



WE CAN DO BETTER

A Report on Youth Addictions Services in Guelph and Wellington County

WDGS
Youth Addiction Project Working
Group 2016

Benchmarking Youth
Addiction Services

Youth Focus Group
Feedback

Youth Voices

Youth Recovery
Stories

12 Actionable
Recommendations



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

YAPWG Members:

- ARCH Guelph – Becki Linder, HepC Outreach Worker
- CMHA WWD – Brett Friesen, Children’s Services Manager
- Community Addiction Services (CADS) – Brenda Atkin, Addiction Counsellor and Lyndsey Gilbert, Addiction Counsellor
- Family and Children’s Services of Guelph and Wellington County – Beth Farquharson, Children’s Services Worker and Don Bens, Children’s Services Worker
- Guelph Police Services – Ross Keller, Community Policing in the Schools
- Portage Ontario – Crystal Pacheco, Social Worker
- Ray of Hope – Glynis Burkhalter, Program Director
- Upper Grand District School Board – Lynn Woodford, Mental Health Lead
- Wellington Catholic District School Board – Jody Allward, Social Worker
- Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy – Adrienne Crowder, Manager, Andrea Kendall, Intern, Sarah Mahato, Program Assistant
- Wyndham House – Leisha Burley, Program Director and Adam Metcalfe, Manager of Residential Services

The members of the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (WGDS) Youth Addiction Project Working Group (YAPWG) provided the energy and information that shaped this report. M&T's Graphics Factory assisted with its design and layout. Youth from our community generously shared their lived experience. Andrea Kendall and Sarah Mahato conducted the focus groups and led the Point-In-Time survey respectively. A great big "Thank You" to one and all!

We'd love to hear from you! For inquiries, comments, or more information on the content of this report, please contact:

Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy
176 Wyndham St. N | Guelph, ON | N1H 8N9
519-821-6638 Ext. 350, acrowder@guelphchc.ca

INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

The Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy Youth Addiction Project Working Group (YAPWG) formed in 2015, with a mandate from the WGDS Committee to review youth addiction services in Guelph and Wellington County, and to offer recommendations for service improvements.

Early in the project three key areas of need were identified:

- the need to enhance the availability of in-school addiction counselling,
- the need to enhance youth outreach services and
- the need for youth-oriented withdrawal management services.

The YAPWG members represent youth services in Wellington County. They have provided information and insight about local addiction and mental health services. In order to learn how other areas deliver youth addiction services, the YAPWG met with and interviewed key staff from the following organizations: Ray of Hope in Waterloo Region, Choices for Change in Perth County, POSSE Outreach Services in Halton Region, One Roof in Kitchener, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services in Ottawa and the Eastern Ontario Catholic District School Board.

YAPWG conducted focus groups to speak to youth about their substance use. Through this process we heard how at-risk youth want to be involved in designing the services that are provided to them, and how it is important to offer services where youth congregate in order to reduce access barriers.

On Dec 10, 2015, YAPWG conducted a Point-in-Time survey with participation from 20 organizations which service youth in Wellington County. Through this process, we learned about the prevalence of substance use for 4,048 youth between the ages of 12-24 in Guelph and Wellington County. This survey told us that 35% of these youth, ages 12-17, are using substances, as are 19% of youth between the ages of 18-24.

What we discovered:

- We were inspired to learn about the youth-helping-youth harm reduction model that has been developed by POSSE, Halton Region's Youth Outreach service.
- We were in awe of the resources that allow Rideauwood Family and Addiction Services to place school-based addiction counsellors in 45 Ottawa area high schools for 14 hours per week in each school, knowing that in Guelph funding supports a .8 Full Time Equivalent position to work approximately 1-3 hours per week in each of 7 local high schools and 4 alternative schools.
- We were saddened to learn that out of the 22 youth who participated in the focus groups, most felt that their substance use was very negatively impacting their lives and yet many were not aware of either harm reduction or treatment services.
- We were challenged to learn through the Point-in-Time survey that 90% of youth in Guelph who were accessing emergency shelter services were actively using substances on the day of the survey.

Most importantly, our report contains 12 recommendations to improve local services. Several of these require only minor redeployments of resources in order to effect significant change. Others will require more substantive resource investments to bring youth addiction services in Guelph and Wellington County up to an equitable and effective threshold. Please read on...

