# **Sharing the Stories**



# Greater Than County Youth Collective Sharing the Stories Report 2020



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# **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is for Greater Than County Youth Collective to evaluate the process of people and organizations working together in the Greater Than County Youth Collective. Interview participants were selected to include a broad range of youth and adults, long-term and short-term members of Greater Than, members of Greater Than's Stewardship Table, as well as members of partner organizations. 1:1 qualitative interviews provided a space for members to reflect on their experiences, share ideas for improving the program, and share any impacts that participation with Greater Than County Youth Collective has had on their lives, work, and community.

# **Origin Story**

#### **Background**

In 2013, the County Community Foundation produced a *Vital Signs* report that provided a snapshot of the community and raised awareness of its successes and challenges. Based on a collection of quantitative and qualitative data from municipal, provincial, and federal sources, it was guided by an advisory committee representing leaders of many local organizations. Community conversations also informed the process. The report pointed to opportunities for collaboration to analyze and address problems.

Based on the report, the advisory committee prioritized three key areas for immediate action: Learning, Food Insecurity, and Transportation. Working groups, comprising over forty organizations in total, were formed to define priorities and projects in each of the three areas. The Learning component of this initiative, originally comprised of members from eight organizations, became the Prince Edward County Youth Collective Impact Initiative. In the winter of 2018 this group was renamed Greater Than: County Youth Collective.

Focusing on youth aged 12 to 29 years old, the vision of this group is to create a community culture that embraces learning and personal development, and that enables everyone to reach their potential. The intended impact is to raise the high school graduation rate in Prince Edward County to parity with the provincial average by 2026.

The term 'graduation rate' refers in our work to academic achievement in general and may take several forms including the OSSD (Ontario Secondary School Diploma), the GED or High School Equivalency Certificate (for which the GED is the test), Ontario High School 16 Credit Certificate, or life skills and alternative work readiness credentials (such as Certificate of Accomplishment).

Bringing the graduation rate and education attainment rates to parity by 2026 is an ambitious goal. The available evidence suggests that there is no typical profile of a high school early leaver. Early leaving is a process, not an event, and is often the result of a long progression of disengagement that may begin before a child enters school. Moreover, there is a significant graduation disparity among students from differing socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. As a result, the project identified five essential support strategies necessary for our youth to succeed, as identified in our Theory of Change.

#### **Theory of Change**

Our Theory of Change outlines the strategies required to produce the population-level outcome. It was developed through a series of workshops, youth surveys and research. The five pillars of our strategy, and their associated outcomes, are:



#### FAMILY, CAREGIVERS & PEERS

Youth feel connected to their families, caregivers and peers



#### WELL-BEING

Youth are physically, emotionally and mentally well



#### **EMPOWERMENT**

Youth feel valued in their community and have a voice



#### **EDUCATION SUPPORT**

Youth are engaged in their education and learning



# CAREER & EMPLOYMENT

Youth see relevance between their education and their future

#### **Progress so Far**

In early 2017, members of Greater Than County Youth Collective began the process of evaluating the Theory of Change. In this process, 5 Partner organizations employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) to learn more about youth in PEC with regards to our Theory of Change's 5 pillars (empowerment, well-being, family and caregivers, career and employment, and education). Survey modules from the Students Commission's Sharing the Stories platform that are specific to each pillar were completed and the data was interpreted by SCC into a 2017 Shared Learning Report.

In 2018, 7 youth were recruited to work as Embedded Youth within partner organizations, with a significant portion of their paid positions directed towards conducting Participatory Action Research in the community for Greater Than. Greater Than's Youth team launched a Sharing the Stories survey collection. The Youth Team met with about 70 Prince Edward County (PEC) youth to gather their input on Mental Wellness and Community Engagement via surveys. This data was turned into the 2018 Shared Learning Report.

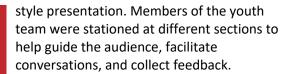
During this time, the Learning & Engagement fund was launched. A fund offered by Greater Than to all partner organizations that would help bridge the funding gaps and barriers that PEC youth face with regards to affordable learning and engaging activities.

