



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Kelowna

25
CONNECTED BY

**Project
Evaluation**



Executive Summary

CMHA Kelowna was awarded a service innovation grant from the Community Action Initiative (CAI) to develop and implement Connected by 25 (CB25) from January 2012 to December 2013. The goal was to address the needs of young people between the ages of 16-24 that have been identified as vulnerable in their transition to adulthood. Specifically, these are youth that are about to, or have 'aged out' of the youth services system, and are in need of support and resource connection as they face the reality of navigating an entirely new set of services, or more specifically, the 'transitions obstacle course' (Clark and Unruh, 2009). The project sought to build capacity within the community to ensure that young people at risk of falling through the cracks in their transition to adulthood had access to the services they require. It further served to build capacity in youth themselves by offering the relational, emotional, and material supports they needed.

The target population for the initiative were young people between the ages of 16 and 24 in the Central Okanagan who are vulnerable to mental health and/or substance use problems. This group included, but was not limited to: young people in care, those experiencing unstable living environments, Aboriginal youth, youth with learning disabilities, substance involved/dependent youth, and young people recovering from mental health and/or substance use disorders and FASD.

Project Vision

The overarching vision for CB25 was a mobilized community with key supports and services in place for vulnerable young people between the ages of 16 and 24 to achieve a seamless transition to adulthood.

Project Objectives

1). Individual Capacity Building

To provide navigation supports and services on the ground so that young people build the individual capacity (relationships, skills, knowledge and abilities) needed to enhance their resiliency and reduce their risk as they successfully transition to adulthood.

2). Community Capacity Building

Develop a multi-level initiative focused on the needs of young people (aged 16-24) that are vulnerable in their transitions to adulthood. The project will build community capacity so that young people have access to the necessary community based services required to support them in becoming successful and productive adults.

3). Systemic Focus

To ensure that the 16-24 year old age group have a system of care that is responsive to their identified needs and a voice in issues directly impacting on their transition experience, including poverty (i.e. living wage), employment concerns, lack of affordable housing, etc...

Project Design

The project was unique, working at multiple levels of scale. From a service delivery standpoint, a youth transitions navigator was the point person designed to assist youth in navigating complex and multiple systems of care, providing the relational, emotional, and material support they required to be successful, and to develop the relationships with the natural supports necessary to sustain them into adulthood. At the same time, a focus on community capacity and systems work helped to build on established synergies between stakeholders to work more closely together in meeting the identified needs of the target population.

The design of the project was intentional, with the service delivery focus unearthing and validating issues related to community capacity and systems barriers for the target population, which allowed an interconnected and reciprocal focus on addressing larger systems and community issues. The project engaged multiple stakeholders, from politicians, to funders, service clubs, students, and others in order to raise awareness of the issue surrounding youth in transition.

Project partners were carefully selected to ensure a broad representation across the non-profit, government, and academic sectors. Primary project partners included:

- The Bridge Youth and Family Services
- Inn from the Cold-Kelowna
- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)
- Interior Health Authority (IHA)-Mental Health and Substance Use (MH & SU)
- BC Housing
- UBC-O

Within the first 6 months of program implementation, a large number of young people were referred for service, stretching the capacity of the program. At the same time, issues were being identified, including barriers to success for the target population. With a focus on sustainability, CMHA was successful in leveraging the initial investment from CAI and named partners to garner new funds, designed to expand, enhance, and sustain the project. This resulted in the development of group programming to address outstanding needs of young people (Supper Club and Nexus Wellness Program), as well as funding to add a second youth transitions navigator to the service delivery team.

As the project reaches the conclusion of the CAI funding period, project sustainability remains a focus. Funding is in place with the Vancouver Foundation (VF) to support service delivery for another year, and CMHA is working with the Bridge Youth and Family Services and MCFD to have staff co-located at the CMHA Kelowna offices, with an expanded mandate. Through the Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) collaborative, jointly sponsored by Divisions of Family Practice, MCFD, and IHA, CMHA is taking the lead in chairing a working group focused on the issue of transitions between youth and adult mental health systems. IHA has co-located a concurrent disorder clinician at CMHA, attached to the CB25 team, to facilitate assessment and treatment on an outreach basis for young people experiencing concurrent mental health and substance use issues.

Overall, the project was a welcomed addition to the community. All respondents involved in the evaluation noted the added value that CB25 brought to the community, and how it addressed an issue that had long been discussed, but had not been addressed. The enthusiasm at a local level was evidenced by the nomination of CB25 for a BC Representative of Children and Youth Award of Excellence in Service Innovation. Young people served by the project also spoke highly about the impact and the role that the youth navigators played in their lives, including flexibility and willingness to support them in navigating systems, as well as helping to build life skills and social connections.

Short and medium term project outcomes for service delivery were largely met. The significant demand for service provided challenges in terms of the ability to respond in a timely manner and intensity of service delivery. The project demonstrated creativity on the fly, responding mid-stream to identified youth needs, by adding group programming, which helped to address service demand and provided a forum for social and peer connection to develop. Youth participants identified group programming as significant in addressing their socialization needs and breaking social isolation. Connection to community resources and the consequential impact of these connections were further noted strengths of the program. Two outcome areas were identified as potential areas of focus for the future: building natural support networks and youth specific housing.

On a community and systems level, respondents spoke to the increased capacity the project built, in terms of new resources being added to the community and the capacity building that took place between organizations. System level issues were identified, and project activities around advocacy were met. The project was strategic in highlighting these issues to politicians, senior government staff, including Assistant Deputy Minister's from different provincial government ministries. While this helped to highlight some very specific issues and raise awareness of the challenges to the population served, it did not result in systems change at a larger level, which would require significant political will and in some cases, legislative changes. Implementing a broader communications and community engagement strategy both in community and connecting to other groups doing similar work are recommendations as the project moves into the next phase.

“CB25 is really about supporting youth who are vulnerable to getting to a place where they're not vulnerable. This is hard work. Improved outcomes for people is what we see. This was a service that wasn't there before. It will lessen longer-term suffering. Support around developing skills, moving through life, just reduces that forever vulnerability”.

-EARLY PSYCHOSIS INTERVENTION PROGRAM CLINICIAN

1). Evaluation Methodology

As per CAI funding guidelines, the development of an evaluation plan happened early in the project, with submission of a Program Logic Model for both service delivery and community capacity/systems work. The plan, and subsequent evaluation process was developed in conjunction with Shirley Chau, UBC-Okanagan Social Work professor, who took the role of evaluation consultant with CB25. The evaluation plan was accepted by the CAI at the mid-point of the funding term.

