

Understanding Youth Involvement in Guns & Gangs and Evidenced-based Prevention Practices

Building Safer Communities
City of Fredericton
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all in





Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge that this work was carried out on the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Peskotomuhkati peoples.

This territory is covered by the “Treaties of Peace and Friendship” which these nations first signed with the British Crown in 1726. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources, but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

To recognize the land is an expression of our gratitude to those whose territory we are on, and a way of honouring the Indigenous people who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought us to reside on the land and to honour that history as we continue to work towards reconciliation.

We would like to thank all of the community stakeholders who shared their time, perspectives, experiences and expertise with us, as well as representatives from other cities and jurisdictions who shared their process with us. A special thank you to the members of the Wisdom Council, for grounding and guiding the process.

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01

Project Overview

Public Safety Canada selected the City of Fredericton to be part of a national project, called Building Safer Communities. The City is interested in understanding the trends around youth-related crime and violence, exploring the current successes and gaps in programming for prevention and reduction services, and developing a longer term strategy to support collaborative efforts to prevent youth crime and violence across our community. This work is taking place between February and September 2023, with the full program roll out running until 2026.

At a glance: 2023 project work

February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project kick-off meeting, bringing stakeholders from the City together to discuss project objectives and plans ▪ Project Planning
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25 stakeholder interviews ▪ Data analysis ▪ Preparation for stakeholder workshop
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshop with 22 stakeholders ▪ Data analysis ▪ Revise project plan, based on feedback ▪ Develop project brief
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Form Wisdom Council, a group of experts representing a cross-section of child & youth services, to provide insights and ideas & host first meeting ▪ Hold Youth Engagements with 5 youth groups: Multicultural Association of Fredericton, New Brunswick African Association, John Howard Society (2) and Youth Advisory Council of City of Fredericton ▪ Literature review and preparation of the evidence-based practice review ▪ Meetings with other jurisdictions receiving funds for Building Safer Communities, to learn from their experiences ▪ Conduct 19 additional interviews with community stakeholders
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Second Wisdom Council meeting ▪ Youth engagements scheduled with St. Mary's First Nation & Kingsclear First Nation ▪ Stakeholder Workshop scheduled for June 13, 2023
July-September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop the plan for the Building Safer Communities project, to be submitted to Public Safety Canada in September
September-December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public Safety Canada approval process ▪ City of Fredericton approval process ▪ Roll out project plan December 2023-March 2026

¹Please note, due to overlapping timelines the summary of the Youth Engagements will be shared directly at the June workshop and presented in the September plan.



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Direction of this Review

The direction of Fredericton community stakeholders is at the heart of this review of evidenced-based practice (Appendix 1: Community Stakeholders). With the priorities set by the community stakeholders in the April workshop in mind, we conducted interviews, reviewed program reports and academic literature for additional information to provide inspiration and support the development of a strategic direction for the City of Fredericton.



Research has shown that violence prevention and early intervention is cost effective, getting a return of \$7 for every \$1 invested (CMNCP, 2018). To effectively address gun and gang violence at the root causes, collaboration across multiple stakeholders is crucial, including those with lived experience. Best practice suggests that plans are co-created with the community and include regular and ongoing report backs to support inclusion and buy-in (CMNCP, 2020).

Waller and Monette (2021) suggest that an understanding of the risks that exist in the city, as well as the protective factors available to support children, youth and families, combined with the best available data from across sectors, and the specific needs of the community, should determine the selection of prevention strategies. They suggest that cities need to mobilize key sectors to address root causes of youth related crime and violence (Waller and Monette, 2021). The City of Fredericton aims to follow this evidence-based process.

This Review will feed directly into the next steps in the Building Safer Communities project. Community stakeholders will then come together on June 13th, 2023 to prioritize action, taking the lead from the direction set by young people and from the information on evidenced based practice outlined in this review. Youth engagement workshops, specifically with young people whose lives may be impacted by crime and violence, will continue. All of this information will continue to feed into the development of the Building Safer Communities Plan, to be completed by September 2023, for approval by Public Safety Canada in December 2023.

Objectives and Audience

Objective: A scan of literature to better understand youth gun and gang involvement and evidenced-based practices in crime prevention and reduction approaches impacting children and youth who are at risk of becoming involved in crime.

Audience: Stakeholders who are currently working to support children and young people in Fredericton, from education, mental health, social development, public safety and criminal justice, police, non-profits, and community organizations representing underserved groups such as the refugee and new immigrant community, the disability community, as well as First Nations partners.



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What do we know about youth and their involvement in gangs?



What is a youth gang? (Dunbar, 2017, 3-4)

- A group with a minimum of three to five persons, involving youth.
- It is a self-formed association of peers (often with a group name or group identity) who have mutual interests, and who may use symbols of belonging (e.g., tattoos, clothing, logos) and special modes of communication (e.g., hand signs).
- Organization is seen as a necessary, though not a defining feature; there tends to be a leadership structure that has more or less defined roles.
- There is control of, or claim to, a specific neighbourhood, territory or turf in which the group operates.
- The group engages in criminal and/or violent behaviour on a regular basis.



Differences exist across communities, as to what a youth gang actually looks like and efforts need to be taken not to stereotype young people causing possible harm through labeling (Dunbar, 2017).

Why do young people become involved in gangs?