On September 12 2018, Greater Than's Youth team hosted a "Data Party" with a call out to all PEC Youth to reflect on and respond to the report that came from the surveys. A display of findings from the 2018 Shared Learning Report were arranged around a large hall in a gallery

# PEC Youth Action

- A safe space in the community for LGBTQ+ Youth. A LGBTQ+ Community Support Network.
- A commitment from local government, community organizations, service clubs, agencies etc. to meaningfully engage youth in their decision making. We want to help the community develop Youth Engagement Strategies.
- Access to relevant sexual health education.
- Parenting programs for young men, supportive programming for boys, access to positive male role models.
- Timely and consistent
  Access to Mental Health
  Supports for Youth. Youth to
  have knowledge of existing
  supports. People working
  with youth are clear on how
  to refer youth to appropriate
  supports.
- Alternative Learning Environments for students who need extra supports.
- Connect youth to community programming that exposes them to different careers and provides opportunity to connect with people in diverse fields.
- Support for families for navigating systems and accessing entitlements and supports (entitlements e.g. social assistance, child benefits, daycare subsidies, hydro subsidies, housing benefits). (Supports: food bank, Learning and Engagement Fund, Learning Enrichment Foundation, Jumpstart etc.)

Greater Than; County Youth Collective September 2018



Approximately 40 youth attended in-person to engage with the data. Members of Greater Than worked together to compile the great amount of feedback from Youth into common themes and Calls to Action.

On September 20 2018, a Collective meeting was held to discuss the Calls to Action.

Member organizations (Youth service providers from all sectors) were presented with the data and Calls to Action, and brainstormed together different ways that Greater Than would respond to the newly discovered (and often suspected) needs of PEC Youth. On that day, 4 action groups were formed to respond to different Calls to Action. Since then, several programs have been developed and/or trialed to respond to calls to action including:

- 1. A program at the Picton Branch Library that provides safe space and a growing network of support for LGBTQ+ Youth community
- 2. An intention to have an equal number of Youth on Greater Than's Stewardship Table and to advocate this practice in the Community
- 3. Safer Sex books obtained by the youth team through CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange) were distributed to several local agencies to leave in places where youth can have access to free sexual health education
- 4. A weekly drop-in style program for young/new parents was piloted at the Picton Branch Library
- 5. The ROC and Children's Mental Health began collaborating to arrange more accessible mental



- health supports for youth
- 6. PELC and ROC accepted students on SAL plans and worked with the local high school to coordinate plans to help students stay in school and/or to graduate
- Youth involved with Greater Than have been connected to community programming and do have greater opportunities to connect with people in relatively diverse fields
- 8. PELC and the ROC created significant programs to address individuals and families in PEC who are underserved, living in poverty and/or isolation, struggling with mental health or addictions, and other challenges.

A website was designed by the youth team, with a local web designer, and was launched in 2019. <a href="www.greaterthancyc.ca">www.greaterthancyc.ca</a> was designed to be a space where all information about all of Greater Than's partner organizations would be in one spot, making it easier for youth and their families to navigate the programs and activities offered by different service providers in PEC. The website featured a series of spreadsheets, organized into the 5 pillars, that listed each and every program offered (in 2019) by our partner organizations that would support people under each pillar. The website also features information about the Learning & Engagement fund, the Calls to Action, Vital Signs reports, the 2017 and 2018 Shared Learning Reports, and past efforts of Greater Than County Youth Collective.

In 2019, the structure of the Collective was changed to allow for a sustainable infrastructure with a core team to remain throughout times without any funding. This transitioned the "Backbone" team to the Stewardship Table, the Youth team was retired, and the Collective continued to meet 2-3 times annually. The Stewardship Table is comprised of 6 executive representatives of member organizations and, ideally, an equal number of paid youth (where funds allow). The purpose of this team is to facilitate the goals of Greater Than County Youth Collective through shared efforts of organizing, convening, tracking, and overseeing, while also trying to raise funds to continue Greater Than County Youth Collective.

#### **Process and Tools to Date**

For this report, the Greater Than County Youth Collective chose to do **1:1 qualitative interviews** to evaluate the process of people and/or organizations working together in Greater Than County Youth Collective. 9 members volunteered to participate in these interviews in December of 2019. Interview participants consisted of both youth and adults, long-term and short-term members of Greater Than, members of Greater Than's Stewardship Table, as well as members of partner organizations.

The interviews provided a space for members to reflect on their experiences, share ideas for improving the program, and share any impacts that participation with Greater Than County Youth Collective has had on their lives, work, and community. As mentioned above, 9 members contributed to interviews held in December 2019. The interviews were facilitated by SCC staff and were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed for significant themes, with counts of how many times each theme was mentioned. Meaningful and telling quotes that echo participants' thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences were drawn from the analysis to provide context to each theme. Names or identifying information have been removed from the quotes and replaced with denotations such as "[x]" or a letter in place to insure anonymity.

