportunities for strengthening the field?
- What are the settings within which Teen Healthy Relationship programs are offered?
- What is the current state of funding and funders within the field?

The survey findings were meant to provide a picture of the current state of the field, as painted by the survey respondents. The results highlighted the most salient issues, challenges, and opportunities faced by the field. During the forum, several activities enabled participants to contemplate the data and discuss whether or not it reflected their own experiences. For instance, the “silos” activity (figures 4 and 5) provided a large map of all the different types of organizations that make up the field, and asked organizations to locate themselves within a particular sector or silo, or within the interstices of different silos. Another activity provided each table with the top seven issues and challenges within the field, and asked the groups to organize them collectively in a spectrum of the most important to the least (figures 6 and 7). Every group had slightly different opinions of the most pressing issue, with one claiming that all seven challenges were interconnected, and therefore all equally important.
Figure 4: Participants discuss which "silo" they fall within

Figure 5: The silos activity

Figure 6: Participants debating the spectrum of challenges and opportunities

Figure 7: Spectrum Exercise - Opportunities for Strengthening the Field
The introductory presentations also demonstrated where Teen Healthy Relationship programs are located in Canada, and which organizations were most influential within the field. Given all the data presented, participants were asked to consider three interrelated questions:

- How do we create better connections within the field, between NGOs, funders and researchers?
- How do we break down silos?
- How do we create a systems approach within the field?

The discussion that ensued spoke of the value of cross-sectoral meetings to bring stakeholders together in physical proximity to each other, and how these conversations could be continued in online spaces. As one participant noted, “Telephone calls and webinars are great, but the in-person meetings are really important, because they bring us face to face”. Several participants noted the need for a central knowledge or network “hub” that brings together information about all the organizations, programs, and opportunities for funding. One person stated, “If we all have one objective, then we need one hub, which can then also be the central location that advocates with government and engages with funding agencies”. Several people noted that the Canadian Women’s Foundation occupies the role closest to such a central hub.

Another point that was stressed was that, in the effort to build consensus, the field must not lose its diversity. The different perspectives voiced in the room are all important to consider, as Teen Healthy Relationship work has to be tailored to different contexts and people. These differences are also one of the greatest strengths of the group as a whole, as they allow the field to learn and evolve.

**DEVELOPING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

One of the primary goals, when we initiated the *Building the Field* project, was to develop a shared definition of the field of Teen Healthy Relationship. This question was frequently discussed and debated during the monthly meetings with the Leadership Roundtable and InsideOut. In the national survey, we asked respondents to define the field as well, and quickly realized that there are many differing, although interconnected, perspectives. Given the wide range of definitions we received, the Roundtable came to a consensus that the social-ecological model was the most helpful way of viewing the field. This model helps us account for the diversity of different actors who make up the field, as well as the varied, interdisciplinary efforts that are currently underway within it.

At the national forum, we encouraged participants to come to a shared understanding of the Teen Healthy Relationship ecosystem. One part of this was the simple act of bringing together diverse representatives from across the field to meet and interact with one another. The second part was to identify themselves within a map of the intersecting fields and sectors identified in the survey and then to consider the following questions towards a shared understanding of the field:

1. How would you describe the field of Teen Healthy Relationships based on your work and the work of others at the table?
2. What are the main issues you face in your work, and what are the opportunities for strengthening it further?
3. How can we break down silos that exist within the field at the moment?
Participants discussed the specific projects they are currently engaged in, and the kinds of issues and opportunities they see within it. Although the conversations, examples, issues and concerns are too wide-ranging to provide an account here, one clear priority that affected every aspect of program delivery was funding, and the lack thereof. For instance, one community program representative discussed the fact that her program often suffers from a lack of funding, primarily because it is a girls-only space. She voiced her frustration with false claims that girls’ programs are given more subsidies than boys’, whilst in fact more than 90% of extracurricular budgets are directed towards boys’ soccer and hockey. For this person, one of the most important opportunities to strengthen the field is to collect data and to view it through a gendered lens.

In another group, participants were in agreement that a major goal of the field as a whole is to “break the cycle of family violence.” They discussed the need for youth to understand the complexities and nuances of how violence works, how it is replicated, and how it can be manifested in numerous ways, like physical, emotional and psychological abuse. The group noted their challenge, as they have to simplify their own complex, multifaceted approach when talking about violence, because funders are interested in straightforward programs with a single goal rather than more complex ones.