Research shows that young people who are engaged in gangs are often from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and experience high levels of inequality (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007). **Risk factors** of gang involvement can include: negative influences, limited attachment to the community, over-reliance on peers with antisocial behavior, lack of parental supervision, use of drugs and alcohol, low potential for education and employment, and a need to belong (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007). **Protective factors** provided by gang involvement include: providing a source of protection, materials and resources, social organization, excitement and entertainment, a source of empathy, belonging and emotional support, and can offer a better alternative to those who see no future in the current job and education system (Dunbar, 2017).

The Building Safer Communities Fredericton review of risk factors associated with young people's engagement with guns and gangs mirrors the broader research. As young people grow up, their life trajectory and their experiences impact the likelihood they will become engaged in gangs. We know that the more risk factors young people need to contend with, the higher the probability that they will join a gang (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007).

The following protective and risk factors emerged from the interviews conducted with community stakeholders. Stakeholders prioritized these protective factors as the elements they felt were needed to support children, youth and families who are in need of support. They also identified specific risk factors for children and youth that are not being met, and may lead to their involvement in crime.



Protective Factors

- Early Intervention & Prevention
- Collaboration
- Culture & Community
- Healthy Role Models & Meaningful Relationships
- Child & Youth Participation
- Education & Training
- Restorative Justice
- Parenting Support
- Employment

Risk Factors:

Overall:

- Mental Health & Addiction
- Poverty & Basic Needs

Specific to Weapons and Gangs:

- Violence
- Gangs
- Weapons

Other:

- Barriers to Accessing Services
- Lack of Connection
- The Pandemic
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Racism

Please note that while all risk factors are important, **this review focuses on those that are actionable within the Building Safer Communities Fund.** Therefore we have not explored issues such as housing, transportation and basic needs, though we recognize that these are crucial elements of addressing the root causes of young people's engagement in crime and violence.

Who joins youth gangs?

Despite youth gangs being a common phenomenon in Canada, it is understandably difficult to gather information about young people engaged in gangs. “Research suggests that youth gang membership cuts across many ethnic, geographic, demographic and socioeconomic contexts. However, there tends to be a relationship between gender, race, ethnicity and class structure that factors into the formation of particular gangs.” (Dunbar, 2017, 9).

Young people who experience severe adversity in their early years are at a heightened risk of developmental disruptions that can lead to long term physical, emotional and mental health challenges (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b). Adverse childhood experiences are referred to as the ACEs, and these have been used to better understand how adversity impacts children’s development.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (CMNCP, 2002):

- Physical child abuse
- Emotional child abuse
- Emotional child neglect
- Caregiver substance abuse
- Caregiver incarceration
- Sexual child abuse
- Physical child neglect
- Domestic violence
- Caregiver mental illness
- Caregiver divorce or separation

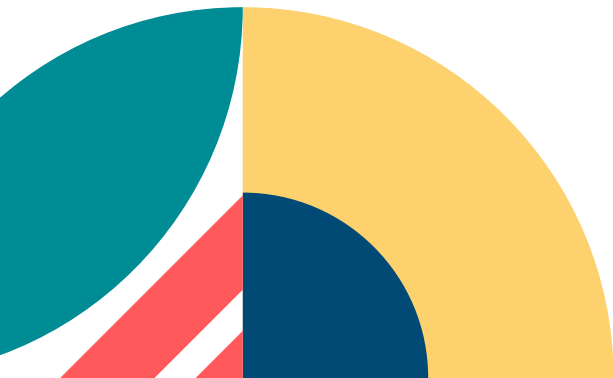
Expanded ACEs:

- Intergenerational trauma
- Racialized trauma
- Community violence
- Intersectionality with gender
- Impacts of COVID-19

Young people with serious and complex needs are the smallest portion of the youth demographic in New Brunswick (See Figure 1: The Pyramid of Intervention in New Brunswick, New Brunswick Health Council, 2020, 8). It remains important to look at how we are meeting the needs of all young people, including a focus on prevention, early intervention and reduction services.



Figure 1, The Pyramid of Intervention in New Brunswick, New Brunswick Health Council 2020



What do we know about the outcomes of youth involvement in gangs?

Beyond the immediate injuries to individuals, youth gangs and their activities are harmful to communities and society as a whole, through various types of crime such as property crime as well as violent crime. The financial costs to the justice and health care systems are also considerable (Chatterjee, 2006).

For the young people who are gang involved, they are exposed to high levels of violence, and are themselves at higher risk of being victims of violent crime and experiencing traumatic events (Dunbar, 2017). Young people coming into gangs with unmet needs and difficult childhoods are then exposed to more traumatic experiences associated with negative mental health outcomes (Dunbar, 2017). For those involved in gangs there are social costs in lost potential and fear of crime affecting the normal activities of citizens (Chatterjee, 2006).



Current Situation around Gun and Gang Violence in New Brunswick

While criminal code violations and the crime severity index have decreased between 2012-2021 across Canada, they have increased in New Brunswick (Statistics Canada, 2022a and Statistics Canada, 2022b). According to the Canadian Violence Crime Severity Index (VCSI) for 2018-2019, New Brunswick saw a decrease in robberies and a 10% increase in violent crime, driven by increases in sexual assaults, uttering threats, and assaults (NBDJPS, 2021). New Brunswick also saw increases in firearm related crimes and firearm related homicides, with an increasing number of victims of firearm related crimes (NBDJPS, 2021). The New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety, Crime Prevention Branch (2021) explains that in 2018 New Brunswick ranked third in Canada for the highest rates of killing of women and girls. Gang violence in New Brunswick appears to occur in outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) and these are on the rise (NBDJPS, 2021). It is not understood why firearm related crime is increasing, nor if it is connected to organized crime groups (NBDJPS, 2021).