# **Executive Summary**

Members noted several highlights of being a part of the Greater Than County Youth Collective. Members describe how the culture of Greater Than County Youth Collective has been an important part of working together. Greater Than County Youth Collective was described as a house for people to convene and network. Participants described their experiences at meetings leading to greater understanding of the existing network of youth service providers in Prince Edward County. Greater understanding of the issues surrounding youth in today's world, specifically in PEC, were documented by many participants as a direct result of PAR. The members all echoed the importance of coming together to intentionally build relationships, learn, brainstorm, and problem solve together. Additionally, members were excited about the projects that emerged to address issues facing youth that were identified throughout the PAR process.

"There's no other place that I know of that brings people together to help me understand things in the County. It's like a house where if I stop in I get to see who's there and what's potentially offered."

"Yeah, I had no idea, like I said the resources available and problems youth deal with. I get excited about it because I get to share all that information and help youth. It would benefit anyone to be a part of, if the whole town hall were told, 'here's what's going on'."

Some members identified challenges and barriers that they have experienced during their participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective. Themes around power dynamics, relationships, communication barriers, and confusion around the funding and governance process for Greater Than were identified. Members also identified challenges organizations face around competition for resources, and being very busy within their professional roles.

"Some people are not taking in the communication and it's costing opportunity for the people they serve."

Members identified potential ways that Greater Than County Youth Collective could move forward. Each response can be attributed to one of the four following themes:

- 1. Being seen as leaders in youth focused solutions in the community
- 2. Diversifying outreach to include a broader range of youth and service providers
- 3. Enthusiasm to continue working to improve outcomes for local youth
- 4. Different ways for people to work together in the Collective

Greater Than County Youth Collective has made significant impacts in individual, social, and systemic levels through their collective impact work in Prince Edward County. Members identified strong qualities of engagement that shape the culture of Greater Than County Youth Collective and identified several processes of youth engagement that lead towards positive shifts in the community. Moving forward, it will be important to reflect on the challenges and barriers identified by participants and work together to mitigate these challenges. The members

shared an enthusiasm to improve outcomes for local youth, and can see Greater Than County Youth Collective continuing to be leaders in local youth focused solutions.

"When the projects have taken flight and have come to life. When you start with providing a space where young people can see what they want to come to the community and having adults and professionals brainstorming and seeing the projects come from them. They are so good."

# **Organization of the Report**

The analysis of the interviews is organized based on the youth engagement framework<sup>1</sup>. This report will be broken down into four sections. The sections will be as follows:

- 1) Outcomes: Individual, Social, Systems:
  - **Individual Outcomes**: Outcomes experienced by members of Greater Than as a result of their involvement that improve them as individuals.
  - **Social Outcomes**: Outcomes experienced by members of Greater Than as a result of their involvement that affect their social networks and relationships.
  - **Systems Outcomes**: Outcomes experienced by members of Greater Than as a result of their involvement which have an even larger reaching impact such that it affects their communities or organizations.
- 2) **Qualities of Engagement**: A category of theme that describes various features that characterize the atmosphere and structure of Greater Than County Youth Collective.
- 3) **Challenges and Barriers**: A category of theme that illustrates the barriers faced by members of Greater Than County Youth Collective and gives context to the program qualities and outcomes.
- 4) **Potential Moving Forward**: A category of theme that explains the ideas put forward by members of Greater Than regarding potential ways Greater Than could work moving forward.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The initiators, sustainers and qualities of engagement are all associated with outcomes of engagement; having strong initiators, sustainers and qualities can lead to a more effective youth program (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lawford, Ramey, Rose-Krasnor & Proctor, 2012; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loiselle, 2002; Rose-Krasnor, 2009).

# **Qualitative Analysis**

Participant responses have been collated into the table below with brief discussions highlighting the takeaways below the table.