Data collection activities were implemented internally by a CMHA Kelowna staff member, with review from the evaluation consultant. Employing a mixed methods approach to data collection, quantitative data were collected via survey, file and internal database review, staff report, and review of meeting minutes, quarterly and other reports. Qualitative data collection included a cross-section of relevant stakeholders involved with CB25, including project participants, and involved one to one interviews, focus groups, and digital storytelling via Photovoice, which was implemented in the fall of 2013 with a group of CB25 program participants.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data Collection

Surveys

Surveys specifically designed for both community members and program participants were implemented as part of the evaluation process. A total of 53 surveys were completed and returned. Program participants were selected based on their active involvement with the project from early engagement to long term participation. Community surveys were distributed to service providers randomly selected based on their knowledge of and connection to the project (as a referral agent or someone that has worked with CB25 on another level).

File Review and Case Study

All young people that were accepted for service by CB25 Youth Transitions Navigators participated in the development of a case file. For the purposes of this evaluation, case files were reviewed to gather demographic and service delivery outcomes data and to assemble a case study highlighting the individual capacity building work associated with the project.

Review of Meeting Minutes and Project Reports

As a function of the CAI funding agreement, reports were submitted at 6, 12, and 18 months. Reports were also required for RDCO, First West Foundation, and Green Shield Canada. Meeting minutes from Child and Youth Mental Health youth transitions working group were included as part of the evaluation. These data sources were reviewed as a means to identify and evaluate key project activities, outputs, and community, and systems level outcomes.

Qualitative Data Collection

Interviews

Service providers were contacted and provided with a project primer and evaluation questions in advance. Interviews with seven service providers were conducted. Key community providers were selected based on their knowledge of the project and experience in the field, including an understanding of both the service delivery and systems level challenges of serving young people in transition.

Six youth were interviewed either in a private space at CMHA Kelowna or a quiet location of their choice in the community. Respecting principles of informed consent and minimizing risk, only participants aged 18 and over were selected for interviews. Participants were selected based on the length of time they had been receiving support from CB25 in order to inform the evaluation process as to the impact the project has had on their lives. Most interviews were recorded, however transcription was conducted real-time. The interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Participants who consented to the interviews were provided with a \$25 honorarium as an acknowledgement of their time and efforts.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups involving community stakeholders, who refer to and are familiar with CB25, were held at CMHA Kelowna on October 7th and 17th. Focus groups followed a similar process as the one to one service provider interviews in respect to initial contact, preparation and consent. A community building facet was incorporated into the focus groups, as the semi-structured interview was held over a robust lunch. This also allowed time for participants to build relationship with each other in addition to informing the CB25 evaluation.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a versatile tool that engages youth, empowers marginalized groups, speaks to diverse audiences, collects data, and tells stories. By putting cameras in the hands of community members, it allows them to become recorders and potential catalysts for social change. Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), the two founders of Photovoice, state that there are three main goals of the process: “to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issue through large and small group discussion of photographs, and to reach policy makers.”

A group of seven CB25 participants consented to and engaged in the CB25 Photovoice evaluation project. The group met over the course of eight weeks during the Nexus programming time (Thursday evenings). Nexus is a structured group setting focusing on skill development and informal peer support connections. Two sets of disposable cameras were made available and narratives were created both individually and co-constructed within the group. A booklet was created showcasing Photovoice (<http://cmhakelowna.culturactive.com/flip/index.html>) and a \$50 honorarium was provided to participants to acknowledge their contributions in evaluating the CB25 project.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Demographic and service utilization data were gathered through an internal excel spreadsheet document created by CMHA Kelowna administration staff. CB25 staff entered identifying demographic and service delivery information into the spreadsheet on each young person referred for service throughout the course of the project. This ensured thorough and detailed gathering of personal information, which was cross referenced with client files for accuracy.

Surveys were reviewed and results reporting generated through an online database. A thorough review of client files, including intakes, completed goal plans, life skills development inventories, and graduation checklists was also undertaken. The review of survey and service delivery data allowed for the identification of the total number of youth that met service delivery logic model success indicators. These numbers were then converted to a percentage and contrasted against targets identified in the logic model.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data gathered from participant and service provider interviews and focus groups was recorded and transcribed. Narrative inquiry, as a tool for analyzing knowledge and experience was the method selected to facilitate the discovery themes. The specific techniques of pausing and word repetitions were used to assist in eliciting themes. The process then relied on comparing and contrasting emergent themes with program logic model constructs.

Photovoice involved a participatory analysis of data with young people involved in the project, leading to codified data sorted into themes. Data analysis included a selection of photographs that reflected participant experience with CB25, highlighting the impact of the project. It further involved contextualizing the photographs by telling stories about what meaning they held for project participants.

Data from all sources and methods was triangulated and broadly led to the same findings about project results, broken down under individual capacity building, community capacity building, and system level activities.

Limitations:

The CB25 pilot project spanned two years in total, therefore long term outcomes cannot be measured. Specific limitations to evaluation scope revolve around potential cost savings and return on investment from the implementation of the project. Service providers who know the systems best spoke to the current impact that CB25 is having on alleviating system burden and projected to the potential community cost savings. It would take several years before an accurate and comprehensive picture emerges in terms of measuring the reduction in youth in transition presenting at/in emergency, justice and corrections systems, homelessness, and further social costs of lost potential.

2. Project Results

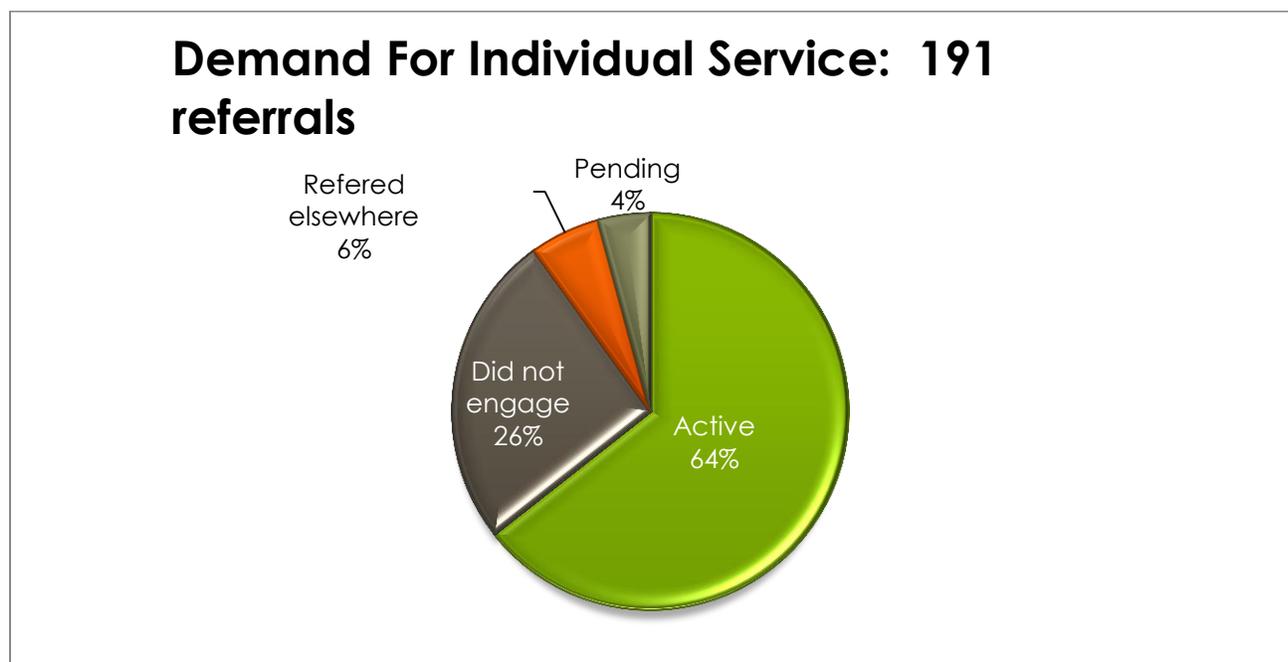
“This program needs to keep going. More people coming down with the same symptoms, more people like me who can have success, a helping hand to push them to the next steps, a better future, not just their issues, but all the people in their life will be positively impacted. CB25 is like a step-by-step introduction to becoming independent. The Navigator was patient. That’s really hard to find”

