



Halton Youth Initiative Report - Executive Summary

An Important Model of Authentic Youth Engagement

The goal of the Halton Youth Initiative was to elevate youth voice and empower volunteers aged 12-17 to have a positive impact in the communities of North Oakville, Acton, Aldershot, and Milton. The project was youth-led, with young volunteers identifying local issues and implementing strategies leading to possible solutions. An evidence-based approach focused on relationship building was taken in all interactions and activities.

The Halton Youth Initiative Report highlights the activities, benchmarks and impact of the Halton Youth Initiative between 2015 and 2021. To view the complete report visit haltonyouth.com.



Preparing the Ground: The Need

An Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) Seed Grant was awarded to North Oakville in the spring of 2015. A committee of regional professionals identified the neighbourhood as a vulnerable neighbourhood with great opportunities. Concerns about the community included high social risk index, high bullying and low social cohesion, high interaction between youth and police, high number of CAS calls, and high referrals for mental health. Youth focus groups were conducted in the summer of 2016 by Our Kids Network, YMCA of Oakville and Community Action for Youth.

The themes that emerged shaped the goals of the work funded by OTF:

- increase awareness of local resources to a youth audience,
- increase awareness of topics that matter to youth,
- collaborate with community partners to increase positive youth hangout space.

Planting the Seeds: The Communities

The success of the OTF Seed Grant for North Oakville prepared the way for an OTF Grow Grant in 2018 to expand the reach of Halton adult-youth councils at OKN Community Hub locations in Aldershot, Acton and Milton.

The Halton Youth Initiative (HYI):

- **Shared power** by holding in-person meetings hosted at the hub locations and the Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre.
- **Challenged growth in youth leaders** by recruiting through outreach in the school systems, Volunteer Halton and through the hub connections.
- **Provided support** by helping young leaders to identify issues that mattered to them and ways to take action to address the issues.
- **Expressed care** by connecting with Adult Allies identified from the hub supporters and who acted as supports through role modelling, giving feedback, mentoring, and providing guidance related to youth leadership tasks, both in and outside of meetings.
- **Expanded possibilities** by connecting with Community Partners and other stakeholders who shared their expertise on specific project elements and invited volunteers to participate in community events/campaigns.





Nurturing the Crop: The Transition to Virtual

The COVID-19 Pandemic required the HYI to dissolve the geographic barriers and quickly develop a model for the virtual world that would continue to tackle the OTF goals. A strengths-based approach that nurtured the existing relationships with youth members and engaged community partners kept the initiative operating, growing and building momentum. Remarkably, youth participation increased during the COVID-19 Pandemic with 300 youth engaged year-over-year.

Five virtual teams were organized to focus on the OTF goals, including a learning component called the “Deep Dive” to ensure all youth were on the same page and understanding foundational information.

Each team followed a similar structure:

- Youth chose what team(s) they were on (“borderless” virtual volunteering)
- Weekly meetings on ZOOM
- Google drive collaboration
- Volunteer hours and leadership honourariums
- Community partner support

Virtual tools including ZOOM, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Instagram and Canva were utilized to strengthen the communication in the community. The effective use of these platforms elevated the HYI community profile. Learning quickly from trial and error helped the project grow and gain momentum during this uncertain time.



Bearing Fruit: Recruit, Retain, Recognize, Relationships, and Resources (The 5Rs)

The transfer of knowledge, content and key data gathered about authentic youth engagement occurred through the creation of useful resources and tools focusing on:

- making the case for investing in relationships,
- recruiting, working with and recognizing youth volunteers, and
- using technology when working with youth.

Why was the experience of the Halton Youth Initiative an important model of authentic youth engagement in Canada?



The Halton Youth Initiative illustrated that when you intentionally build and support youth-focused initiatives, communities can:

- exceed outreach goals,
- provide safe in-person and virtual spaces to gather, and
- maximize the positive impact on issues that matter to young people.

What we know for sure is that the Halton Youth Initiative was a catalyst for community youth engagement during a very challenging time. Initiatives across Canada can learn from the Halton Youth Initiative experience. This work must continue and Halton Region has the knowledge and know-how to lead the way.



Fast Facts

The impact of the Halton Youth Initiative between 2015-2021.

57420
YOUTH REACHED BY
THE WORK OF THE
HALTON YOUTH
INITIATIVE



300+
VOLUNTEERS
CONTRIBUTING

5000+
VOLUNTEER HOURS
CONTRIBUTED



50+
COMMUNITY
PARTNERS



30+
PROJECTS AND
CAMPAIGNS



30+
SPECIAL
EVENTS



30+
INDIVIDUAL AND
GROUP AWARDS



100+
YOUTH INVOLVED
IN THE
EVALUATION OF
THE INITIATIVE



70+
VIDEOS HOSTED ON
THE HALTON YOUTH
INITIATIVE
YOUTUBE CHANNEL



\$3,000+
RAISED IN
6 CRAFTING FOR A
CAUSE FUNDRAISING
CAMPAIGNS FOR 6
DIFFERENT
COMMUNITY
AGENCIES



\$571,800+
INVESTED
IN
HALTON
YOUTH



Funding for the Our Kids Network Halton Youth Initiative is provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

For the full Halton Youth Initiative Report
visit haltonyouth.com