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Engage youth in the design of youth addiction service system improvements

- Invite the voice of youth with lived experience to assist in youth addiction service system design to enhance the value of these services to their consumers.
- Youth who attended the YAPWG focus groups expressed interest in being invited to participate in designing services.

2. Co-locate addiction services to reduce barriers to accessing services

- Provide addiction counselling and support services where youth congregate, i.e. at Wyndham House Resource Centre, or the Guelph Community Health Centre, or The West End Community Centre, etc.
- Co-locate youth addiction and mental health services at one geographic location, and/or under one administrative body to enhance delivery of complexity capable services.

3. Cross-train mental health service providers in addictions treatment

- Cross-train CMHA WWD Mental Health workers to also provide addiction counselling, and provide ongoing supervision and training to integrate skill development.
- Similarly, cross train addiction workers to deliver mental health services.
- At current staffing levels, cross-training mental health and addiction workers would increase the capacity of youth addiction services in Wellington County 6-fold.

4. Enhance the capacity of the Guelph's Youth Services Providers Network (YSPN)

- Resource the YSPN to become an active community of practice by embedding opportunities for knowledge and skill-development at its meetings, thereby expanding its current information-sharing process.

5. Develop youth-specific harm reduction programming

- Adopt POSSE's harm reduction model of youth-helping-youth in Wellington County.
- This youth-helping-youth model has proven its efficacy.

6. Fund youth-specific outreach services and locate them where street youth congregate

- The most marginalized youth currently don't access addiction services.
- Specialized youth addiction outreach services located at the youth shelter and/or Section 23 schools are required in Guelph to work with this population.

7. Offer a minimum of 2-days/week counselling in selected high schools

- Wellington County's in-school counselling services fall far behind a best-practice standard of 2 days a week in all high schools.
- Select one or more high-risk high schools in Wellington County in which to offer service at best practice levels, similar to the model used in Kitchener-Waterloo (see page 7).

8. Advocate for youth -oriented Community Withdrawal Management Services

- As Community Withdrawal Management Services are developed by the Waterloo-Wellington LHIN, advocate for them to be designed and developed to meet the needs of youth in Wellington County.

9. Work with school boards to offer effective substance education programming in schools

- Youth have told us that much of the information they received about substance use in schools did not meet their needs.
- Share substance use information with at-risk populations within local schools, thereby enhancing the provincial curriculum to meet local needs.

10. Promote the Be Safe app to high risk youth who own cell phones

- The Be Safe app offers youth who have smartphones an easy way to carry a Personal Safety Plan with them at all times.

- This app is available on both Android and iOS operating systems and can be actively promoted to support youth safety and wellness.

11. Develop youth-run social enterprises to employ youth who are street oriented and do not attend school

- Follow the example set by One Roof in Kitchener and create one or more social business enterprises that are led and staffed by at-risk youth.

12. Collaborate with the City and County to increase pro-social recreational opportunities for at-risk youth

- Enhance the STEPS program so that pro-social activities such as dodge ball and volleyball, art and creative studio spaces are more frequently available to at-risk youth.
- Invite service providers to participate in these activities in order to build relationships with this client population.

REVIEW OF POLICY PAPERS AND REPORTS ADDRESSING THE DELIVERY OF YOUTH ADDICTION SERVICES IN WELLINGTON COUNTY

In developing “We Can Do Better,” the YAPWG reviewed provincial and regional reports and policy papers focusing on both prevention and youth addiction treatment services. (Please see a full list of these reports on page 6).

Existing regional reviews and reports identified service gaps for youth with addictions issues, including the need for a youth-oriented withdrawal management service as well as a lack of services for transitional aged youth. They also strongly recommended that community organizations work collaboratively to meet best practice standards and promoted wrap-around service models for children and youth. Several of the reports also acknowledged the extent to which many organizations in Guelph and Wellington County have incorporated an anti-oppressive framework into their practice. However, specific steps to guide the implementation of evidence-based best practices at the local level, and recommendations for accountability and oversight for services were absent.