Across Canada, young adults (age 18-24) and youth (age 12-17) are accused of firearm related violent crime at a higher rate than other age groups (NBDJPS, 2021). New Brunswick has seen low to non-existent youth street gang activity, though there is concern that OMGs are recruiting/contracting youth gangs to engage in criminal or violent activities (NBDJPS, 2021). There is a need to better understand who is being recruited and design an intersectional prevention strategy that takes into account gender, age, culture, race and ethnicity (NBDJPS, 2021).

New Brunswick's 5-year plan on gun and gang violence aligns with their Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy as well as their Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Strategy (NBDJPS, 2021). New Brunswick's plan focuses on understanding the nature of gun and gang violence in the province, and collaborating with various partners to develop and implement an evidence-based plan to address gun and gang violence, including prevention, intervention and suppression activities (NBDJPS, 2021).

The Fredericton City Police provided data on where young people, aged 12-17, and firearms were present over a ten year period from 2013-2022.

Files involving young people and firearms, between 2013-2022 include:

- 28 young people accused of possession of a firearm.
- 6 young people suspected of possession of a firearm.
- 26 victims of violent crime involving a firearm.

Seized firearms are the result of a criminal offense, and over the same ten year period of 2013-2022, we can see how many and what type of firearms were seized. These numbers do not include items stolen / found, safekeeping, etc.:

- Total of 838 firearms seized between 2013-2022 (from people of all ages.)
- Rifles were the most common, at 277, followed by “other” at 223, shotguns at 178, restricted 96 and prohibited, 64.

Interestingly, beginning in 2018, there appears to be both an increase in the number of weapons seized and the number of firearm files for juveniles, pointing to an increase in the level of violent crime involving guns in our jurisdiction. It is beyond the scope of this review to undertake a comparative analysis of provincial and national data, and so we are unable to say whether Fredericton aligns or exceeds the provincial and national data at this time.



Current Situation for Children and Youth in Fredericton and New Brunswick

It is important to consider children and youth's wellbeing from a holistic perspective when thinking about the current situation of children and youth in Fredericton. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada, provides a strong foundation to explore how children and youth are faring in the city. This brief overview is unable to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation for children and youth in the city and province, but aims to provide additional information around the key risk and protective factors identified in the initial consultations with stakeholders through March and April of 2023.

As noted by stakeholders in Fredericton, it is difficult to get a comprehensive picture of the situation for children and young people across the city. There is a need for a shared system to store and track data across services, to ensure that practitioners have access to clear information. The lack of clear open source data hindered the ability of this review to gain a complete picture of the lives of children, youth and families.



Exploring Protective Factors

Protective factors are positive influences in a young person's life that help them to mitigate the potential risk factors they encounter. Evidence suggests that the accumulation of protective factors can lead to a decrease in the likelihood of youth gang involvement (McDaniel, 2012). The following section covers some of the key protective factors highlighted by community stakeholders in Fredericton, adding additional context from the literature.



Access to Healthy Role Models and Healthy Activities

Research shows that developmental changes during adolescence means that day-to-day relationships between young people and their guardians (parents, grandparents, foster parents, group home staff, etc.) are extremely important (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b). Adolescents need positive, meaningful and long-term relationships with healthy adults and with their peers. According to the Child Rights Indicator Framework for 2021, only 45.7% of grade 6-12 year olds in New Brunswick reported having someone to look up to, and this was even less for those who are food insecure (26.8%), LGBTQ (36.5%) and special needs (39.8%) (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021).

Over 50% of young people do not have a healthy role model in their lives, and for food insecure youth, over 70% of them do not have a healthy role model (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021).

In New Brunswick, 65.7% of young people felt they had good places to spend their free time (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). According to participatory research done with queer, trans and non-binary youth, researchers at the University of New Brunswick found that young people needed more safe spaces, that accommodate young people's different needs, such as quiet spaces to relax, spaces for socializing and activities, supported by adults (Burkholder et al, 2021).



Sense of Belonging, Fair Treatment and Resilience

According to the Child Rights Indicator Framework for 2021, **only 27.5% of grade 6-12 year olds in New Brunswick reported feeling like they belong at school, and this was even less for those who are food insecure (13.7%), LGBTQ (17.6%) and special needs (20.3%). Refugees and new immigrants fared slightly better at 28.9%** (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). Since we know that lack of belonging is a key risk factor for gang involvement, the low levels of belonging for young people in the province are striking.

There is data to suggest that students in Fredericton are faring slightly better than the province. Only 37.4% of New Brunswick students in grade 6-12 felt they were treated fairly in their community, this was the lowest for food insecure students (17.4%) . LGBTQ (25%) and special needs (28.1%) (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). The statistic is slightly higher for Fredericton at 40% (New Brunswick Health Council, 2020). 71% of students in the province who were surveyed said they were moderately to highly resilient, but this decreased to 57.9% for students with special needs, and 36.5% for students with food insecurities (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). 74% of young people in Fredericton reported moderate to high resilience (New Brunswick Health Council, 2020).