Another participant discussed her organization’s initiative for sustainable funding in a rural community. They created a network between three municipalities in order to identify all the stakeholders in the field. This allowed them not only to identify all the funders who were investing in their network, but also to identify all the different programs in progress in the three municipalities. In the process, they were also able to identify groups of women and girls who were currently not served by any of the programs. In order to make sure all girls had access to services, they set up a mobile team that brought the programming to hard to reach areas. For this participant, this is an important success story, one that she views as an opportunity to strengthen the field at large.

Because funding is scarce, service providers tend to compete rather than collaborate, which in turn results in the formation of silos within the field. Thus, many discussed how building networks and hubs at municipal, provincial, regional and national levels could help break down silos and encourage collaboration. Most people proposed this hub as a kind of administrative and advocacy-focused organization that would take over funding and policy-related work from frontline organizations. Several people also talked about the hub as a knowledge-sharing space where frontline organizations could share their programs and evaluations. This would help frontline workers to learn from each other, to access successful programs, and tailor them to their own specific contexts. Hubs at different levels could then communicate with each other and bring stakeholders together at regular intervals for more fertile knowledge exchange and planning.

IDENTIFYING THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FIELD OF TEEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The forum was primarily dedicated to enabling conversations about the most meaningful ways to strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. The sessions enabled participants to increasingly narrow down the most significant issues and opportunities for building the field. We began with a simple yet effective exercise called the “4 corners”, in which the four corners of the room were set up with boards labeled “Aha”, “Argue”, “Agree”, and “Ask”. Participants could circulate around the room and engage in discussions, disagreements and debates. A facilitator at each corner made notes about their discussions (see images of the flipcharts below). These ideas collectively represent the most important issues, challenges, opportunities and ideas for strengthening the field.
These ideas were then prioritized, with each participant selecting what they considered the highest priorities. At the end of the process, 8 major themes surfaced as the most significant for building the field. Of these, the need for diversity and inclusion, of youth voices as well as marginalized populations such as 2SLGBTQ+ youth and Indigenous youth, were so significant that the Leadership Roundtable proposed to include youth voice and gender diverse youth, as overarching themes or guiding principles for the field as a whole. Additionally, the needs of Indigenous youth were considered in need of greater attention, thereby making engagement with First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth a priority area in itself.

The eight priorities were presented back to the larger group, and participants were asked to collectively identify the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for each theme. Participants could circle around the room and engage with all eight topics, in order to have the greatest cross-fertilization of ideas within the forum. The ideas that emerged are briefly presented below.

**EIGHT PRIORITIES FOR THE FIELD**

1. **Teen Healthy Relationships Program Providers**, and the need to better support their efforts. Participants highlighted the need to identify a core set of skills, as well as basic training and evaluations programs, in order to strengthen their work.

   **STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES**

   - Teen healthy relationships work is increasingly recognized and gaining momentum and social acceptance.
   - There is a greater focus on involving men and boys within this work, which has historically focused on interventions with women and girls.
   - More program evaluations are providing evidence about the impact of this work, thereby yielding valuable information about trauma-informed best practices in the field.
   - More mentorship and training programs are available for program delivery staff, helping to build capacities of program providers in the field.

   **CHALLENGES AND GAPS**

   - Program providers face the dual challenge of maintaining fidelity to their programs as well as making them sufficiently flexible and responsive to diverse contexts.
   - Despite increased recognition of teen healthy relationships programs, there is insufficient funding for the work. It is also not sufficiently prioritized in some educational systems.
   - The “field” is very disjointed at the moment, and operates within a scarcity mentality, such that program providers are not thinking long term and not investing sufficient time in training and capacity building.
   - There are major training gaps, for service providers as well as facilitators, teachers, parents, pre-service teachers, and other adults in the field.