-PROGRAM PARTICIPANT, 19

Findings on Individual Capacity Building Activities

Demand for Services

CB25 started accepting referrals for service in February 2012, after broad based community promotion efforts took place to create awareness of the project.



A review of project referral data identified that of the 191 requests for service, 123 young people were accepted for some form of navigation support. Of significant note is the following:

- Demand for service was significant, as the original proposal identified a target of 75 young people over the course of the pilot project.
- 50 young people did not engage in services provided by CB25. Each referral was vetted for appropriateness and services offered.

- 12 young people that were referred for service were passed on to another service provider, as they more closely matched the program criteria of another program.

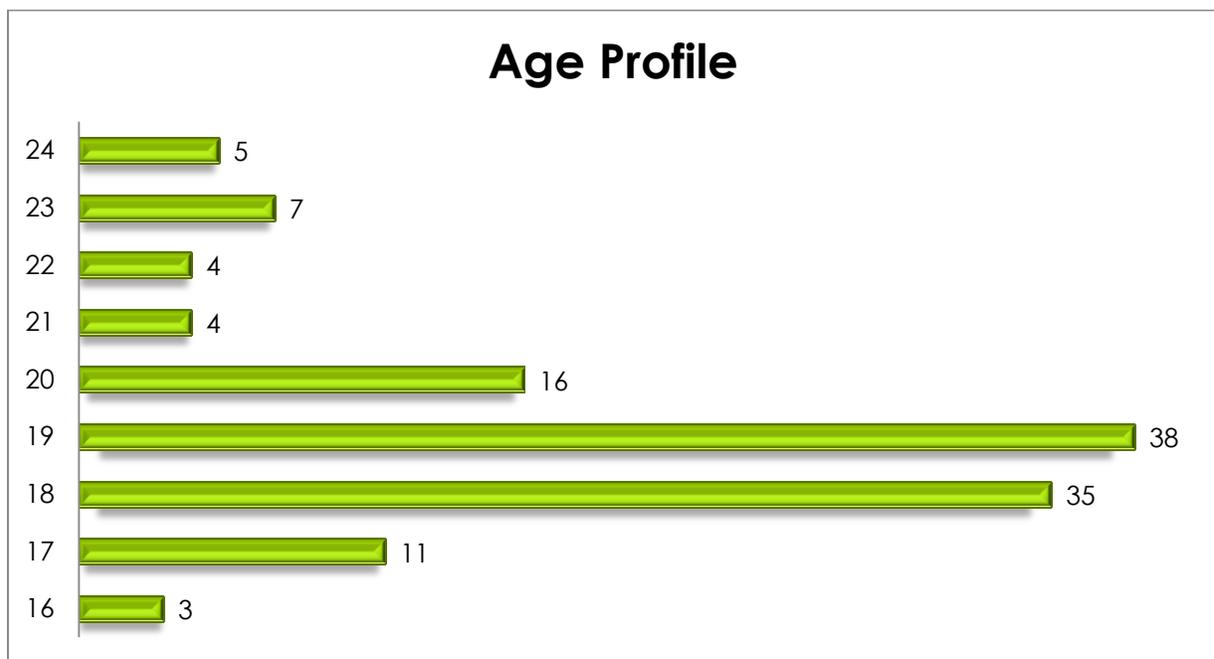
Challenges

One of the key challenges highlighted by program staff during project evaluation was the increased demand for service that came as the project was implemented. The CAI contribution afforded funding for one full time Youth Transitions Navigator. Within the first 4-6 months of the project, demand exceeded the supply of support available. CMHA Kelowna responded by utilizing internal resources to add a second navigator to the project, which was sustained when an application for funding was approved by the Vancouver Foundation. Neither was deemed as significant issues by participants and stakeholders through the feedback provided in the evaluation, nevertheless these are considerations worth mentioning, specifically as it applies to service access. It is possible, however, that the 26% of young people that did not engage with services were in part as a result of demand volume.

The project set out clear criteria for access upon project implementation, including a detailed referral form and intake process, as a means to ensure that young people who both wanted, and were in need of the service, received supports. Project staff articulated these expectations through presentations with multiple community stakeholders during the project to ensure a clear and thorough understanding of the process and the project focus. The fact that only 10% of referrals were passed on to another service demonstrates that overall, the referrals received were appropriate.

Participant Age Profile

As the project was designed to support young people that were at-risk in their transition, and either ‘aging out’ of the youth system or had recently done so, a review of the age breakdown of active project participants was warranted to identify how many fit within the ‘sweet spot’ of 18-20 years of age, and also as a marker of appropriate project referrals.