Risk Factors

As discussed above, it is well known that exposure to multiple risk factors increases the likelihood of gang involvement beyond that of an isolated risk factor (McDaniel, 2012). The following section covers some of the key risk factors highlighted by community stakeholders in Fredericton, with additional context from the literature.

Poor Mental Health and Wellbeing

Communities that focus on a balance between the promotion of mental health and the treatment of mental illness have better outcomes for children and youth (New Brunswick Health Council, 2020). Part of this balance is achieved by weaving together publicly funded services and community-led services (New Brunswick Health Council, 2020). The mental health system in New Brunswick is facing significant challenges around providing for young people's mental health concerns including in prevention, detection, treatment and urgent care (The Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022c).



The mental health of young people in grades 6-12 in New Brunswick is worsening, with 37.6 % (38% for Fredericton) reporting symptoms of depression in the last 12 months, this was higher for young people who are food insecure (66.7%), LGBTQ (60.3%), and those with special needs (53.1%) (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). Mental health may be impacted by the presence of bullying, and 51% of young people reported being bullied in the last 2 months (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). 32% of young people in Fredericton said they needed to talk to someone about their mental health needs, though 9% were not seeing anyone (New Brunswick Health Council, 2020). There is a clear need for additional mental health support, in order to support young people and reduce the risk of them seeking support in unhealthy places, such as gangs.

Similar to their peers in New Brunswick, Indigenous young people are struggling with their mental health (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). In the Student Wellness Survey for Grades 6-12, 49 of 57 indicators related to mental health, tobacco, cannabis and alcohol use showed more difficult circumstances for Indigenous than non-Indigenous young people (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021; New Brunswick Health Council, 2020). In Canada, colonization, adverse government policies such as residential school and the ongoing removal of children from their homes, and poverty, combined with racist systems and other factors, have led to intergenerational trauma and disproportionately high mental health challenges for Indigenous peoples (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021).

Culture is a protective factor and crucial for ensuring Indigenous children's rights and best interests. Indigenous partnership in design and delivery of culturally appropriate mental health services is crucial to the success of any initiative. Relationship-based practice rooted in the connection to the land, family and community, supported by language and cultural values are important cornerstones (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). An evaluation of mental health services in the Atlantic First Nations was completed in 2021, and recommendations included an increase in support for young people; comprehensive and sustainable mental health and addictions services that are culturally safe and community based; and accountable to addressing racist practices within the system (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021).



Youth in the Criminal Justice System

The Advocate's report, *Through Their Eyes*, highlights that youth in the criminal justice system have higher rates of learning disorders, mental health challenges as well as challenges with substance use (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b). "A major indicator of potential involvement in the youth criminal justice system is, unsurprisingly, previous involvement in the youth criminal justice system" (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b, 148). The report speaks to the complicated conditions placed on young people who are charged in the system, and how these conditions set young people up to fail, particularly those with unstable home environments (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b).

With the introduction of the Youth Criminal Justice Act of 2002, there has been a downward trend across Canada of youth custody admissions, but for Indigenous youth it is rising (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). In 2014-2015, there was a 15% increase in the pre-trial detention of Indigenous youth (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). In the 2018-2019 data, Indigenous young people continue to be overrepresented in the justice system at all stages, including custody and community supervision arrangements (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). In New Brunswick, Indigenous youth, age 12-17, make up 4% of the population but they are admitted into the provincial correctional system at almost twice the proportion (Wiley, Love & Emmet, 2020 in First Nations Advisory Council, 2021). Indigenous young people face significant challenges in a system that is more likely to deny them bail, charge them, and give longer sentences (First Nations Advisory Council, 2021).

According to the State of the Child Report (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022a), New Brunswick has made significant progress in the youth criminal justice system in the last five years. This is backed by the consistently low number of youth in secure custody, a recent move towards restorative justice that can divert youth from the criminal justice system and the focus on healing and the root causes of the crime (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022a). Significantly more resources and focus need to be invested in supporting young people with mental illness and neurological and physical disabilities in the criminal justice system (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022a).

Young people in care and involved in criminal justice system

“No way would I be involved in the justice system if I wasn’t in care.”

A youth in secure custody (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b, 146).

Research shows that there is an overrepresentation of youth in care in the criminal justice system, due in part to the chronic traumatic stress these young people experience that leads to a reduced capacity for their brains to moderate impulsive and aggressive behaviors (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b). Looking at risk factors for young people in care such as lack of family and school attachment, and mental health and substance use, indicates that youth in care are susceptible to entering the criminal justice system (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b). These challenges are exacerbated by a system that regularly moves children between homes and is unable to support young people in maintaining stable relationships, including connection to culture, family and peers (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b).

The Through Their Eyes report cites major challenges with the way young people in care are handled by the criminal justice system (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b). It highlights the need to work through Youth Justice Committees in collaboration with Child and Youth Teams under Integrated Service Delivery in order to better coordinate with child welfare, prioritize reconciliation with victims and develop measures that support the young person in question (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b). There is also a lack of clear data on the intersection between children in care and in the criminal justice system, such as number of arrests, or open custody, and this further hampers efforts to support these young people (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b).

High Risks for Young People in Care

Due to the early life challenges experienced by young people prior to being removed from their homes, and then continuing through their engagement with the foster care system, young people in care are at a higher risk of criminal activity. Between 2022 and 2023, Partners for Youth conducted a youth engagement with youth in care, from across New Brunswick to better understand their experiences (Partners for Youth, 2023). The Partners for Youth report calls for changes to the current system **including moving to relationship-based care and investing in truly restorative programming for holistic health and wellbeing** (Partners for Youth, 2023).