   **OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS**

   - We need consistency in skills, training, evaluations, resources, and messaging across the field. Although these may vary across contexts, there should be some established standards.
   - We need to create a knowledge sharing and communication system or network across the field, to share research, evaluations, best practices, and discuss challenges.
   - We need a shared community of practice, or a hub, where we can share information, trainings, programs, and funding information as well. This is connected to the knowledge-sharing point above.
   - We need to conduct long term evaluations of teen healthy relationships programs in order to have evidence-based programs. In order to do so, we need funding support.
2. **Involving Parents, Caregivers & Other Support Systems** within Teen Healthy Relationship programming for a more holistic approach that can begin to change different aspects of teen lives, within the family, with the community, and at school.

### STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

- There are already several initiatives in place to engage parents and caregivers in healthy relationships programs, such as Facebook groups, workshops, and intergenerational cooking classes.
- There is some concurrent programming offered in an unassuming way, to parents as well as children.
- A national program called “Strengthening families for the future” indicates buy-in at the policy level.
- The most successful programs, in terms of engaging parents, offer childcare and food. We can learn from this when designing future programs.

### CHALLENGES AND GAPS

- Although organizations do send information to parents, it is difficult to know what is reaching them, what is effective, and how to effectively engage parents without overwhelming them.
- Many parents are working—sometimes several jobs—and may be struggling with other challenges, which makes engaging them difficult.
- Although Facebook groups exist, they can be problematic because of privacy settings, and hard to know which messages are reaching the audience.
- There are some parents who are already very engaged; the challenge lies in finding out how to reach those who are not engaged at all.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS

- Organizations working with youth need to build their internal capacity to effectively engage with parents at the same time. However, this not always feasible because it requires extra funding.
- We need to connect with other organizations who work with adults and communities and integrate teen healthy relationships programming with their work.
- Teen healthy relationships program providers should have a means to communicate, share, and vent about their efforts, experiences and learnings from engaging parents in this work.
- We need to be careful about our own assumptions regarding parents and caregivers. Some of the worst role models can be teachers themselves—a whole other problem.
3. **Building National Leadership and Network**, which would be responsible for engaging and advocating with government, building relationships with funding agencies, and connecting frontline service providers with one another.

**STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES**

- There is existing expertise in the field of teen healthy relationships work at the provincial and regional levels. We need to capitalize on this existing expertise to work towards making it more sustainable.

- Governments and practitioners recognize the importance of healthy relationships programming and its value to the larger goal of preventing violence against women.

- There is some momentum at a national level towards supporting teen healthy relationships work, but this needs to be further mobilized.

- We need to ensure that the national network is diverse, multisectoral, and inclusive of different perspectives and contexts.

**CHALLENGES AND GAPS**

- We need to agree upon a theoretical approach to teen healthy relationships in order to develop a national strategy that can guide the work at provincial and regional levels. While these guidelines will not be prescriptive, they can be useful to ensure some consistency.

- We need to navigate the balance between a national framework and regional specificity. The framework therefore has to allow for flexibility and context-based responsiveness.

- There has to be greater involvement of funders and philanthropists in determining the strategy in order to ensure the programs are sustainable and supported.

- We need champions at different advocacy, funding, and policy-making levels to take the strategy forwards and ensure the work on the field is sustainable.

**OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS**

- Create a listserv for information and knowledge sharing, as well as opportunities for funding and collaboration across the field.

- We need more evaluations of programs in order to know what is successful, and what is not. We could start collecting anecdotal information as well as quantitative evidence.

- We need a regional or national hub that can support frontline work in multiple ways: network building, knowledge sharing, capacity building, and funding.

- We need to highlight the role of youth leaders and involve them in every initiative, including the national strategy and national leadership hub.
4. **Indigenous Programming**, which needs to emanate from a strengths-based perspective rather than one that is based in the risks and dangers that Indigenous youth may face, a shift in perspective that can provide an important means of empowering youth.

### STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

- There are some excellent examples of community-driven work, as well as research and programs for Indigenous youth.
- There have been excellent efforts to build relationships with First Nations communities and on-reserve schools, to offer teen healthy relationships programming.
- The relationships amongst and within Indigenous communities can be very strong and powerful, and can therefore be an excellent foundation to build further healthy relationships.
- There are excellent examples of meaningful allyship that engage in decolonization practices.
- There are new programs that are based in Indigenous knowledge, history and values, supported by the development of Indigenous leadership.