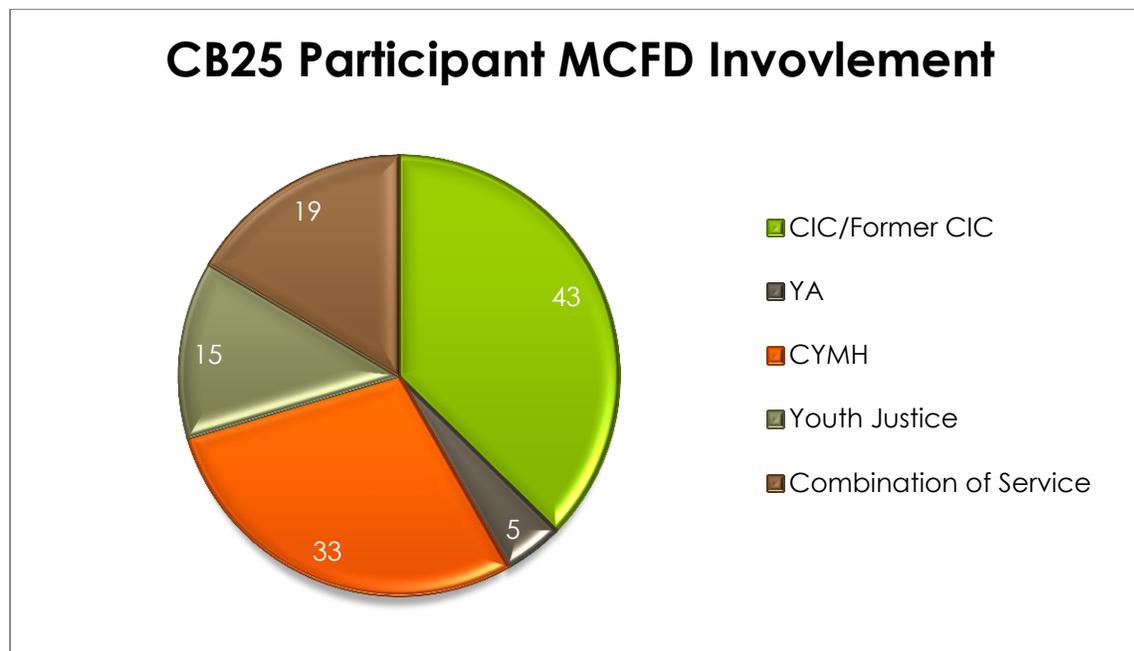


Project data show that 73% of young people served were between the ages of 18 and 20, fitting within the critical transition time frame where they were about to or had aged out of youth services. For the 16% of young people ages 21 and over, all of them had previous system involvement with MCFD, were struggling to connect with resources, and had minimal supports in place.

Participant Involvement with MCFD

CB25 focused on a target population of young people at risk in their transition to adulthood. This provided a broad mandate from which to work. One of the areas that CB25 tracked was the connection of participants with MCFD programs and services. As a provincial ministry with a mandate of serving children and youth up to the age of 19, MCFD is responsible for supporting Children in Care (CIC), those on Youth Agreements (YA), and also provide services, including Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH), Youth Justice Services, and others.

Within the broad mandate of MCFD, there are multiple service areas where young people require transitional supports. Most significant are those youth that are aging out of foster care. It is important to consider other service areas, as youth involved with CYMH, YA, and Youth Justice Services also have specific transition needs.



Of note, out of the 123 young people that engaged with CB25, 94% had either current or historical involvement with MCFD, either through one of the MCFD service lines, or a combination of multiple services. The data highlight the heterogeneity of young people served by MCFD and the diversity of need that exists around the issues of transition to adulthood and the complexity of service delivery systems. While MCFD is responsible for a broad range of service areas for children, youth and families, when young people transition to ‘adult’ services, they are faced with navigating multiple ministries and services. For example, income supports are delivered by the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, mental health delivered by the Ministry of Health, justice services by the Ministry of Justice, each area with its own focus and mandate. Cross ministry protocols have been established between MCFD and other ministries and when utilized, have supported transition between systems. In other cases, unused protocols and lack of coordination has created significant barriers to service, as CB25 identified through the delivery of service provision through the project.

Regardless of the diversity of youth in transition, the commonality that exists for all young people that ‘age out’ of youth systems of care and require support accessing and transitioning into the adult system is the need for assistance in navigating a new set of services, with a different culture and expectations than what they are, or have been used to.

Case Study: One Young Lady's Experience with a Youth Navigator

Context

Approaching 19 years of age, 'Laura' had been receiving group therapy services from Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) in Kelowna. As she was about to 'age out' of this service, her Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) clinician referred her to CB25, as she had unmet ongoing needs. Despite a transition protocol developed in 2002 between CYMH and IHA that was supposed to streamline transition of care between systems, the protocol was not operationalized in Kelowna. As a result, the young lady would need to navigate a new system of care on her own. In addition, due to stress at home with her mother, she was at high risk of homelessness. Unfortunately, as she had not lived independently from her mother before, she was not eligible to apply for income supports through the Ministry of Social Development due to the two year independence rule. Working was not a realistic option due to her own health concerns and the stress from family conflict. She was at-risk on multiple levels, and in need of support.

Process

One of the first things that the youth navigator did was to assess Laura's needs. As her mental health was deteriorating and she was in need of intervention, a referral to adult mental health services was facilitated. Laura was required to see an intake worker, a case manager, was then referred to a psychiatrist where she was provided a diagnosis, and then back to the case manager, and finally referred to the exact same type of therapy she had received in the child and youth system. Without the support of a navigator, it is unlikely that she would know to take these steps, and highly unlikely that she would have the patience to follow through. Her navigator walked with her every step of the way, advocating where necessary. She also provided her with resource information around other programs and services that might be of significant benefit to her.

Results

In spite of the individual and systems barriers in front of her, with the help and support of her navigator, Laura accessed and completed group therapy within the adult MH system. As she did so, her health and well-being increased. As a result, she was able to make significant progress in her life. She finished high school and found part-time employment. With an income source, she was able to move out into her own place, which she shares with her partner. She was referred to CMHA for a wellness grant, enabling her to get a gym pass, which she uses regularly. As she is of Metis heritage, the navigator also helped her to explore and connect with her culture.