“I have no care in the world, so my stress level is at 1. I live in the moment and take one day at a time. When I get out of here, I’m either going to get run over by a car, stabbed or shot. So I don’t think I’m going to live long anyway.”

Current youth in care (Partners for Youth, 2023, 20).

Youth in care said they did not feel connected to the adults who support them (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b). There is a need for additional training for child welfare professionals on child development and the impacts of trauma on developing brains (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b).

It is challenging for young Indigenous people in care to gain access to their culture and access culturally-based services (Partners for Youth, 2023). Cultural identity is important for wellbeing and healthy development. Culturally-based approaches need to be central to the work of Social Development staff (Office of the Advocate for Children and Youth, 2022b). Understanding structural inequality and inter-generational trauma are crucial for the work with Indigenous youth and gang prevention and early intervention strategies (Dunbar, 2017).



Barriers to Accessing Services for young people

Stakeholders across Fredericton spoke of the challenges around existing barriers for children, youth, and families to access the services they need. One of these barriers was a lack of clear information about what services are available and for whom. **72.5% of youth reported that they did not know where to access services, support, and resources in their communities** (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021). This is a staggering number of young people in the province, and clearly efforts need to be made to provide information about available services and connect young people to people who can support them on their journey. This statistics was even higher for LGBTQ and food insecure students, with 82% not knowing where to go for support (Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2021).



04


Prevention, Early Intervention, and Intervention Strategies

Prioritizing Strategies Selected by Community Stakeholders

During interviews with community stakeholders across the city, people were asked about the key gaps that exist for children, youth and families. At the April workshop, stakeholders then determined specific priorities, and the following emerged as key priorities:

Community Stakeholder Priorities:

- 1 Create a youth drop-in center offering a clear access point for children, youth and families looking to access services from multiple organizations, and build healthy relationships. This space would also be a direct connection point for families, offering inclusive and accessible services available to all.
- 2 Offer direct prevention services including, healthy engaging nature-based, culturally based and community-centered recreation programming that is inspiring and inclusive and connects young people with healthy relationships with adults and peers.
- 3 Strengthen integration of child and youth focused policy, programming, data and evaluation and a focus on youth participation through collaboration with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate on the UNICEF child-friendly cities initiative.



There are many excellent programs and organizations in Fredericton, already operating in a similar manner to many of the evidence-based programs listed below. The focus of this review is to provide additional information and inspiration through evidence-based programming. We trust that as this project evolves, organizations will step forward to share their expertise and explore how we can bolster existing collaborations to support children, youth and families.

In the following section, each of these priorities will be supported by examples of evidence-based and best practice, from the literature.



Youth Drop-In Centre

Providing a central location for children, youth and families to access programs and services from multiple organizations has proven to be highly successful in multiple communities. We were able to speak with different stakeholders outside of the Fredericton area, including in Saint John, who shared how pivotal it has been for their communities to have an accessible and inclusive location to provide young people with the support and services they need. Interestingly, many of these drop-in centers offer a variety of services for a wide range of young people. In these cases, multi-use spaces help to reduce the stigma associated with being in a space reserved for deficit-based services. For the Teen Resource Centre in Saint John, they have an open door policy, and the young people decide what programs and services they would like to access. At its core a youth drop-in centre can be a safe place for young people to hang out, and build relationships with supportive adults and peers. It can also be a place to access mental health support, job training or education programming as well as recreational activities.

The following are the key gaps that exist in Fredericton, according to community stakeholders, that could be addressed through the creation of a youth drop-in centre:

- Central location for young people and their families to easily access a range of services.
- Coordinated services to respond to crises around youth including mental health, crime and violence.

Here are a few examples of evidence-based programming:



Youth Drop-In Centre or Family Wellness Hub

Example: Teen Resource Centre, Saint John

The Teen Resource Centre is a drop in center, operating for over 20 years, that offers multiple programs for all young people including tutoring, sexual health, counseling, employment services, education programming for out-of-school youth, as well as recreation and activities like movie nights. Operating out of an old school, organizations rent space within the building making it an easy access point for young people and their families. **Everyone is welcome, and young people self-organize by choosing which programming and services they would like to attend/connect with.**

Example: Youth Impact, Moncton

As part of broader programming that offers residential programs with intensive support for youth in care and transitional housing for at-risk and homeless youth, Youth Impact also offers a multi-resource and drop-in centre, and case management. Outreach programming includes drug intervention programs, alternative education programs, Youth QUEST Central is a multi-resource centre for youth aged 16 to 24 who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The facility includes laundry and shower facilities, computer communications, academic upgrading, job-readiness training, information sessions, counselling, directional planning, and artistic and recreational programming. It also houses six other agency programs that youth may access. Case management is offered on site, including client assessments, and pre-employment and employment preparation services to at-risk youth 16 to 24 years old. **The centre helps young people find and access appropriate services and resources, identify barriers, and advocate for client services to help youth reintegrate into the educational or vocational sector.**



Trauma-Informed Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing

Example: Community Healing Project for Crime Prevention and Intervention, Toronto

The project aims to address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement. This is a mental health and resiliency program for youth ages 13-18 that supports them to understand trauma, anxiety and PTSD related to community crime. Young people learn coping mechanisms to avoid violence such as how to increase sense of control when triggered, self-care strategies, and learn about existing services (CMNCP, 2002).

