

Youth Engagement in Research: Insights of ACCESS Open Minds Research Project Aimed to Transform Youth Mental Health Services

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INTRODUCTION TO ACCESS OPEN MINDS



Generating new knowledge & evidence



Creating a pan - Canadian network



Providing high quality mental health care & services



Involving young people & their families/carers

INTRODUCTION TO NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

National Youth Council: We are the voice of youth within the project. Youth have identified gaps in how services and service providers understand and meet their needs. Since ACCESS Open Minds is working to transform youth mental health across 14 diverse sites, youth consultation is important and necessary.

Vision: To support Canadian youth and the ACCESS Open Minds initiative by giving youth a voice in their mental health care.

Mission: To create a real culture of change in youth mental health services by facilitating youth engagement across the ACCESS Open Minds network.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THROUGH NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

- Youth are integrated into all levels of governance of the research project, creating youth-adult partnerships. Youth are not only the participants of the research; they are immersed in the project delivery.
 - **Value:** Embedding youth engagement within the project allows young people to be fully engaged in all aspects of research.
- We have worked to improve conditions in which youth engagement can flourish:
 - The times for youth contributions are flexible and are practical for young people.
 - **Value:** Fully considering when youth are available and working around their schedules ensures youth can adequately contribute to the research. This also creates higher attendance rates.
- Youth who are engaged in the research development through the National Youth Council are compensated fully for their time. We have a fixed 5 hour per week cap with a fixed hourly rate.
 - Youth can access funding to attend events such as conferences for capacity building and professional development.
 - Compensating youth through a fixed hourly wage is a concrete illustration of organizational values. Financial compensation can also help youth participate by minimizing costs of participation.
 - **Value:** Compensating youth can increase youth’s feeling of being equals with the adults in the project; together youth and adults are coworkers. Youth may have more interest and ability to provide valuable contributions to the project when they feel they are equal stakeholders.
- In 2016, a motion was passed by the executive committee, requiring that youth be a part of all hiring panels within the central office and ACCESS OM sites.
 - **Value:** Having youth be a part of the hiring process increases the chance that youth will feel comfortable with the staff that are hired. It also increases the likelihood that service providers have the required knowledge and experience to work with youth and help them seek the care they need.
- Youth are working as peer-support workers, youth coordinators, and other roles at sites. Youth are not only advisors for their site and nationally, they may also be working within sites to drive changes. Youth who are not working at sites are active champions of the project, helping to spread the word and sharing the services available through ACCESS OM with friends.
 - **Value:** Creating job opportunities within sites means that youth perspectives are incorporated into services. Additionally, youth as champions help young people to become aware of ACCESS Open Minds as a option for mental health services that has been developed for them with other youth.

KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS

As outlined in our 2017-2018 Annual Report:
93% of youth responded that ACCESS Open Minds staff responded to their needs and concerns.

99% of youth said they would recommend ACCESS services to a friend in a similar situation.

While it is difficult to know how youth engagement has impacted these statistics, youth are clearly still feeling supported and represented in the services they are receiving through ACCESS Open Minds.

NEXT STEPS

- Communities outside of this national research network have begun to consult ACCESS Open Minds to advise on the implementation of similar models. Our youth engagement strategy is an important part of implementation.
- The National Youth Council is working on developing a number of Knowledge Translation tools in order to share lessons learnt.
- Continuing to build on the level of integration of youth in the research project.
- Youth inclusion in reporting and sharing of research data.

TIPS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- Engaging youth in research is not one-size-fits all. Different frameworks work for different projects.
- Patience is key. It can take a lot of trial and error before you determine what is working or isn’t working for your team. Readjust.
- Creating youth-adult partnerships rather than just engaging youth as a subsector of the project promotes relationship building.
- Meet youth where they are and when they are available. Be flexible.
- Consider who might be missing from the table when engaging youth (ethnicity, age, gender, socio-economic status, etc.). Does the project impact Indigenous youth? If so, are Indigenous youth represented? Consider how it would impact the project if they are not.

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JOINING THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

1

Young leaders in mental health with lived experience

16-30 years old

2

INTEREST + INFO = INVITATION to participate

Through discussion. Fluid and flexible. No contracts.

3

From local communities to a national level

Learning from each other.

Creating momentum in Canada from coast to coast to coast.

4

Ongoing engagement

Committed to meetings every two months.

Invited to contribute to various activities throughout ACCESS OM

5

Share experiences and expand knowledge

Communication with the ACCESS OM Network via Executive Committee & working groups.