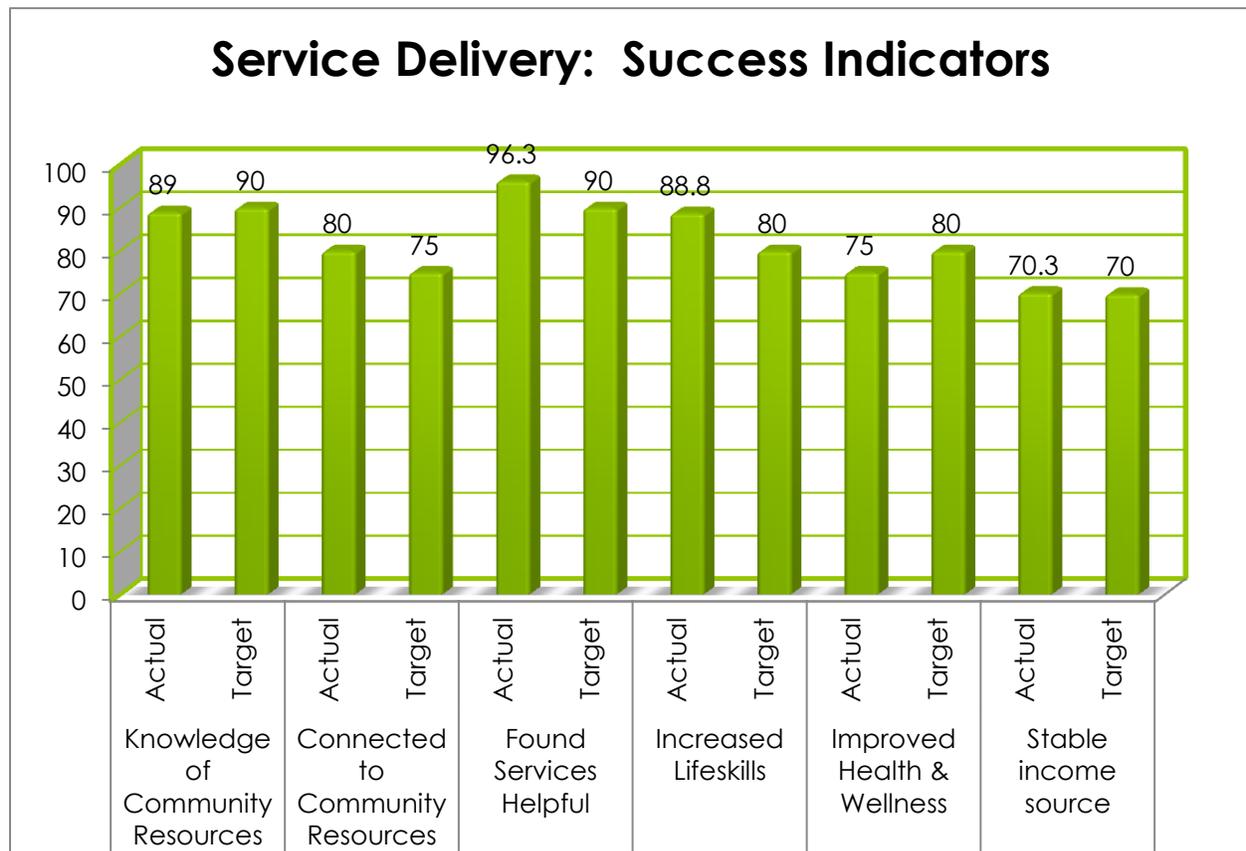
On an individual basis, the young person was supported in addressing multiple needs and navigating a complicated system of care. She went from being at-risk of homelessness and in need of clinical mental health intervention. The outcome for Laura was positive, and she is in a good place in her life.

Individual Capacity Project Outcomes

As part of the evaluation plan submitted to the CAI at project mid-point, a program logic model with short, mid and long term service delivery outcomes was submitted for service-delivery related activities. Within that document, specific indicators of success were identified.

Participant Service Delivery Data

Based on an analysis of triangulated quantitative data (participant surveys, file review), actual versus targeted achievement of participant indicators of success are presented.



In the majority of cases, actual indicators of success either met or succeeded those established at the outset of the project. One of the key indicators of success is the increased knowledge of and connection to community resources. As many young people are faced with a challenging reality of navigating complex systems of care, the value of youth transitions navigators is highlighted by the connection to community based resources and the need for more effective and efficient resource coordination.

Qualitative Data Theming

Based on the triangulation of qualitative data, the following overarching themes and sub themes, related to individual capacity building activities, were identified.

Theme 1

Meeting the basic needs of program participants engaged with CB25

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants

Sub Themes: Access to food and nutrition, food security, access to health care

This theme speaks to connecting youth to income supports (person with disability status), food, clothing, toiletries to promote hygiene and required medications, in circumstances and situations where these needs were previously unmet or insufficient for youth to be successful and connected to community.

“It was critical because I didn’t have any support, no income, with my diabetes, anxiety, and later celiac disease. I couldn’t afford medication. I was running out of insulin. I needed food.” Program Participant, 19

Theme 2

Connection to Community Resources

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews, Focus Groups

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants, Community Stakeholders

Sub Themes: Access to educational and vocational programs, health services, mental health services, housing, and income supports

This theme speaks to the ability of the project to connect youth to appropriate community services and supports. Linkages to housing, mental health services and income supports were the primary supports identified by youth and community stakeholders. Beyond initial service linkage and connection, youth navigators supported youth participants by increasing knowledge and self-efficacy skills in order to promote successful community connections now and into the future.

“I didn’t know about so many of these things. I didn’t know about PWD or that I would qualify. I didn’t know what foods I could eat, or what stores I could go to. Courses, skills, doctors and psychologists. Got connected early this year from that counsellor, and things happened pretty quickly.” Program Participant, 20

Theme 3

Life and Social Skills Development

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants, Community Stakeholders

Sub Themes: Activities of daily living, health, social skills development

This theme reflects the opportunities for learning and skill development. CB25 Youth navigators focused on teaching life skills both 1:1 and in group format to enhance youth’s self-sufficiency and independent living across multiple domains of life (budgeting, time management, boundaries, sexual health, cooking and food safety, etc...).

“CB25 has taught me a lot. I’ve learned things I never knew before, things that will help me in my life. It makes me more ready to live on my own. I have more confidence now” Program Participant, 19

Theme 4

Increased Social Connection

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants, Community Stakeholders

Sub Themes: Social inclusion, belonging, connection to peers, healthy and safe activities

This theme reflects the increased connection and access to socially safe and appropriate activities

for young people served through the program. Connection to a peer group with similar experiences, resulting in an increased sense of connection and belonging was identified across youth participants. The project evolved to incorporate evening groups to facilitate social connection, belonging and opportunities for informal peer support. These groups and the subsequent special events and alumni dinners have been held continue to provide space and opportunity for youth participants to connect with others and create a sense of belonging and community.

“It’s inspired me to volunteer for that fundraiser that we did at the table. I felt like paying it forward; knowing I wasn’t being judged really helped. The functions that we attend through CB25 we get a lot of support. Progress like this helped me connect with society in a respectful and responsible way.” Program Participant, 19

Achievement of Short and Mid Term Outcomes

Overall, the short-term service delivery outcomes were largely met. In terms of mid-term outcomes, when considered overall, many of the outcomes were partially achieved. Respondents identified obtaining a stable income source through employment or statutory supports (including income assistance). They also identified the connection to community resources as a significant positive outcome and the consequent impact that it played for them in addressing their outstanding needs. This bridging between and connection to community based resources is a significant step in preventing young people from falling through the cracks as they are faced with a forced transition as a result of reaching the age of majority.

Short-Term Outcomes

- Youth will have an increased knowledge of and connection to community resources/Youth will be able to identify community and natural supports to assist in their transition to adulthood: **Outcome Achieved**
- Youth will meet their basic human needs: **Outcome Achieved**
- Youth will experience and report an increase in life skills knowledge and development: **Outcome Achieved**
- Youth will experience and report an increase in health and wellness (Physical health, mental health, A&D etc.): **Outcome Achieved**

Mid-Term Outcomes

- Youth will be connected to, engaged with, and utilizing social supports and resources: **Outcome Achieved**
- Youth will have safe, stable housing, and an identified income source: **Outcome Partially Achieved**
- Youth will be connected to family members, appropriate adults, and peer supports: **Outcome Partially Achieved**
- Youth will have the community connections, life and social skills, knowledge and abilities to become self-sufficient **Outcome Partially Achieved**

Challenges

Natural Support Networks

One of the outcomes identified was the creation of natural support networks for young people served through the project. Literature on resiliency (Reid, 2007) has highlighted the role that a relationship with one caring adult can have in a young person's life. Respondents did speak to the peer connections made, specifically through the group programming offered and the overall positive impact on social connection and inclusion. One of the key themes from the Photovoice evaluation was the creation of safe spaces and places for young people to connect and belong. While a positive outcome for young people, it does not meet the broader need for natural support network development.