### CHALLENGES AND GAPS

- There is a major lack of Indigenous content in most school curricula, which poses a huge gap to overcome, because there is a kind of absence and refusal to acknowledge Indigenous communities and knowledge.
- The rural and remote locations of many First Nations communities is a challenge in terms of providing adequate and context-specific programs to youth.
- There is a long history of mistrust and lack of allyship that makes it difficult to build trust without retraumatizing Indigenous communities.
- There are massive funding constraints that make it difficult to provide the kind of careful, respectful, bottom-up, trauma-informed approach that is required. It is necessary to include Indigenous communities in building and delivering these programs, rather than a top-down approach.

### OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS

- It is essential to take a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach to teen healthy relationships programs within Indigenous communities. These programs should be owned and delivered by the communities.
- We must learn from, and meaningfully implement the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- We must work hard to develop a model of mutual respect, trust, and benefit. This begins with non-Indigenous people learning from and about Indigenous communities and culture.
- We have to take into account and respect the diversity within Indigenous communities in Canada, and to learn about the complex and differing realities which they face everyday.
- We must address the funding disparities that currently exist, and dedicate sufficient funds to support initiatives for Indigenous youth in urban and rural contexts.
5. **Community Program Settings**, including youth populations that may be harder to reach, such as rural communities, as well as programs that are offered in out of school settings such as community centres.

- **STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES**
  - Community-based programming offers diverse programs that are open and available to all youth. These are created to be responsive to the community’s needs, and are flexible enough to be altered when necessarily, in order to better serve target populations.
  - Community programs, and community spaces in general, can be a stable constant for some youth, especially those who are part of unstable home and school environments.
  - Community-based programs are arguably more flexible than school-based ones, because they are not tied to a curriculum and do not need to be approved by school boards. This means they have more freedom to change programs and be responsive to youth needs.
  - Community programs, when they work, can be amongst the most successful ways to reach youth, in a non-restrictive, non-biased and non-judgemental way.

- **CHALLENGES AND GAPS**
  - Although community programs would be strengthened by partnerships, there are currently not enough because there is competition for resources and funding, creating a competitive atmosphere instead of an atmosphere of collaboration and co-working.
  - Community programs can sometimes be working in isolation, without the support of an institution such as a school board, or without the mandate of a school-based curriculum.
  - Building and maintaining relationships with the community can be hard work, particularly in rural and remote communities. This is compounded by the fact that communities are already responsible for other programs and can experience burnout.
  - There is an ongoing struggle with inconsistent funding, inconsistent participation, and inconsistent ownership of the program and curriculum.

- **OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS**
  - Community programs need to be further supported through strategic partnerships with other programs, including health services, teen healthy relationships programs, schools, libraries, and other youth-centered services, in order to provide holistic care.
  - Community programs should be created with a sustainability methodology, to consider the longevity of the program offerings, and see how these can be taken forward without burnout.
  - It is essential for community programs to establish a voice, and define what a safe space means in their particular context. Moreover, even with established guiding principles, the programs must retain flexibility and be responsive to needs of the entire community.
  - Regional and provincial guidelines for community programs may be helpful in setting a baseline for the services provided, ensuring that everyone has access to basic care.
6. **Access & Engagement for Youth Not in School**, including youth who may be in treatment, in care, in custody, or being home-schooled. Here, it is important to consider the challenges specific to certain populations when developing programming.

**STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES**

- There are mandated programs within the youth justice system. Many such programs take a strengths-based, restorative approach rather than a punitive one. Initial evaluations suggest that these are successful.

- In B.C. there are youth hubs, supported by provincial funding, that provide support and education including outreach, physicians, mental health care, nurses, sex and sexuality education.

- In Ontario, there is mobile programming to reach small, rural communities that reach home-schooled youth and provide opportunities for socializing.

- There are many partnerships with organizations working with marginalized and at-risk youth, such as youth in shelters, in custody, and more.

**CHALLENGES AND GAPS**

- This theme, by definition, is a gap in the teen healthy relationships field. Most programs are offered in school or after-school settings, and therefore don’t reach these extremely vulnerable youth groups who do not have access to these spaces.

- Within court mandated programming, there are few resources/programs for girls who have experienced violence. The focus is on programs for male perpetrators of violence.