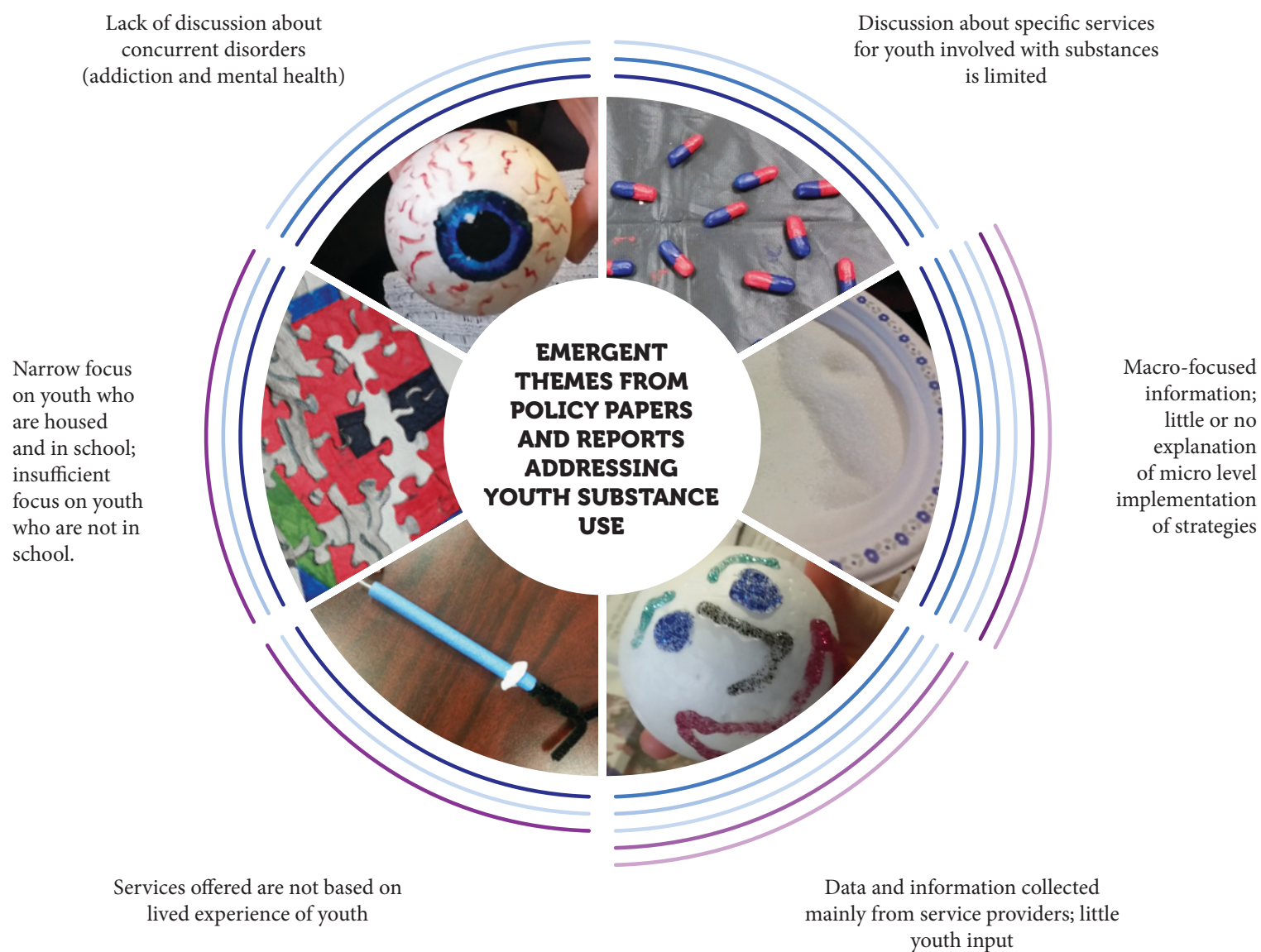
The provincial reports offered broad policy direction for mental health services for children and youth, however policy recommendations focusing on the service needs of youth with addictions and/or concurrent disorders are noteworthy in their absence.

The focus of the YAPWG “We Can Do Better” report is on the needs of youth (12-24 years of age) who struggle with substance use in the City of Guelph and Wellington County. It has been created to bring additional information and insight into developing equitable, appropriate, and research-informed services for the youth in Guelph and Wellington County who are struggling with addictions challenges.