Categories	Themes	Frequency <sup>2</sup>	Description
Individual	Increased knowledge and understanding of local services and networks	12	Understanding existing community systems and organizations as well as what they offer and how they are connected
	Opportunity to grow/refine skills	8	Skill-building opportunities in the areas of governance, facilitation, research, and collaboration
	Increased knowledge and understanding of youth perspective	6	Processing new information from youth to better understand barriers and challenges they identify
	Opportunity for action	4	Where people can work differently as individuals
Social	Collective impact approach to bridge gaps in the community	18	Working together to identify and implement community-based solutions in an effort to respond to barriers and challenges faced by local youth
	Making connections in the community	17	Local organizations spending time building relationships through Greater Than meetings and events
Systems	Creation of new resources for youth	13	Resources created and/or implemented by partner agencies in response to youth voice
	Collaboration amongst service providers	7	Community organizations coming together to implement change across sectors
	Increase in referrals	2	Community organizations noticing increased referrals as a result of working together

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The frequency is an approximate count of the number of mentions for each theme. This frequency count may include multiple mentions by a single respondent or single mentions by multiple respondents, therefore, please interpret with caution.

Qualities of Engagement	Collaboration	23	Coming together to learn, brainstorm, problem solve
	Theory of Change, PAR, and wraparound supports	15	The process of supporting youth in a holistic way and responding to youth voice
	Importance of diversity in Greater Than's members	8	Having a broad range of voices and perspectives to collaborate with
	Shared understandings and common goals	7	Members who share common goals around promoting success for all youth by working together
Challenges and Barriers	Relationships amongst Collective members	17	Participation barriers, and unclear roles of member organizations
	Governance of the Collective	15	Power dynamics amongst stakeholders, and unclear funding processes of Collective Impact projects
	Busy organizations	6	Need for efficiency and shared resources for meetings and collaborative work
	Competition for resources	6	Competitive nature of non-profit funding for organizations who share similar mandates and/or serve common clients
Potential Moving Forward	Diversifying outreach	7	Connect with more youth and local agencies to broaden Greater Than's network
Totwara	Being leaders in local youth focused solutions	7	Continuing to work collectively to influence change in the community in response to youth voice
	Enthusiasm to improve outcomes for local youth	7	Excitement and anticipation to continue working together to support local youth.
	Different ways to work together	5	Opportunities to work in new ways such as online meetings, sharing regular updates, community advisors

# **Outcomes: Individual, Social, System**

#### Individual

All of the members identified opportunities and experiences that led to individual growth, capacity building, and better understanding of youth perspective and/or local services during their participation with Greater Than County Youth Collective. Members indicated personal growth in the areas of confidence, facilitation, data/research, and governance. Some members noted actionable areas unique to their roles and perspectives that became clear through their experiences in the Collective.

#### Increased knowledge and understanding of local services and networks (12)

Members reflected on their capacity to embrace their new understandings around youth voice and perspective in more than one way, by employing them in their professional roles as well as in their personal lives. Certain qualities of member involvement in the Collective led to opportunities to work differently on an individual level both at work and in the community.

"Nice to know what's going on in the community....and see how organizations that are one way in my mind, being open to starting initiatives to fill a need. I think that's very positive."

"I've learned about individual agencies and what they do... It helps with knowing what supports are out there and knowing where to direct students who need something we don't provide."

"I learned about the agencies. That was one of the best parts of working with the people was because you got to know more about what was happening in their work places and their programs."

#### Opportunity to grow/refine skills (8)

Skill-building opportunities and areas of professional development were noted by some members as a result of working together in Greater Than County Youth Collective. Members reported growth and increased understanding around processes such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), facilitating a collective impact approach, and governance of the Collective.

"Definitely continued to grow youth facilitation skills... It was neat to work with people who you learn from."

"It refreshed all of my data and research skills."

"I've learned about Collective Impact and the Theory of Change. Things take time, and if you wait long enough you get good results."

Increased levels of understanding, appreciation, knowledge, and skillsets with regard to youth perspective and the collective impact approach are individual level outcomes that can be attributed to long- and short-term participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective.

"The Stewardship Table experience is like a mini board. It is helpful for learning how boards work, and understanding the governance structures. It's very interesting."

"With the Stewardship Table I learned a lot and it was a great constructive growth opportunity."

#### Increased knowledge and understanding of youth perspective (6)

By nature of the Collective's work of holding open meetings, collaborative project development, and various methods of youth engagement, members reported becoming more aware of the struggles faced by local youth such as marginalization, disengagement, and mental health challenges.

"My appreciation for the struggles youth face in PEC has increased. Through this job you realize sometimes there is nothing that youth can do to get out of the situation so my perspective is changed..."

Members reflected on having the opportunity to "participate in the youth perspective" personally and "spread the word" from an organizational perspective or capacity.