- Many kids in the justice programs are pulled away from their communities and sent far away and punished in brutal ways, rather than being shown care and support.

- How do you navigate consent for/with someone who’s incarcerated? Kids who are in juvenile detention don’t always have the choice to attend the programming, or the same ability to draw boundaries.

**OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS**

- People working with youth justice and detention should be provided with sufficient education, training, and resources. These must be trauma-informed and culturally appropriate such that they help with restoration and rehabilitation rather than further alienate these youth.

- We have to learn more about why parents are choosing to homeschool their children, and what particular kinds of needs homeschooled children may have, in terms of social skills, relationship-building, etc.

- We must address the special requirements for youth who are homeless, have substance abuse issues, and who live in shelters. We should develop partnerships with organizations who support them.

- Ongoing mentorship may be an appropriate approach for working with youth who are in the justice system or homeless or otherwise marginalized.
7. **Online & Digital Programming**, which highlights the possibilities of using digital media and new media technologies to reach youth populations online, in order to both reach a larger population of young people, as well as reach them through the media they are most invested in.

### Strengths and Successes

- Digital programming can reach diverse audiences more easily, and therefore makes teen healthy relationships work more easily accessible to underserved youth and remote, rural communities.
- Online programs can also reach parents, teachers, and other adult influencers and stakeholders.
- This can be a more creative way of reaching youth. As young people are already online, it meets them where they are. Several successful community based and youth-run programs are online.
- Programs created by youth can be empowering and teach them new media-making skills. In the process of making media, they learn other forms of communication, negotiating relationships, and useful skills.

### Challenges and Gaps

- There is often a gap between service providers ideas for online programs, and what youth actually want to see. We have to make sure programs are accessible, interesting, and creative.
- Creating online programs can be expensive and require skills that many service providers do not currently possess.
- Digital spaces can be empowering, but online abuse, bullying and violence also thrive. It is essential to educate youth about digital media literacy skills to navigate online content critically and safely.
- It is difficult to make sure the information provided online is reaching the intended audience and consumed in the right way.
- Without a facilitator, online programming may not be disseminated and used properly.

### Opportunities and Actions

- Organizations must build digital capacity, recognizing the labour that goes into online communication.
- Thoughtful media creation should respect the safety of participants and allow for them to ask questions.
- We could create a youth-led online directory or database for organizations working in teen healthy relationships.
- Online programming should be creative, use humour, popular culture and other references that will be engaging for youth. Engaging youth in creating these programs is essential.
- When involving youth, we need to teach them critical media literacy skills, whilst also including diverse youth so we can center marginalized perspectives more firmly within teen healthy relationships programs.
8. **Youth Voice & Gender Diverse Youth** provide the overarching core principles for all action areas. Centering these voices will become a guiding principle of all the work in Teen Healthy Relationship programming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE &amp; SAFE SPACES</th>
<th>ENGAGING YOUTH</th>
<th>BEING ADVOCATES WITH FUNDERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It is important not to make assumptions and to be heteronormative through the program or the language we use. This includes respecting chosen pronouns and using gender-inclusive language wherever possible.</td>
<td>• Youth-centering needs to be built into the structure of the program, which is best achieved when youth action committees help create the programs. This will also help avoid tokenism, and ensure that youth voices are centered and taken seriously.</td>
<td>• Funders and governments are not always as invested in youth voices. We need to educate policymakers and funders about why it is important to fund youth engagement for stronger and more effective programs.</td>
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<td>• We cannot always provide safe spaces, but we can work towards creating them and encourage &quot;brave&quot; spaces, in which youth can be open, empowered to be themselves, and identify and speak as they wish.</td>
<td>• It is important to pay youth for their services, knowledge, and engagement. If we want youth to participate, we should make sure that their knowledge is valued and that their time and labour is taken seriously.</td>
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<td>• In some communities, having spaces that are explicitly for LGBTQ youth can be unsafe because attending means &quot;outing&quot; yourself; it may be better to run programs in spaces with a variety of services.</td>
<td>• We have to ensure inclusivity of youth from different backgrounds—varied nationalities, religions, races, and genders to make sure we have diverse representation. This will also help us make programs more responsive to different needs.</td>
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<td>• Importantly, these spaces need to be inclusive to all. Therefore, we need to set guidelines for engaging respectfully, which could include &quot;calling in&quot; rather than &quot;calling out&quot;.</td>
<td>• Youth representation is needed at every stage. We should include them in creating research surveys as well as in the process of analysing the results and disseminating the data.</td>
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• There is strength in numbers: Organizations who offer teen healthy relationships programs should come together to advocate for youth voices in order to convince funders that this is a priority within the field as a whole, and not merely the mandate of a single organization.