From the perspective of its creators, this report adds to the current literature by:

- 1 - Bringing the voice of youth with lived experience to the table;
- 2 - Putting the spotlight on youth with addiction and/or concurrent issues;
- 3 - Examining local needs within the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington;
- 4 - Suggesting 12 actionable recommendations to implement best practice service models and frameworks.

WHAT DO POLICY PAPERS & REPORTS SAY?



Sources:

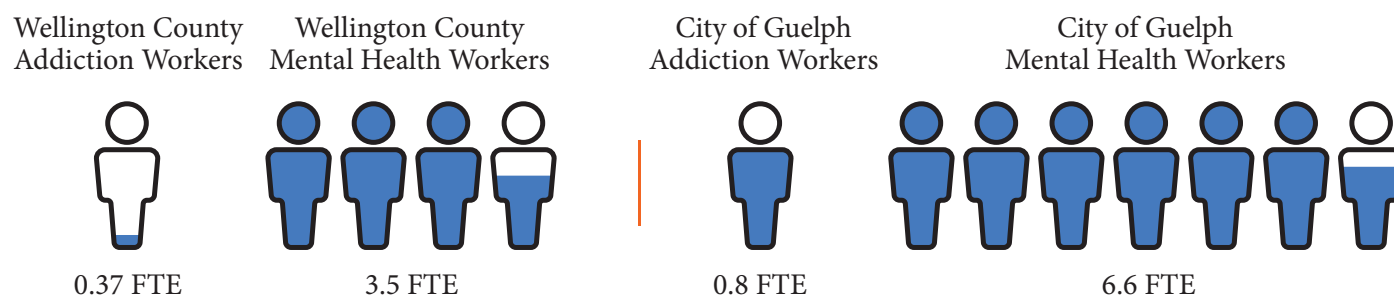
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BENCHMARKING YOUTH ADDICTION SERVICES IN GUELPH & WELLINGTON COUNTY

How do youth addiction services in Guelph & Wellington County compare to local mental health services and addiction services in other regions?

LOCAL SERVICES (FOR YOUTH AGES 12 - 18)

Services in Guelph & Wellington County



Youth Addiction services are provided by CADS and funded by the LHIN. | Youth mental health services are provided by CMHA and funded by MCYS.

Youth Addiction Services in Guelph Compared to Ottawa

Funded Addiction Counseling Hours
Per week Per High School



The Kitchener-Waterloo Youth Addiction Services Model

Kitchener-Waterloo has one designated urban and high-risk school. It has 1.0 FTE dedicated to addiction counseling



4 other schools have one worker present per school, 16 hours per week.



20 high schools are served by Community based treatment (Ray of Hope) on an as needed basis.