"Knowledge is power, right? I continued to grow in more openness in all levels, not just inclusivity or what a student wants in life, just overall. More openness and acceptance, and how to genuinely empower youth."

#### **Opportunity for Action (4)**

Members reported on opportunities to work differently or in better ways due to their individual participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective. Participants often indicated feeling empowered and/or having greater understanding of their own roles in the community with relation to the Theory of Change. Some members reflected on ways that their individual roles may look differently moving forward based on these experiences, such as responding to their clients differently in their own workplace. As well, some participants report feeling more comfortable to make referrals to other youth service providers involved with Greater Than.

"Seeing people and checking in with people can be really helpful and can get things moved along, It's a good way to sort of check in with someone to move forward with things."

"Not just sitting and watching. I'm trying to be more vocal. I'm newer so I'm hesitant but it's getting better. Not as experienced as the other people around the tables."

"My perspective is changed...It's changed my response."

#### Social

All of the members identified ways they have been working together to make connections and to better understand the gaps that youth are facing in the community, and ways to bridge gaps both in their own roles and in a collective impact approach. Members indicated the importance of building relationships with other organizations, local youth, and other community stakeholders.

#### Collective impact approach to bridge gaps in the community (18)

Through the process of working together in a collective impact approach, members noted the increased ability to both understand and bridge gaps leading to stronger social networks of service providers in the community.

"There's no other place that I know of that brings people together to help me understand things in the County. It's like a house where if I stop in I get to see who's there and what's potentially offered."

Greater levels of awareness around challenges faced by youth was noted by each of the members, and can be attributed to the Collective's broad range of service providers and youth working together to focus on and respond to youth voice in the community.

"Yeah, I had no idea, like I said the resources available and problems youth deal with. I get excited about it because I get to share all that information and help youth. It would benefit anyone to be a part of, if the whole town hall were told, 'here's what's going on'."

Members also discussed the important role of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the process of collecting and understanding youth voice in the community.

"It became really interesting when PAR became a thing, and it felt like there was action to it and there were things I could see and be involved in. It's really easy to get behind when you meet a whole bunch of agencies working towards a collective goal saying come do this, it was a great platform for them."

#### Making connections in the community (17)

Multiple members commented on the benefits of building social networks and relationships during their participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective. Members described their interactions with other partners of the Collective being mostly positive and worthwhile.

"It's been helpful, being new, just to get to know people better and understand the complex web of services and other organizations in the County it's been good and I learn more at every meeting."

Many members noted that the process of working together has also led to stronger social networks and higher levels of comfort and trust amongst members of Greater Than. They also

expressed the benefits of having the ability to brainstorm together to overcome barriers identified in the process of working together in a collective impact approach.

"I'd like to say I saw people become more comfortable sharing their actual concerns and opinions and that's a natural outcome from being at meetings together. I was impressed seeing different agencies sitting and saying their opinions and that's how solutions are made."

Some members also reported higher levels of comfort and confidence with making referrals and/or reaching out to other agencies to work together as a result of their participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective.

"Getting to work with the other organizations and networking. Knowing who to talk to when we want to partner and having faces to names. It's not as intimidating or awkward to reach out to other organizations because there is a pre-existing relationship."

#### **Systems**

All of the members described systems level changes that they have witnessed throughout their participation with the Greater Than County Youth Collective. The most common answers from members outlined the creation of new resources and projects implemented by organizations, as well as collaborative and wraparound approaches to address gaps identified in local services by youth voice.

#### Creation of new resources for youth (13)

When asked about Greater Than's biggest achievements, all of the members indicated that action within community systems has been most important. Many members reflected on the processes of collecting youth voice in the forms of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Calls to Action, creating the Learning and Engagement fund, as well as the creation and implementation of projects that are now addressing many barriers identified by local youth.

"I think the biggest achievement is implementing change. Often times we see people collecting data and identifying problems but Greater Than has implemented things to fix problems over a short period of time. Greater Than has made change and they're changing students outlook. Discover Youth is a perfect example."

Members noted the creation of 4 specific projects that are responding to the Calls to Action identified by local youth. Projects developed to address barriers around accessibility, mental health supports, navigating systems, and LGBTQ+ supports were referred to a number of times by members as direct results of the collaborative process.

"The projects, the decision around how to respond to the calls to action. That was really cool. The data parties were pretty awesome events. The LGBTQ training hopefully made a difference."