Youth Outreach Workers

Example: Youth Inclusion Program, UK

Youth Inclusion provides direct outreach and support for vulnerable youth, including mentoring, health and wellbeing, homework help and skill-building activities for 10 hours per week, as well as assistance dealing with challenges around guns, gangs and violence (CMNCP, 2018). Street workers build strong and long term relationships built on trust. The program can focus specifically on the needs of teenage boys, providing alternatives to gang affiliation, and mediate conflict while providing mentorship (Waller and Monette, 2021).



Direct Prevention Services

Community stakeholders spoke about the need to increase direct services to address the root causes of young people's engagement with gangs that focus on connecting them with a sense of self and their identity, building their connection to their culture and community and a sense of belonging, and providing them with opportunities that they may be unable to access due to structural inequalities. Importantly, the programs and services available need to meet or exceed the options or incentives offered by a gang, while also reducing or eliminating the negative consequences attached to gang membership (Dunbar, 2017). This requires various strategies and activities that can address the risks and needs of young people who may be at risk of gang involvement (Dunbar, 2017).

The following are the key gaps in Fredericton, identified by community stakeholders, that could be addressed through a healthy offering of nature-based, and culturally-based programming that builds community fabric:

- Culturally-based services for Indigenous youth and newcomer youth
- Programming that invests in healthy, long-term meaningful relationships between adults and young people, offering young people important role models.
- Nature-based and land-based programming that connects young people to their natural environment and provides them with an alternative to overuse of technology.

Here are a few examples of evidence-based programming:



Example: Warrior Spirit Walking, Prince Albert

Most Indigenous young people growing up in high risk environments do not end up in gangs due to positive individual traits and community support, yet approximately 22% of young people engaged in gangs in Canada are Aboriginal (Totten, 2010). The program supports Indigenous children and youth (in gangs or vulnerable to entering gang life) to achieve their full potential, reducing vulnerability to violence and abuse. Counseling occurs in the form of a talking circle. Male and female Elders are asked to come in and provide teachings in the areas of: drumming, sweat lodges, sweetgrass and sage picking, round dances, making medicine bags and other cultural crafts and activities. Cultural teachings support a sense of belonging, identity and community.

Example: Life Skills and Positive Social Norms Training, focusing on gender-based violence

Offering life skills training to young people, these programs focus on emotion regulation and problem-solving to help young people develop self management skills and reduce impulsive responses causing violence (Waller and Monette, 2021). These programs can focus on **building key skills in relationships, learning about consent, and building positive norms around masculinity**. Offering a space to share examples of healthy masculinity and positive social norms is important to deter sexual violence and raise young people's awareness of the role they play, particularly for boys (Waller and Monette, 2021). These programs have proven to decrease violence against women (Waller and Monette, 2021).

Example: Raising Voices, Uganda

Collaborating with schools, community groups and local leadership, Raising Voices aims to build understanding around the root causes of violence, such as power imbalances, to prevent violence against women and children. Raising Voices uses various approaches to engage families in conversation, including drama, to discuss alternatives to corporal punishment, violence prevention and the importance of mental health.



Example: Positive Parenting Program, Australia

Central to supporting young people is building relationships with their families, as these parents and guardians are likely to also experience similar risk factors e.g. lack of basic needs, mental health challenges (Dunbar, 2017). Positive Parenting aims to **support new and young parents/guardians of young children, focusing on building healthy relationships, developing problem solving skills, managing anger etc.**, by investing in parents who can both prevent and intervene with young people in need. These upstream preventive programs reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which lead to difficulties forming healthy and stable relationships, create struggles with school, finances, and jobs, and increase chances of committing violence in the future (Waller and Monette, 2021).

Example: Adventure and Wilderness Therapy

Programs can be focused on young people and/or young people and their families. The focus is on building trust and collaboration to overcome a specific challenge, be that camping, hunting, hiking or climbing. Evidence shows that overcoming challenges with a group helps improve communication and behavior skills and support self-esteem, and can help to divert young people away from negative circumstances (Youth Endowment Fund). Nature-based programs have also been proven to have positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing (Youth Endowment Fund).

Example: Community gardens or urban green space

According to crime prevention statistics, efforts such as increasing green space in a city, and improving the quality of the buildings and public spaces is a cost-effective way to decrease community violence (Waller and Monette, 2021). Community gardens engage young people and their families in nurturing green space in their communities, including planning and growing the gardens. Community gardens are safe spaces for young people to gather, and build meaningful relationships with peers and adults focused on the health and wellbeing of the natural environment. Community gardens have been shown to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, support community cohesion and increase life satisfaction (Lampert et al, 2021).



Example: Identity and Belonging for New Immigrants and Refugees

Programming to support empowering identity development and positive self-concept, including both Canadian identity and ethnic identity are important for young newcomers (Dunbar, 2017). Programming must address structural inequalities and support young people to navigate their environments, through access to opportunities that support equality. Young people may be arriving with complex life experiences and adequate attention needs to be given to the complex needs of these young people and their families (Dunbar, 2017).



Collaboration for Collective Action

The City of Glasgow in Scotland, once labeled the murder capital of Europe, has reduced youth violence by 50% within 3 years and has sustained these through a service mobilization strategy (CMNCP, 2018). By mobilizing key sectors such as education, child and youth services, health care, and police, this increased collaboration around a deterrence model enabled young people to seek and receive help (CMNCP, 2018). With adequate and sustained funding and a committee focused on violence prevention, they were able to train and support workers across the system and work alongside mothers, parents and community members to mobilize young people around healthy and supportive resources (CMNCP, 2018). The Glasgow success story points to the potential of cross-sector and community collaboration.