The Ottawa Youth Addiction Model

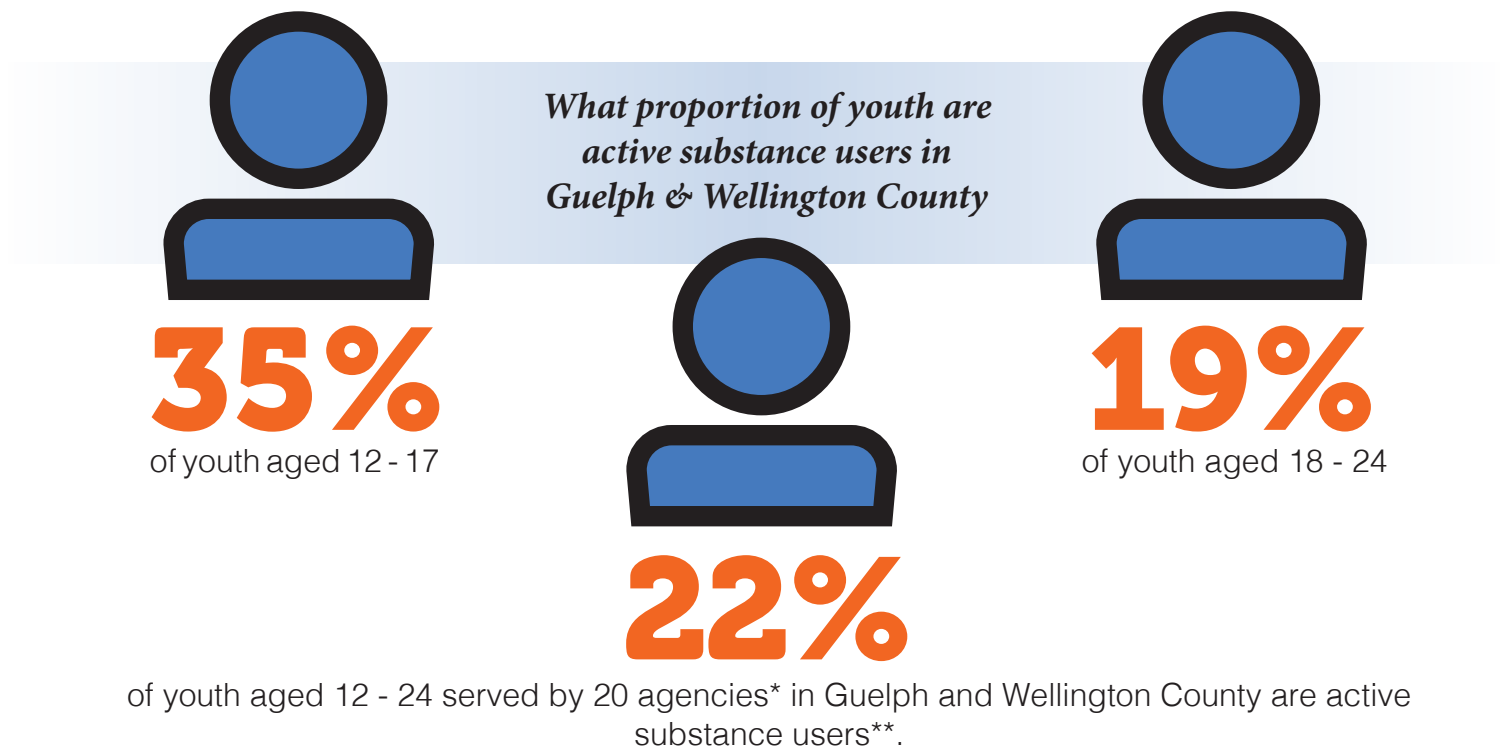
Rideauwood Addictions and Family Services in Ottawa represents a best practice standard for youth addiction services.

Rideauwood Addictions and Family Services employs one worker 2 days per week in each of its 45 high schools. Youth addiction services in Guelph are provided by CADS, with one 0.8 FTE to serve 7 high schools and 4 alternative schools.



Represents 1 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) worker

POINT IN TIME COUNT: A SNAP SHOT OF YOUTH SUBSTANCE USE IN WELLINGTON AND GUELPH ON DECEMBER 10, 2015



WHAT IS A POINT-IN-TIME COUNT (PITC)?

This PITC survey captured a snapshot of the number of youth who are actively using substances who accessed health, educational, or social services in Guelph and Wellington County on December 10, 2015. This benchmark will assist policymakers and program administrators to develop programs and processes to address youth substance use and addiction.

* Based on the case reports for 4,048 youth being served at 20 agencies in Guelph and Wellington County.

** Active substance use means that a youth is using one or more substances for non-medical purposes. Substances include: alcohol, cannabis, opiates prescribed to others or purchased on the street, crystal meth or other stimulants, benzos and/or other substances (nicotine was excluded from this PITC).