"Well I think it has provided more opportunities for early leavers and more support. I think we're about to learn how to keep kids in school instead of support the outside of school. The range and depth of programs has changed since 2013. The projects that youth identified through calls to action, that's an achievement. The research was an achievement. How ever many youth went through the embedded program were changed."

"There was no concept of wrap around support. It was you make your own way to your own agency. The concept of how do you holistically support people across the board. The ROC with the YIP program. PELC has been able to move into the financial support in a different way to see how to support people to continue their education. Community Living being in the schools, that is a big achievement."

"Obviously, the LGBT space is amazing, seeing that come to life and knowing that it didn't exist before is a little concerning but we're moving forward. It's exciting."

#### Collaboration amongst service providers (7)

Members noted that by collaborating with members in the community that gaps in services are being bridged by way of new resources, new/strengthened partnerships, and increased opportunities for youth. Members also described new opportunities for organizations to work together or to work differently than before as a result of their participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective.

"It filled my knowledge to be able to send students I'm working with to send to different places, and being able to give them positive information and telling them you know other staff in agencies personally makes a difference in making youth comfortable in accessing services."

"When the projects have taken flight and have come to life. When you start with providing a space where young people can see what they want to come to the community and having adults and professionals brainstorming and seeing the projects come from them. They are so good."

"Bringing everybody together and bridging the gap."

#### Increase in referrals (2)

While noted above that members reported feeling more comfortable with the idea of making referrals to other member organizations, 2 members expressed explicitly that they are either actively making or receiving more referrals.

"With [x program] there have been more referrals to other agencies in the community. Other agencies have referred to us."

# **Qualities of Engagement**

This section describes the ways that youth voice has been used as a vehicle for Greater Than County Youth Collective to bring issues forward to the community, and to open the dialogue to have conversations across multiple sectors.

#### Collaboration (23)

Through the process of collaborating and strengthening partnerships in Greater Than, it is clear that many areas of the Theory of Change are being addressed. There are new wraparound supports, opportunities, and resources for youth in the community which are attributed by members as direct results of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process, the Calls to Action, and the intention to overcome barriers identified by youth voice and feedback.

"There's a real commitment to PEC's young people and young adults. Everybody is 150% on that. I would say we're all craving sort of, what are those things that are going to work really well."

"The collective put youth work into the public eye, they had It also legitimized the work that people are doing. The work you do as a group is more powerful than work you do individually."

The members also noted the importance of listening to each other while learning to work together and collaborate from each other's unique perspectives and capacities, as it can be difficult at times to collaborate from different perspectives. Members reported that by meeting regularly and getting to know each other's roles in each organization, they feel it has led to stronger personal relationships, and having a greater understanding of and stronger sense of connection to the networks and supports available for youth in PEC. There is also a greater awareness of the gaps that have been identified through PAR, which the members of the Collective strive to bridge over time.

"I think it's everybody working together and everyone wants to accomplish that end goal and everyone at the table uses their backgrounds to help shape the collective moving forward. You can see it's difficult from each other's perspective."

#### Theory of Change, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and wraparound supports (15)

Members expressed that Greater Than's decision to pursue Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the community to explore their Theory of Change has provided an avenue for the Collective to engage with local youth, identify barriers youth face in the community, and to work together to overcome these barriers.

"How exciting it is that the collective has implemented programs so quickly after gathering data and you can see people really care about affecting change."

As well, members reflected on the important concept of wraparound supports for local youth being made possible through working together to achieve Greater Than's Theory of Change.

"It's a place to support people through a wider lifespan by addressing all 5 buckets, there's enough diversity in the collective to address all 5 buckets."

#### Importance of diversity in Greater Than's members (8)

Members highlighted the importance of diversity (rich, poor, young, old, non-profit organizations, funders, community members, etc.) amongst the members of Greater Than County Youth Collective. They indicated the importance of striving to include a wide variety of perspectives in conversations at Greater Than's meetings and events.

"People have been fantastic. It's been interesting to see the wide variety of youth involved and to hear from a wide variety of individuals."

"It's really neat to see the round table with some folks who have identified or voiced their opinions all the way who have struggled with food or school and then people [x] who are retired. It doesn't happen elsewhere so it's neat to see."

"Lots of good work for young people, a team of diverse young people, which is difficult but it's awesome to learn so many different perspectives. And to be as inclusive and accommodating as possible."