• We need research and evaluation to show the benefit and value of engaging youth, and use this data to convince funders. However, we need funding to conduct the research and evaluation.

• We need to use inclusive language and youth voices throughout our work (and not only on awareness days) to establish these changes within our own organizations, in addition to teaching funders.
LIMITATIONS OF THE NATIONAL FORUM

Overall, the general consensus following the first National Forum for Teen Healthy Relationships was that the meeting was a success, and provided an opportunity for representatives from across the field to come together and collaboratively frame what this work entails, and identify ways of enhancing it together. However, there are a few limitations that must be acknowledged, which include:

• **Lack of diversity:**
  Although while organizing the forum, the Leadership Roundtable attempted to include different communities, final participation at the forum was not adequately intersectional. We need to ensure more diverse participation in the future, by reaching out to and supporting the participation of more marginalized communities.

• **Lack of Youth Representation:**
  Despite the fact that the forum was to build the field of Teen Healthy Relationships, and that all participants highlighted the need to include youth voices across the field, there were few youth present in the forum itself. In the future, we recognize the need to address this problem, and reach out in a more focused way to diverse youth groups across the country to engage their participation and centre their perspectives.

WORKING GROUPS

The discussions throughout the two days of the National Forum were all geared towards identifying the primary action areas that will help strengthen the field of Teen Healthy Relationships. As described above, the discussions were wide-ranging, but also became successively more focused and narrowed, to coalesce into the *most crucial* means of strengthening the field. The final session at the end of the forum asked participants to form 4-6 working groups that would work on specific action areas and develop action plans to build the field as a whole.

Based on the intensive discussions around the eight priority areas described above, participants organized into four working groups by the end of the forum. In many cases, they integrated more than one of the priority areas mentioned above, based on the shared issues between two priority areas. In other cases, they expanded and further developed the discussion to be more precise and reflective of the realities in that subsection of the field. Below, we provide a brief description of each of the working groups.

Note: the action area on online and digital programming was not formed into a working group because of a lack of knowledge amongst the representative around how to implement that plan. However, it is still considered a recommendation to the field.

*Working Group 1: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Programming*

This working group will focus on programming within Indigenous communities, both on and off reserve, as well as those in rural and urban areas. The main focus for the group will be:

• Collecting relevant resources for Indigenous youth
• Understanding the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s calls to action in relation to current Teen Healthy Relationship work
• Mentorship with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth in care
Working Group 2: Equipping and Engaging Adults

This working group combines themes 1 and 2 outlined above, which include empowering and strengthening program providers as well as engaging parents and caregivers. The group aims to better engage all the adults who act as role models and influencers in youth lives. The main focus for the group will be:

- Identifying core competencies and best practices amongst existing programs
- Sharing experiences and resources within the field
- Developing strategies to centre youth voices within programs

Working Group 3: Community Program Settings and Hard to Reach Youth

This group also combines two priority areas listed above (themes 5 & 6): community program settings and hard to reach youth. This group focuses on programming that takes place in non-institutional settings, as well as programs that serves youth who are not in the school system, such as youth in custody, in care, homeless youth and youth who are homeschooled. The focus for this working group is:

- Identifying current programs in community settings, and programs for youth in custody, in care, and youth not being served by schools
- Identifying the successes, challenges and gaps within these programs
- Identifying existing online engagement tools that can have a wider reach

Working Group 4: National Leadership

This group derives from priority area 3 listed above: building a national leadership network. The primary goal of this working group is to create a national strategy on Teen Healthy Relationships. The main focus for this group is:

- Identify existing provincial and regional strategies for Teen Healthy Relationships
- Map the existing stakeholders (nationally) within the field
- Identify and develop an overarching theoretical framework for the field
- Begin to define the role and responsibilities of a national leadership hub

If you are interested in participating in these working groups, learning more about their discussions, and have any questions, we invite you to contact the Canadian Women’s Foundation at teenwp@canadianwomen.org with a brief expression of interests and a short biography of your experience in the field of Teen Healthy Relationships.
The report thus far has provided an overview of the Building the Field project from its inception in October 2015 until April 2017, which marks the middle of this three year initiative. This next section briefly describes the activities that we will undertake for the duration of the project. Primarily, the next several months will be dedicated to the working groups, which will meet at regular intervals.