YOUTH ADDICTIONS FOCUS GROUP

Purpose Of Research

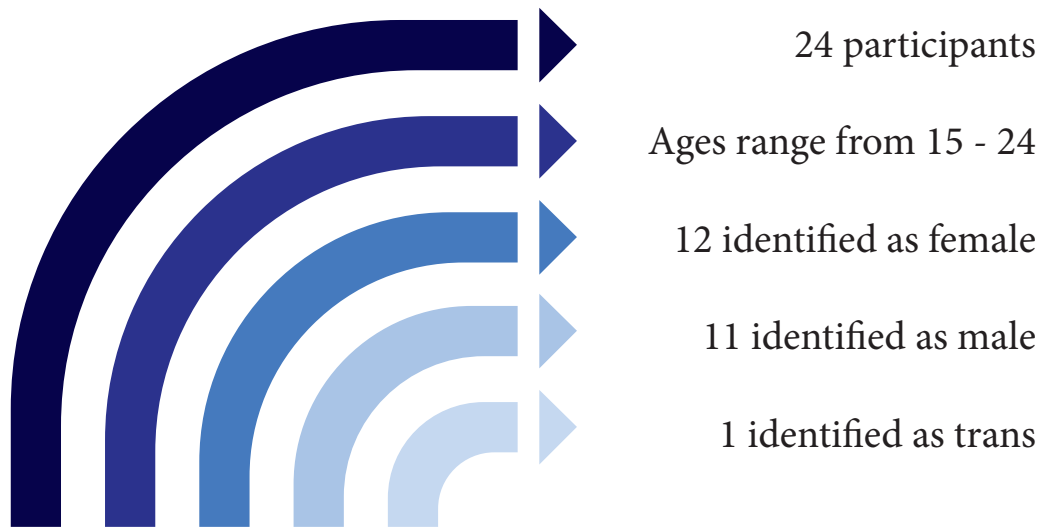
YAPWG was interested in learning about youth addiction from the perspective of youth themselves. Through the facilitation of four focus groups, this study collected information about youth substance use, and youth experiences with local addiction services.

Exploring what youth who are described as "high risk" have to say about the state of addictions services, as well as substance use within the community, is important because these individuals have been largely excluded from previous studies and reports.

More specifically, YAPWG wanted to know more about:



FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS



FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

The focus groups were conducted at four locations within Wellington County which serve youth (schools, resource centers, and social service agencies). Arts-based research methods were chosen, as this style of research is engaging and provides creative ways for youth to share information.

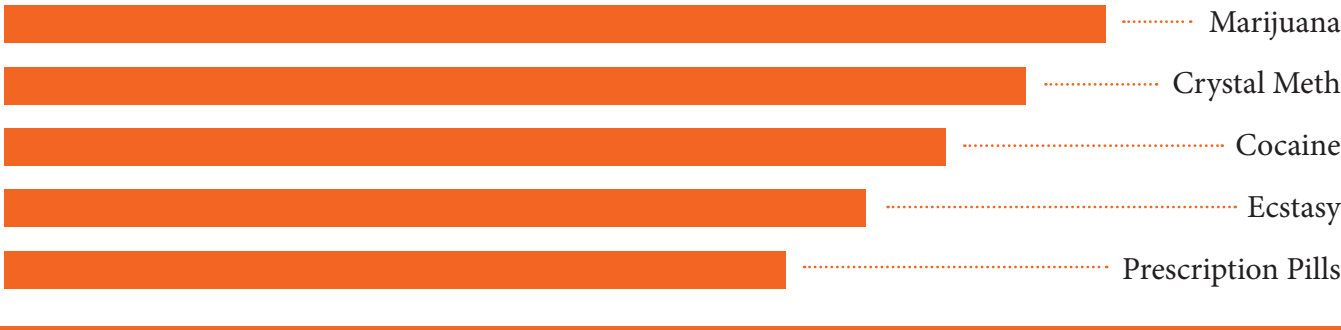


FINDINGS

The information extrapolated from the focus groups point to very important issues which demand further attention. Some of the most poignant findings of the study are outlined below.

Drugs in the Community

Listed below are the most commonly mentioned substances, in order of the frequency of their use:



DRUGS YOUTH REPORTED USING



YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF ADDICTION SERVICES

When asked about their experiences using youth addiction services, two key themes emerged: some youth felt as though there was a lack of resources for youth, others felt that, in comparison to other communities they are familiar with, there are many services available to them in Guelph.

Many youth involved in the focus groups were largely unaware of addictions services in the region, stating:

“From what I’ve heard, it’s not enough. But I’ve never really sought out addiction services ”

- Participant

“Personally like I dont see a lot of things to reach out for... if you were to like just seek it out yourself, personally it’s hard to find”

- Participant

“ There’s nothing really in Guelph.