One of the partner organizations was Inn From The Cold Kelowna. The organization offers an Inn Home Support program, linking volunteer mentors with individuals in the community. The initial plan was to link mentors with some of the youth supported by Connected by 25 who had the need for natural supports. Unfortunately, the program did not have sufficient capacity, or a supply of mentors to help facilitate this process. While 2 or 3 matches were made, there was minimal success in this area.

A recommendation for the future is increased community involvement, particularly in the realm of mentorship and building natural resource networks. The Kinnections Youth Mentorship program, offered in the Lower Mainland, is a model to consider.

Housing

The other mid-term outcome identified in the logic model that presented as a challenge was achieving safe and stable housing. Adolescence is by its nature, a time of transition and young people will move, sometimes frequently. Program staff highlighted challenges pertaining to finding and maintaining housing for young people in Kelowna. In the past several years, new housing has been built for various population groups. One of these is a CMHA Kelowna project called Willowbridge, a 40 unit transitional housing facility for those at-risk of, or those experiencing, homelessness. A number of Connected by 25 participants were referred to Willowbridge during the project. Project staff reported that the specific and unique needs of youth participants were challenging in a housing environment that predominantly served adults, a point reinforced by other respondents during the evaluation. In addition, various community organizations have proven cognizant to the need for youth housing.

Findings on Community Capacity Building and Systems Level Activities

“Filling the gap. The bridge between youth and adult systems. We never had that before. We continued to bring this forward as a community, but nothing was ever addressed before. CB25 addresses risk factors before there’s a huge impact, keeps the community safer, reduces crime, mental health prevention, decreased hospitalization, connections to Pharmacare, MSP assistance, otherwise youth might gravitate to crime. When these needs are met, everything starts to fall into place”.

ADULT PROBATION OFFICER

Community Context

One of the innovative aspects of CB25 highlighted in the CAI innovation grant proposal was the multi-level approach to addressing the issue of young people in transition. The convening work that led to a successful innovation grant identified a clear disconnect between youth and adult service delivery systems in the Central Okanagan. In particular, the two systems had developed a level of internal effectiveness, but the systems worked in isolation from one another. As a result, young people were at increased risk of ‘falling through the cracks’ between systems. A need to increase awareness of services available for the young people targeted by the initiative, as well as service providers was clearly identified.

Activities

CB25 staff made a concerted effort to bring service providers together throughout the project. Multiple activities from the beginning of the project were designed to raise awareness of the issue in the community. Examples include:

- Regular monthly meetings between local Youth Employment Service Providers
- Meetings between CB25, MCFD CYMH, and IHA Mental Health and Substance Use Services
- Meetings between CB25 and individual organizations (i.e. Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs, MCFD, Metis Community Services, etc...)
- Involvement in community committees and tables: Youth Services Advisory Committee, CYMH Collaborative Action Team
- Education of issues pertaining to youth in transition through presentations at UBC-O, discussions on CBC Radio, to local service clubs, and highlighting CB25 through participation in a knowledge exchange, co-sponsored by CAI and the Vancouver Foundation (VF) in November 2013

Case Study 2: Building Community Capacity with a partner organization

Context

The Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs (OBGC) is a large multi-service organization that works with homeless youth and those at-risk of homelessness in the Central Okanagan. Due to funding mandates, most of the programs and services offered by the organization end when a young person turns 19. A number of young people require no further service after working with OBGC, while others have unmet needs and circumstances that transcend the legislative barrier presented by the provincial age of majority. OBGC provides emergency shelter, outreach services, and other front line services. The youth that require transition support and seamless connection to provide continuity and consistency in service delivery are youth that are at-risk of falling through the cracks in their transition to adulthood.

Process

In early 2013, staff members from CMHA Kelowna and the OBGC met to discuss mutual interests and how increase connection and collaboration around youth in transition. Clarity around respective roles and responsibilities was the first step in the process, as was identifying needs around transition planning. It was agreed that a short memorandum of agreement would be drafted between the organizations that spoke specifically to a process that would be undertaken to help young people transition between the organizations, and also how the organizations could support one another.

Results

Since the initial meeting, a monthly meeting is held with a standing agenda focused on specific young people that require ongoing support. This has allowed for a more effective and efficient transfer of care, more appropriate referrals, and a working relationship that continues to grow. Beyond transition planning, it has also allowed both organizations to share resource information with one another and discuss processes in the larger system that has helped to build efficiencies in practice. For example, Connected by 25 staff has mentored OBGC staff the income assistance system and the steps required to help young people access the assistance. As OBGC does not regularly interact with this service delivery system and CB25 does, it presented an opportunity to build capacity for the organizations.

Impact

The impact of this relationship has been significant. A transition planning process was highlighted as a positive outcome, with staff identifying the ability to more effectively support youth in transition as taking significant pressure off of them. It has resulted in better planning, increased frequency of smooth transitions for young people, and overall, has increased the capacity of both organizations, and, as a result, the community, to better serve this group of young people. It further set the stage for future collaboration and possible partnerships around service delivery.

“CB25 literally saved us days and weeks with sharing information about accessing income assistance. There’s a lot of trust and rapport, opening doors that aren’t easy to find.”

OKANAGAN BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS, RECONNECT WORKER

Systemic Focus

Context

Another strategic area of focus of CB25 was to identify systemic barriers that were impacting young people in transition, and advocacy related to these issues. By working at multiple levels of scale, the issues experienced by the youth transitions navigators on the ground served to unearth and reinforce systemic issues. Within 6 months of the program starting, two key barriers were identified, including:

- The disconnect between CYMH and IHA mental health and substance use services. A transition protocol had been established in 2002, but it had not been operationalized in the Central Okanagan. There was no established connection between systems, and young people were having trouble navigating
- The two year independence rule established by the Ministry of Social Development and Innovation, which prevented some young people at risk from accessing income supports, placing them at further risk and pushing them toward criminal behaviour or increased risk of victimization

Activities

- Information gathering from young people and community to identify trends and barriers
- Generation of informational materials (i.e. 'Mind the Gap' document to highlight the transitions obstacle course and multiple ministry involvement)
- Meetings with politicians: 8 MLA's, including the Minister of Social Development, opposition critic for MCFD and MSDI designed to share project information, identify and highlight systemic barriers
- Meetings with Deputy Minister from MSDI and Associate Deputy Minister of MCFD to highlight systemic barriers faced by young people in transition
- Highlighting systems challenges and barriers at the Knowledge Exchange hosted by CAI/VF in November

Case Study 3: Addressing barriers in the mental health system of care

Context

At the beginning of the project, a significant gap in the mental health system emerged. In B.C., CYMH is delivered by MCFD, while adult mental health is the responsibility of IHA. In 2002, a protocol was established between the two organizations designed to assist in a seamless transition between systems for young people who needed ongoing mental health intervention when they turned 19. Unfortunately, through the lived experience of CB25 participants, it became clear that the protocol was obsolete, not effectively utilized in Kelowna. In effect, it had become an expensive bookmark, where it sat on the shelf and collected dust.