According to a review of successful programming across Canada, the best results in addressing youth involvement in gangs come from collaboration across sectors in the community (Dunbar 2017). Organizations need to form alliances and find meaningful ways to bring stakeholders together based on shared goals, while also setting up infrastructure and multi-disciplinary teams (Dunbar, 2017). This also includes rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes that are established at the start of the prevention initiative, in order to constantly track effectiveness and make necessary program changes (Dunabr, 2017; The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b). A focus on transparency across programming, including in operational successes and challenges is important to ensure accountability to children (The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2022b).

Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) plays an important role in creating collaborative service delivery, yet many stakeholders felt that collective planning with the nonprofit sector, families and the community as well as with Indigenous partners, would greatly strengthen this approach. ISD is a positive approach with a proven track record and we hope that efforts to expand collaboration will continue.



The following are the key gaps in Fredericton, identified by community stakeholders, that could be addressed through strategic collaboration across sectors to support youth wellbeing:

- Opportunities for meaningful child and youth participation, including peer-support.
- Collaborative intersectoral working group or network to discuss programming, services and policy reform for young people that centers their wellbeing.
- Central location to access data on the situation of children and young people in the city, including evaluation data of program successes.
- Coordinated effort to secure funding, particularly long-term funding, for non-profit agencies who are striving to meet the needs of marginalized young people.

Here are a few examples of evidence-based programming:



Meaningful youth participation

According to the recommendations in the Youth Strategy for New Brunswick (2011), young people are not highly engaged in civic and political capacity in the province, compared to national rates of participation. Youth initiatives are facing financial challenges, are unable to retain engaged youth due to other commitments including family, school and work (Government of New Brunswick, 2011). There is a lack of consistent evaluation practices across youth programming, to measure meaningful impact (Government of New Brunswick, 2011).

Example: Youth Advisory Boards

Youth Advisory Boards or Committees offer a safe space for young people to voice their opinions, be heard by adults in positions of power, and have an influence over actions that impact themselves and their peers. Advisory boards that speak to cities, organizations and other groups offer a space for intergenerational collaboration that affords the opportunity to improve services for young people and their peers. It is important to recruit and support a diversity of young people to participate, to ensure a wide variety of voices are heard and listened to.

Local context:

The City of Fredericton has recently started a Youth Advisory Board, as an opportunity for young people to feed their thoughts and ideas directly into the city's programming and services. The first task of the Youth Advisory Board is to offer their thoughts and ideas to the Building Safer Communities project in early June. A sustained and diverse youth voice will be a solid step forward for the city.

Inter-sectoral Steering Committee/Youth Violence Prevention Board:

Example: Situation Tables, Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's Situation Tables are rapid team-based responses to critical issues. This is a multi-disciplinary, interagency approach bringing together mental health, health, addictions, justice, education and other community services that can respond immediately in a crisis situation with coordinated services. Membership is consistent and any member can bring forward an urgent case to develop a plan to mitigate risk.

Committees are best placed to organize coordinated efforts to collect and share information and data across programs and services, addressing this existing gap. They are also able to use this vital information to develop coordinated approaches to securing long term funding.

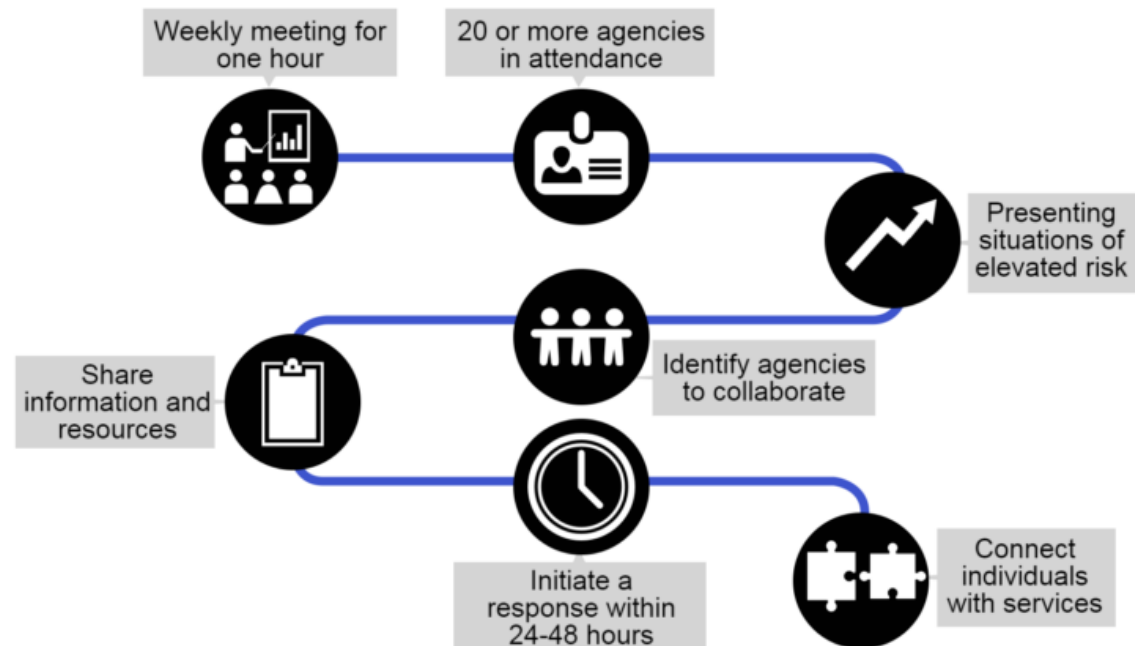


Figure 2, Situation Tables, Prince Albert Model, <https://taylornewberry.ca/addressing-risk-through-system-collaboration-evaluation-of-the-connectivity-situation-tables-in-waterloo-region/>