#### Shared understandings and common goals (7)

Members talked about sharing a common goal of wanting all youth to be successful, and that information from youth voice is leading to collaboration and action amongst service providers.

"When you work with people who are authentically excited about empowering youth and having everyone work toward the same goal of having youth reach their potential, you want to work with them and work as hard as they're working."

"We all knew that there need to be changes made in the school system in order to make it easier for teenagers to graduate."

# **Challenges and Barriers:**

Some members identified challenges and barriers that they have experienced during their participation in Greater Than County Youth Collective. Themes around power dynamics, relationships, communication barriers, and confusion around the funding and governance process for Greater Than were identified. Members also identified challenges organizations face around competition for resources, and being very busy within their professional roles.

#### Relationships amongst Collective members (17)

Members identified that unclear relationships and/or commitments between stakeholders can be a barrier in their experience with Greater Than County Youth Collective. Some members reported that their capacity/know how to participate in the Collective Impact approach is unclear, and that balancing resources and effort was a struggle.

"Some of us don't know what full participation looks like. I don't know what full participation would look like with different mandates."

"Sometimes it's hard to see the collective part. Sometimes I feel like we're all still siloed."

"There was more giving than taking historically."

#### **Governance of the Collective (15)**

Challenges associated with the transition in governance such as an unclear commitment of resources (time, energy, funds) amongst members of the Stewardship Table were identified by some members. Many members reported an unbalanced and/or unclear power dynamic between stakeholders, as well as confusion around the funding process for Greater Than.

"There was frustration with always having to ask for permission for everything... We spent so much time making a governance model that was a constellation model but we went with a straight up hierarchy in practice."

"In hindsight the Trillium Project, we didn't have an appropriate transfer or end to that it feels like. Or the best-case transfer or termination, it feels like there's some bad feelings or undone work. There's not a great feeling about how we moved into the next step and we're still trying to move there."

"The governance should have been set up a whole lot earlier. There wasn't governance other than the Foundation in place which really seemed odd. It felt like this year we didn't get to strategize what we do next."

Members reflected on the need to include and/or encourage the voices of more members around the table during meetings.

"There's an opportunity in the meeting for more voices to be heard."

"It's a feeling of not being taken seriously when I speak in a meeting."

"I wonder if there's a chance to open the doors to people with lived experiences like youth who have accessed the services we are working on. Opportunity for more diversity."

Other barriers that were identified include the need for sustainable funding in order to be able to continue working together in the community and to continue funding projects.

"The lack of longevity with the projects that we're doing that are really amazing and we're addressing issues based on research... It feels like you get a project, and find your feet, and then the funding is done."

"A challenge and opportunity is the County Foundation having the opportunity to consider a role in sustainable funding."

#### **Competition for resources (6)**

Some members described barriers to collaborating with organizations that share similar mandates due to the nature of non-profit funding. Non-profit funders are often selective and in a small community that can mean a greater competition for resources for individual organizations.

"Earlier on there were challenges between non-profit organizations, people defining age groups and ...In an environment where resources are scarce, those things happen."

"Competition for funding. The idea we would all get by working collectively that these amounts would materialize, and the pie would be bigger which hasn't really happened yet. The government change affected this as well, and we're back to the same non-profit scramble."

#### **Busy organizations (6)**

Some members spoke about the challenges of organizations being very busy while they are also committed to working collaboratively. Learning to work together in an efficient way was discussed by many of the members. Members noted some growing pains with specific regard to making time to attend long meetings and how to efficiently balance efforts.

"Everyone has a lot of work to do. Working in a very, very busy organization, you go to the table to meet with other people and you have that shared understanding that you need to be efficient, there's a standard of quality to make sure things are done right."

Members also reported that due to the nature of working in a collective impact approach with a broad range of members at the table, information can seem overwhelming and/or complex for some members of Greater Than. They identified that it may be especially difficult for some members to relay new/important information to their co-workers or throughout their organizations. They also mentioned that this can have cascading effects in their organizations if they do not understand the resources and/or opportunities available through Greater Than such as the Learning and Engagement fund.

"I remember wanting my coworkers to be able to attend meetings. I always wanted that because then they would be able to understand the context behind every data party and event we wanted to take youth to. Always had to do the best to communicate things and understand and keeping them up to date in a busy place."

"Some people are not taking in the communication and it's costing opportunity for the people they serve."

Their reflections echo the importance of understanding different perspectives within the bigger picture, and the ability to relate the work of the Collective to that of their own organizations.