Process

CB25 was able to find the referral protocol that had been established and shared it with MCFD and IHA management. All of those involved recalled the presence of the document, some had not seen it previously, but all agreed that it was not being utilized in practice. Attempts were made to make edits, but as a government document requiring multiple levels of sign off, little action would be taken in this area. In early 2013, an Interior Region Child and Youth Mental Health Collaborative was announced and an action group formed in Kelowna. Access to services was at the forefront of this initiative, and the issue of youth transitions was in scope for consideration. The forming of the collaborative provided another opportunity to tackle this issue. A youth transitions working group, chaired by Connected by 25 was formed.

Impact

It is still early in the process, but some small victories have been achieved in this area. Staff from IHA and MCFD is working in closer collaboration and referrals of transitioning youth have begun. Membership in the working group is beginning to grow, to include other government organizations, non-profit groups, a local psychiatrist, and a paediatrician that has signed on. Short, medium, and long term goals have been established, with the vision to create a youth/young adult mental health team. Had Connected by 25 not existed, and an energy and light flashed on this issue, it is highly likely that nothing would have been done. While progress can be slow and sometimes painful, things are moving forward.

*“Systemic advocacy-this is a huge gap, we need to make change.
CB25 is doing this work.”*

IHA URGENT RESPONSE CLINICIAN

Link to Project Outcomes around Community/Systems

Evaluation participants spoke highly to the impact and value added elements that CB25 brought to the community. Many noted that the dedicated and specific focus of the project was a welcomed addition. In the convening process that led to the development of CB25, and through the project, many spoke of how this work was often done off of the ‘side of the desk’. The project provided an opportunity for stakeholders to engage around an issue.

Qualitative Data Theming

Based on the triangulation of qualitative data, the following overarching themes and sub themes, related to community capacity building and systems level activities were identified.

Theme 1

Increased Community Capacity to Address and Support the Needs of Youth in Transition

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews, Focus Groups, Meeting Minutes, Project Reports

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants, Community Stakeholders

Sub Themes: Creation of new programming, increased collaboration and partnership between service providers, increased awareness and understanding of community based resources and processes, improved transition planning

Program participants spoke to this theme in terms of the support and assistance they received from CB25 transitioning from the child and youth world to adult services and systems. Community stakeholders have been engaged in the youth transitions dialogue since the inception of CB25. Through interviews and focus groups, child and youth stakeholders groups spoke to the return on investment our community will potentially reap by supporting youth in their transition. Additionally, community stakeholders also spoke to increased awareness of services and supports in the adult systems as well as increased knowledge through CB25 of relationships and of improved access to previously unfamiliar systems.

“It works. We provided services and supports to youth in transition who aged out at 19. The planning and exchange between agencies has been incredible.”
Mental Health Clinician

Theme 2

Bridging the Gap Between Youth and Adult Service Delivery Systems

Appearance in: Photovoice, Interviews, Focus Groups, Meeting Minutes, Project Reports

Participant Groups Identifying Themes: Program Participants, Community stakeholders

Sub Themes: Systemic advocacy, identification of systemic barriers, linking systems, bridging a systems gap

This theme reflects the ongoing dialogue and activities that has been initiated by CB25 to identify and address systems gaps and barriers. Referral protocols, interagency protocols and transition planning mechanisms have been developed with a focus on changing practice to better serve the unique needs and challenges that transitioning youth experience. Stakeholder meetings and action groups have been initiated to facilitate increased planning, oversight and overall service delivery coordination between social service organizations in the delivery of programs and services for 16-24 young people in transition.

**“Breaking down barriers for youth that are at risk and falling through the cracks.”
Child Psychiatrist**

“My client didn’t feel she had the same connections to adult services as she did with youth. CB25 helps her with that, making these connections. Before, she was in care, and that is a hard transition. So many youth are vulnerable”. MCFD Social Worker

Achievement of Short and Mid-Term Outcomes

The dedication of CAI funding to this community afforded new resources and connections to be built. All stakeholders unanimously endorsed this as a positive outcome of the project. The issue of youth in transition spans multiple sectors, stakeholders and ministries. Review and analysis of the data pertaining to community capacity building demonstrate that the project has had an impact on multiple levels. New services have been brought to the community, with new relationships and connections developed as a result. Transition planning processes and protocols have been established between specific organizations, resulting in partial achievement of these outcomes. A clearly identified gap has been addressed, with bridges build between some systems that have traditionally worked in isolation. In order to fully achieve the intended outcomes, broader stakeholder reach and involvement is required and necessary.

Short-Term Outcomes

- Increased knowledge and awareness by youth service providers about services available to young people past 19 years of age: **Outcome Partially Achieved**
- Service barriers and gaps are continually identified, and plans are developed to address these gaps: **Outcome Achieved**
- Stakeholder organizations are engaged in a dialogue around the provision of transitional service delivery for young people between 16 and 24 years of age: **Outcome Achieved**

Mid-Term Outcomes

- Increased planning, oversight and overall service delivery coordination between social service organizations in the delivery of programs and services for 16-24 young people in transition: **Outcome Partially Achieved**
- Referral protocols and transition planning mechanisms are in place between organizations, to assist in planning for vulnerable young people where necessary and appropriate: **Outcome Partially Achieved**
- Systemic issues pertaining to vulnerable young people in transition are addressed and advocacy related activities are underway: **Outcome Achieved**

Challenges/Limitations

Significant energy was dedicated to community development activities. Multiple stakeholders were engaged through the process on a local level and through connection to politicians. Capacity building discussions also took place with funders, including the Vancouver Foundation, as the organization has made youth aging out of foster care a primary focus of their youth homeless initiative. CB 25 would be well served to connect and engage with stakeholders that can offer different perspectives and broader community input. Some of this work has been done, but the overall potential has not yet been realized. For example, engaging the business sector and broader community at large as outlying stakeholders would require more time and resources for the project to reach its full potential and to expand on community development initiatives that have been undertaken.

In addition, CB25 did some work to highlight the issue of youth in transition through the production of materials to highlight the issue (i.e. 'Mind the Gap' document, Photovoice ebook) of youth in transition. Developing a broader communication strategy to highlight the issue and expand stakeholder reach would help raise the profile of the issue, and help to broaden community engagement in this issue. This would further serve as a sustainability strategy and embed some of the work that CB25 has done into the community as a whole.