**ROLE OF THE WORKING GROUPS**

The working groups will meet on a regular basis via video conferencing or other online meeting tools. During the course of the next several months, they will:

- Discuss the main priorities, issues and challenges within their group
- Conduct research into existing programs and best practices, tools and modules
- Build relationships amongst themselves to strengthen their own networks
- Collaboratively identify the most meaningful initiatives
- Propose pilot projects to effect change within the field

**ROLE OF THE CANADIAN WOMEN’S FOUNDATION**

The Canadian Women’s Foundation will continue in its role as a facilitator for knowledge exchange. This will include providing tools and platforms to enable knowledge exchange and communication within the group. We will also help the working groups with data from the National Survey, literature reviews and other research from our past work in the field of Teen Healthy Relationships.

**STRUCTURE**

We envision this project being organized on the lines of a hub and spoke model (figure 8). Each of the spokes represents a working group, while the hub at the centre represents the leadership roundtable, coming together to exchange knowledge. The hub at the centre is made up of representatives from each of the working groups. Together, they constitute the wheel, which can be seen as a representation of the field of Teen Healthy Relationships.
Looking to the future, we envision the membership of the Leadership Roundtable changing. All of the existing members have joined working groups either as members or co-chairs. The representatives of each working group will also join the Leadership Roundtable, which will continue its current role of facilitating knowledge exchange and directing the project as a whole. The working group co-chairs is a rotating role and membership on the Leadership Roundtable can change throughout the year. The existing members will provide the continuity and historical knowledge of the project overall. This form of distributed, collaborative ownership is our guiding not only for this project, but indeed for the field as a whole.

PLANNED OUTCOMES

Given that the Building the Field project has been designed as a collective effort, every step of the project has been iterative, based on collaborative dialogue and action. As a result, the outcomes for the project as a whole are somewhat difficult to predict, at least in specific terms. However, we hope that each of the working groups will develop recommendations for pilot projects to strengthen the field of practice of Teen Healthy Relationships. Based on collective decision-making, we will select 2-4 projects to pilot-test in the field. As with every step of the project, this will be rigorously documented and the projects will be piloted, in order for us to be able to gauge their effectiveness towards the larger goals of building the field and preventing gender-based violence.

ADDRESSING THE GAPS

As mentioned above, our preliminary consultations, the National Survey, as well as the National Forum itself revealed some important gaps in the project so far. Notably, there is a lack of diversity in our current pool of stakeholders, both in terms of intersectional representation as well as inter-sectoral representation. Moreover, there is a lack of youth leaders within the project as a whole, and the need to centre their voices is a priority for the project going forward. In order to ensure that these marginalized perspectives are integrated within the Building the Field project, we are committed to several initiatives to incorporate these voices.

- We will conduct focus group discussions with youth leaders from across the nation, in order to better understand their priorities and needs, and to be able to centre these within the project and the Teen Healthy Relationship field.
- In order to further break down silos within the field, we will reach out to individual stakeholders who did not or could not participate in the survey and the national forum. In particular, we hope to engage in consultations with policy makers and funders, whose representation in the project so far has been minimal.
- To make sure that marginalized and historically oppressed populations are centred in our work, we will engage organizations and community groups that represent sexual, gendered, and racialized communities who have historically been at the margins of this work, despite the fact that these same communities are disproportionately affected by different forms of gender-based violence.
- Finally, we are aware that representation from the Territories and Quebec was less than that of other provinces, in both the survey as well as the national forum. Therefore, we will reach out to stakeholders from these areas to ensure that their perspectives and region-specific challenges are taken into account as we focus on strengthening the field of Teen Healthy Relationships.
For more information about the Canadian Women’s Foundation Building the Field Project please visit canadianwomen.org