# **Potential Moving Forward:**

Members were asked for their input on the areas for potential impact moving forward with Greater Than County Youth Collective. Each response can be attributed to one of the four following themes:

- 1. Being seen as leaders in youth focused solutions in the community;
- 2. Diversifying outreach to include a broader range of youth and service providers;
- 3. Enthusiasm to improve outcomes for local youth;
- 4. Different ways for people to work together in the Collective.

#### 1) Being seen as leaders in youth focused solutions in the community (7)

Members discussed the importance of maintaining a presence in the community, championing youth focused solutions together. Moving forward, some people indicated that Greater Than County Youth Collective should strive to be a communication and action resource for youth in the community.

"There are a lot of programs and services available to youth at no cost that I would expect that 99% of the community doesn't know about. That's a problem, and we need to get it out there."

2) Diversifying outreach to include a broader range of youth and service providers (7) Members commented on the need to include more youth in the community and one idea to achieve this is to meet at PECI after school.

"I wonder if there's a chance to open the doors to people with lived experiences like youth who have accessed the services we are working on. Opportunity for more diversity."

As well, broadening the network of service providers is a suggestion to enhance the wraparound support structures in place.

"The first thing I thought of is if there's a foodbank or something not directly working with youth but also provide services that youth need. Stretch into other service providers as well."

#### 3) Enthusiasm to improve outcomes for local youth (7)

As well, many members voiced their conviction and excitement to continue innovating and strengthening wraparound supports for youth in the community by participating as members of Greater Than County Youth Collective.

"Continuing to build on the safe spaces whether it's simply youth having issues at home, LGBTQ+ youth, youth that don't have friends, it's all full circle and your end objective is just to make people feel more engaged or more welcome because the better we feel about ourselves the more productive or able we feel."

#### 4) Different ways for people to work together in the Collective (5)

Ideas around working together differently include online meetings that could have an informal drop-in structure to share resources and information across networks on a more regular basis.

"Is there an opportunity to have some sort of a forum where people can get together; something like google hangouts where people can drop in and share resources and people can work together to make agendas. 'Hey, what's going on, I have a question, where do I go, there's a training coming up.' Sharing resources better, in-between meetings."

Another idea includes collective fundraising through Greater Than to support more community research and data sharing, as well as to continue funding innovative projects.

"Around the shared data, analyzed and shared data. There's an opportunity for a community fundraising collective where people would be giving to support education. The continued coordination of projects to make sure that things that need to happen are happening."

#### Conclusion

The purpose of this report is for the Greater Than County Youth Collective to evaluate the process of people and/or organizations working together towards the shared goal of improving outcomes for Youth in Prince Edward County, with the ultimate goal of raising graduation rates to parity with the province by 2026. This will compliment the 2017 and 2018 shared learning reports. Interview participants were selected to include a broad range of youth and adults, long-term and short-term members of Greater Than, members of Greater Than's Stewardship Table, as well as members of partner organizations. 1:1 qualitative interviews provided a space for members to reflect on their experiences, share ideas for improving the program, and share any impacts that participation with the Greater Than County Youth Collective has had on their lives, work, and community.

Greater Than County Youth Collective has made significant impacts on individual, social, and systemic levels through their collective impact work in Prince Edward County. Members identified strong qualities of engagement within the collective and identified several processes of youth engagement that have led towards positive shifts in the community. All of the members interviewed indicated that using a community based collective impact approach to come together to learn, brainstorm, and problem solve has been key in moving towards creating a community culture that embraces learning and personal development and enables everyone to reach their potential.

Members also shared insights on challenges and barriers experienced throughout their time working together. The most significant theme in this section was Relationships amongst Collective members, pointing towards unclear roles of some of Greater Than's partner organizations. Moving forward, Greater Than may continue to work together to mitigate these challenges with attention to communication and resource management. The members shared an enthusiasm to improve outcomes for local youth, and can see Greater Than County Youth Collective continuing to be leaders in local youth focused solutions.

Next steps for evaluation could include:

- Sharing this report with the Greater Than County Youth Collective to provide space for discussion and feedback
- Implementing a second round of Sharing the Stories surveys to evaluate changes in the community regarding Youth Well-being and Community Engagement after programming has been piloted and/or implemented by partner organizations
- Qualitative interviews and/or a sharing circle with the former Embedded Youth Team to evaluate the process and concept of having Youth embedded in partner organizations

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