Not that I know of at least”

- Participant

“ There’s lots of services here compared to other places. When I was living back in New Brunswick... they dont have any services really for rehabilitation. They dont have anything, no methadone clinics or anything like that... no detox or anything. So when you compare that place to here, there’s a lot of resources ”

-Participant

“There are many harm reduction groups that happen. It’s just nobody goes to them ”

- Participant

QUOTES FROM YOUTH



"There is absolutely no benefit to using drugs. Other than the fact that you get high, it just completely ruins your life. It doesn't happen right away, but in time it will." - Participant



"I feel like no matter what, you need someone else in order to get help. You can't do it yourself" - Participant



"Meth destroys any life. Like it doesn't matter who you are, you cannot manage a life on meth ... It takes over your life" - Participant



"I just bring myself back to like how bad I got and how I don't want to get back to that point. No matter how bad my trigger is, its not bad enough that I could put myself back there" - Participant

"Drugs are terrible in my eyes. They destroyed my life" - Participant



IDEAS FROM YOUTH

Youth who participated in the study had a number of key suggestions pertaining to services they would like to see in the community. The recommendations outlined below were provided by youth participating in the focus groups.

1

Provide Youth-Led, Lived Experience Services

Many participants within all four focus groups shared that they felt services and supports should be youth-led, and involve someone who has lived experience with substance abuse and addiction. They shared that many programs take an abstinence-based approach and relate to (and are facilitated by) adults. Youth do not see abstinence as realistic or welcoming, and see this type of service as a barrier which keeps them from accessing resources and services.

2

Improve Educational Programs in Schools

Participants also mentioned that they felt it would be beneficial to have substance abuse programming in schools offered at an early age in order to promote prevention and harm reduction. A number of youth shared that more comprehensive information about drugs would have prevented them from trying them in the first place. Some participants were unaware of what “harm reduction” meant, and suggested that more information about this be provided to youth. Others shared that drug programs such as D.A.R.E are incorporated too early in the school system, and should be offered multiple times, at older ages, such as high school. Youth mentioned that it would be helpful if these programs also informed them about addiction services in the community, as many expressed that they and their peers were largely unaware of any services in the community.

3

An Increase in Outreach Services

A number of participants shared that there is not enough youth outreach support in Guelph. Many participants mentioned that they prefer outreach services. They are either unaware of other services in the community that are youth-specific, or they do not feel comfortable accessing such services due to not feeling welcome in certain spaces. Several people expressed an appreciation for the work done by CADS, but raised concern over the scarcity of this resource, given the level of need.

4

More Youth-Specific Treatment Facilities

Several youth involved in the focus groups mentioned that they would like to see youth-specific treatment facilities within Wellington County. While many were unaware of local addiction services which do accept youth, those who knew about them explained that they are directed to Kitchener for services, which was not ideal. Addiction services that offer youth and adults counseling in one location was seen as a significant barrier for youth seeking these services.

CELEBRATING STRENGTH, RESILIENCE, & SUCCESS

With help, people can get better. Here are accounts from local youth who are on the road to recovery from substance abuse.

What are you most proud of about where you're at today?

"When I woke up in the hospital and saw my reflection, I had enough. And now... well, I never thought I could achieve 5 ½ months sober. I am now able to hold my head up high and feel empowered"- Participant

"I need to be careful not to get ahead of myself, however I am very proud of having today. I take each day day-by-day, retaining that humility. There was a lot of motivators and I am proud of the progress I have made. I am proud that I was open enough to attend AA, getting a sponsor and reaching out for help and getting that support back. I was open minded and willing to follow through with the changes necessary to turn my life around. It is a matter of knowing what support is available and using it." - Participant

What has changed the most for you?

"I am not hiding my emotions anymore; I am able to express them in a healthy way. I have a generally happier and relaxed frame of mind and I have never felt like this before. Physically I feel 300% better. Socially, I have lost about half of my friends. I have learned who my real friends are but today, I can say I am okay with that" - Participant

"My frame of mind is the most significant change. I have more of a realization that spirituality is an important component. I am learning to be grateful for things I have, versus looking at what I do not have. I am also learning about forgiveness. The accountability piece is important honesty with self and others is vital" - Participant

For others in a similar situation, what would you tell them that you think would be helpful to them?

"It will get easier once you own up to the changes that need to be made. I have made mistakes and I have decided to make the changes to live a better life. I can relate with those who are going through this journey and support is so important along the way. I feel it is more courageous for a young person to walk through the doors of their first 12-step meeting, or reach out for help from a counselor. It's not where we've been, it's where we are going" - Participant

"Acknowledging that I can relate. Explain to them they are not alone in those thoughts and feelings and that there are a lot of similarities to be drawn from your story and other peoples stories. Keep an open mind and an open heart to different solutions" - Participant





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519 821-6638;350