Intersectoral coordination, prioritizing the rights of children and youth

Example: Unicef Child Friendly Cities

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports municipal governments in realizing the rights of children at the local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. It is also a network that brings together government and other stakeholders such as civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, media and, importantly, children themselves who wish to make their cities and communities more child-friendly. The framework consists of two pillars: goals and results to be achieved; and strategies to achieve these goals and results. The Child Friendly City initiative offers the city an opportunity to secure collaboration and coordination across programs, services and policies, to support better outcomes for children.



05

Summary of Priority Actions with High Potential for Addressing Root Causes of Youth Crime and Violence in Fredericton

In Canada, youth gangs continue to be a widespread problem (Dunbar, 2017), though limited official data exists with which to understand the problem of young people engaged in gangs in Fredericton. What we have learned from the engagements with community stakeholders is that the problem is real and requires immediate attention to prevent it from getting worse. The underlying risk factors for young people and the lack of sufficient protective factors is a real issue and there is evidence to suggest that this is worsening. We are at a critical juncture to rethink our collective approach to prevention and early intervention programming, to address current gaps in services before it impacts more young people and our community. The Building Safer Communities project comes at a strategic time to enable us to solidify our collective approach to addressing the root causes of young people's engagement in crime and violence.

Summary of Priority Actions:

Drop-in center:

- Coordinated service delivery for children, youth and families in one location, making it easier to access appropriate services, and breaking down barriers.
- Inclusive and accessible services available to all, enabling young people to self-organize and select which services they need.
- Offer programming to fill gaps including, mental health services, culturally-based services, educational and job skills training.
- Healthy adult outreach workers building meaningful relationships and supporting the development of peer to peer networks.

Direct prevention services:

- Healthy engaging nature-based activities such as community gardens that support mental health and wellbeing while building relationships and connection with the land.
- Culturally based services for Indigenous youth and refugees and new immigrants, connecting young people with Elders, and offering culturally-based programs to support wellbeing, identity and belonging.
- Focus on meaningful relationships between adults and young people, and peer groups.
- Offer training around positive social norms that focus on guiding key skills in relationships, learning about consent, and building positive norms around masculinity.
- Support new and young parents/guardians of young children, focusing on building healthy relationships, developing problem solving skills, managing anger.

Collaboration for Collective Action:

- Inter-sectoral planning tables or violence prevention board to increase coordination and collaboration across sectors, with focus on the wellbeing of children and youth. Focus could include crisis intervention and/or longer term planning and coordination.
- Collaboration around policy, shared data, monitoring and evaluation, and funding, to bolster inter-sectoral work in children's rights.
- Sustained and supported youth leadership through Youth Councils and other initiatives to increase young people's voice and influence.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Community Stakeholders

Community Stakeholders Interviewed from March 1-June 8, 2023 (Total 44)

Anglophone West School District
Capital Region Mental Health & Addiction (2)
City of Fredericton (3)
City of Fredericton Police (2)
Department of Public Safety
Department of Social Development (2)
Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation
Fredericton High School
Fredericton Public Library
Gibson Neill Memorial Elementary School (2)
Global Child
Ignite Fredericton
Imprint Youth Fredericton
Inclusion New Brunswick (2)

Integrated Service Delivery North Fredericton - Horizon Health Network

Integrated Service Delivery, Southside- Horizon Health Network

Intensive Support Program

John Howard Society (2)

Justice and Public Safety

Liberty Lane

Multicultural Association of Fredericton

New Brunswick African Association Inc

New Brunswick Coalition of Persons With Disabilities

Office of Child and Youth Advocate of New Brunswick (3)

Partners for Youth Inc. (2)

St. Mary's First Nation (2)

Teen Resource Centre, Saint John (2)

Under One Sky Friendship Centre (2)

Youth in Transition

Wulastukw Wolokehkitimok



Community Stakeholders at the April 2023 Workshop (total 22 participants)

Anglophone West School District

City of Fredericton

City of Fredericton Police (2)

Gibson-Neill Elementary School (2)

Integrated Service Delivery Child and Youth Team- Fredericton North

Intensive Support Program

John Howard Society of Fredericton (2)

Justice and Public Safety

Multicultural Association of Fredericton

New Brunswick African Association Inc. (2)

New Brunswick Coalition of Persons With Disabilities

Office of Child and Youth Advocate of New Brunswick (4)

Partners for Youth Inc.

Youth in Transition (2)



Youth Engagements Conducted by June 8, 2023 (total of 5 so far):

Multicultural Association of Fredericton

New Brunswick African Association

John Howard Society (2)

Youth Advisory Council, City of Fredericton

***Currently in discussions with St. Mary's First Nation and Bilijk First Nation to hold youth engagements in June**

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<https://www.allinagency.ca/>