3. Project Sustainability

Serious attempts were made, and continue to be made by CMHA Kelowna, to ensure sustainability of CB25, including ongoing project funding and practice shifts in community. Some of the sustainability-based activities to date have resulted in an extension of the project beyond the CAI funding period, which ended December 31, 2103.

- Throughout the project, funding proposals were submitted to expand and enhance project focus and scope. A total of \$111,400 dollars was leveraged from the initial CAI grant investment, including Telus, First West Foundation, Green Shield Canada, Regional District of Central Okanagan, and the Vancouver Foundation. These funds will allow a youth transitions navigator to continue for a year beyond the expiry of CAI funds.
- CMHA Kelowna has accessed CAI sustainability funding streams to support project sustainability. Approval for a digital short through Charity Express will be completed in the New Year, to be used as a promotion and marketing tool, and raise awareness of the issue of youth in transition. In addition, CMHA Kelowna has been approved for a sustainability seed grant of \$5,000, as part of a grant request to HRJ consulting, a grant application that would extend the project into 2016.
- Meetings have been held with project partners MCFD and IHA throughout the term of the project to discuss focus and progress, including potential funding to sustain project operations. The Bridge Youth and Family Services holds contracts with MCFD that are focused on youth in transition, and the project is currently negotiating that these contract funds be utilized to help sustain the project by keeping a Bridge staff person co-located at CMHA Kelowna headquarters, while honoring the terms of the MCFD agreement.
- IHA has dedicated psychiatric sessional time and in November 2013 allocated a concurrent disorder specialist two days per week to the project in order to address clinical mental health and substance misuse issues in the population targeted by CB25. IHA has also requested a mini proposal for their consideration in upcoming budget deliberations.
- CMHA Kelowna and other project partners are part of the Interior Regional Mental Health and Substance Use collaborative, jointly sponsored by IHA, MCFD, and Divisions of Family Practice. As part of the local action team, and chairing a working group on youth transitions, the work started by CB25 will live on through this venue, presenting new opportunities to build relationships and sustain the spirit and legacy of the project.
- The partnership between CMHA Kelowna and the Bridge Youth and Family Services has been solidified through this project. Joint activities have been held throughout the course of the project, including a shared Indigenous Cultural Competency Training which was held for the mutual benefit of CMHA and Bridge staff, and well as co-facilitation of skills groups for young people. The Bridge has committed to a continued working relationship with CMHA Kelowna, which will afford an opportunity to share resources to offer skills groups in the absence of any further funding.

- A memorandum of understanding has been developed between the Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs (OBGC) and CB25, which sets a course for planning and a process for transition of young people aging out of OBGC services. This document is a living example of a template which can be utilized by other organizations in the community to support the effective transition of youth between services.
- CMHA Kelowna has committed to maintaining a focus on CB25 and the issue of youth transitions for the foreseeable future. Within the management structure, there are roles entailing a community development focus dedicated to continue addressing this issue within the community. In addition, beyond grants and fundraising activities, CMHA Kelowna will also consider fee for service arrangements to support young people in transition. A recent example is a contract for service signed between CMHA Kelowna and Manitoba Family Services, to provide direct supports to a young person from Manitoba that has aged out of their child welfare system and is living in BC.

Much work was done from the beginning of the project to address the issue of sustainability. Challenges pertaining to sustainability include the short funding cycle, as it was difficult to show some program outcomes within a two year funding window. In addition, from a point of continuous quality improvement, the ability to develop a solid program, capture results, and continually modify and grow presented a time challenge. Finally, the current fiscal reality in the province of B.C. works against new funds being deployed for the project. Managers within IHA and MCFD stated that they support the project wholeheartedly, but face funding freezes or cuts in their own areas of responsibility. As a result, the partnerships that have been developed through the project are a key to its ongoing sustainability, as are the leveraging skills demonstrated by CMHA Kelowna throughout the project.

“Partnership with CMHA has been phenomenal, wonderful to see this continue. We need more partnerships between youth and adult services, transcending the gap. This is a step to bridging the gap. Hopefully the model will be replicated. We need more resources. The need is overwhelming. I think we underestimated or were unaware of how many youth would need this”.

-THE BRIDGE (PROJECT PARTNER)

4. Recommendations

Recommendations are mainly addressed to CMHA Kelowna in regards to being the lead organization involved with the project, and in regards to project sustainability.

Community Capacity/Systems Level Recommendations

- CB25 would benefit from a systematic communications strategy around the issue of youth in transition, and to raise awareness of the project overall. CMHA Kelowna has a communications department with some capacity to deliver professional communications support, including the use of social media, a CB25 website, and other means to highlight the project in greater detail. It is encouraged that the organization consider implementation.
- Focus on community building activities beyond the scope of the existing partners and stakeholders. Engaging the broader community, including the business sector, would help to raise a greater awareness and profile of the issue and the project overall, an example is the work being done by the Vancouver Foundation (VF) on youth transitioning from care. Engaging more fully with VF in a partnership capacity to raise the profile of the issue across the province would assist in the systemic focus taken by CB25.
- Once the CAI digital short is created, it would be valuable to reconvene the groups that were involved in the initial convening activities in order to highlight the impact made by the project and engage in a community wide dialogue around the needs and issues of youth in transition. This will allow the gains made by the project to be further embedded in the community and build off of the partnerships already established to further build community capacity and commitment.

Service Delivery Recommendations

It is recommended that CMHA Kelowna and partner organizations leverage broader stakeholder engagement with enhanced opportunities for young people. For example, with the recent establishment of the CYMH collaborative, there is a shared energy around shifting the system and increasing access to services. A core recommendation is:

- To leverage the existing relationships established to build a CYMH services hub in our community. Modelled after Headspace in Australia, this model would serve as a point of multi-disciplinary contact for youth and their families, increasing access to services, removing barriers, and addressing needs on a continuum from prevention to intervention. It would also contain transitional housing for young people that require youth specific housing to assist in addressing outstanding needs identified through the evaluation report. This would lead to achievement of the broader CB25 vision:

“A mobilized community with key supports and services in place for vulnerable young people between the ages of 16 and 24 in the Central Okanagan to achieve a seamless transition to adulthood”

- In conjunction with the evaluation consultant, review and where identified, revise the program logic model and project outcomes based on the challenges and learning identified in this evaluation report. Examples include modified/adapted evaluation tools (including surveys and questions).
- Increasing awareness of the needs of youth in transition, the potential to recruit mentors, increase a supply of landlords, and increase support for the project beyond the role established by navigators.

“When I was under 18, everything was just given to me. When I aged out, I didn’t know what to do. Transitioning, when you age out, you are done. If there was no CB25, I’m not sure what I would be doing. I don’t really know of many other supports out there that would do what this program does.

-PROGRAM PARTICIPANT, 20