

25 Community Conversations: Promoting Belonging in the Community with “Love my Hood”

by



for

Oakville Community Foundation

August 16th 2019

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Introduction:

The North Oakville Youth Developmental Council (NOYDC) is a council made up of youth ages 12-17 years old and adult allies from various organizations in the community. NOYDC believes that youth voices matter in North Oakville and that youth have a lot to offer our Oakville community. We also believe that strengthening relationships between youth and adults in North Oakville will help to build youth assets and increase positive youth development. The overall objective of the NOYDC is to create opportunities for meaningful youth involvement in the North Oakville neighbourhood in order to find ways for youth and adults to build relationships and increase youth developmental assets.

This objective also aligns with the findings of the Oakville Community Foundation's (OCF) 2018 Vital Youth Report in that relationships, or "a strong sense of belonging is a factor in current and future success"¹ for youth. However, "while youth give their neighbourhoods high marks for safety their view of their neighbourhoods as caring is ranked lower particularly by high school students." A recent North Oakville Youth survey developed by the Our Kids Network (OKN) and other community partners found similar outcomes among the youth in North Oakville, where 87% of grade 10 students reported that they felt safe in their neighbourhood, while only 48% of students thought that their neighbourhood was caring. The NOYDC has been focusing on this survey result for over the past few months and ways we can help to build an even more caring neighbourhood for youth by providing them with opportunities to belong and contribute to our community in a meaningful way.

¹ All quotations taken from the 2018 Vital Youth Report: A tale of two childhoods

The NOYDC believes that belonging is about feeling connected to a community or a group. Transparency, self-expression, support and inclusivity describe an environment that fosters belonging. As a neighborhood, it is important that we provide youth with opportunities that promote these characteristics so that optimal growth can be achieved. After multiple intriguing and engaging discussions, the council decided to support an idea called “Love my Hood” by starting such an initiative within Oakville.

The Opportunity:

Ideas are important. To begin anything new, an idea is necessary. They are the base for innovation and provide motivation for improvement. When ideas are ignored, the feeling of belonging disappears. Unfortunately, in the current fast paced living environment, they are often overlooked.

“Love my Hood” aims to solve this problem by providing a platform for youth to not only share their ideas but also implement them. The youth can devise an idea for an event or project that they want to organize and host within the community, and the NOYDC would support their idea by providing possible funds and materials to turn that idea into a reality.

The Idea:

“Love my Hood” is an initiative that is currently being implemented by Burlington² and Kitchener.³ After observing the success that they have achieved, the council decided to create something similar in Oakville. “Love my Hood” is a year-round program that builds healthy communities by engaging and empowering people to come together to celebrate their

² <https://www.burlington.ca/en/your-city/Love-My-Hood.asp>

³ <https://www.lovemyhood.ca/en/index.aspx>

neighborhood. Residents can share their ideas for events and can receive a grant of up to 300 dollars to implement it.

Kitchener has started multiple new programs through the ideas that residents sent in while Burlington has hosted a diverse array of events. What the NOYDC likes about this idea is that it provides a way for various individuals in the community to get actively involved by planning a neighbourhood event or project which promotes a sense of belonging. Since the NOYDC is a youth-based project, the plan is to encourage youth to get more actively involved by providing them with an opportunity to submit their event/project ideas to the NOYDC so that the council can provide them with the funds and materials needed to implement their idea. Groups who apply should have at least one youth member who is actively involved in the event/project planning. This way the youth in the community get a chance to connect with the adults, while the adults get to experience working with a youth.

The Response from Youth:

This idea for 25 Community Conversations focusses on youths' ideas for neighbourhood events/projects and their willingness to apply and participate. Thus, it was important to understand if youth would be interested in participating in a 'Love My Hood' project such as this. To gather their input, the council conducted a youth survey.

Twenty youth who were not youth council members participated in the survey. After receiving the response, the results showed that 85% of youth were interested in organizing their own events. The sample ideas they provided ranged from arts-based gatherings to environmental initiatives. However, they all had one thing in common. They all supported inclusivity within our community and aimed to provide spaces that allowed people to grow.

Conclusion:

Belonging begins with feeling welcomed and nurtures growth. These ideas that youth provided off the top of their heads could create a better community. With a structured opportunity like Love My Hood that supports youth-led ideas and provides the resources to give them shape, youth would hopefully be encouraged to get more involved in our community, feeling a greater sense of belonging. NOYDC hope to provide such an opportunity with the support of the OCF.

Acknowledgements:

The NOYDC would like to thank all of our youth council members for offering their ideas for our 25 Community Conversations submission. A special thank you to our youth council member, Hargun Kaur Rekhi, for writing the submission and also thank you to our other youth council members, Ashley Stevenson and Lucy Cartwright for their support.

We would also like to thank our two NOYDC Alumni, Cindy Lin and Ayra Kathuria for supporting our youth council members in leading the conversations, and also their assistance with developing the youth survey.

Finally, thank you to NOYDC's adult allies for their participation in this conversation as well:

- Michelle Knoll (Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre)
- Teresa Rinaldi (YMCA Oakville)
- Nabeel Rahman (Town of Oakville)
- Gurpreet Romana (Halton Multicultural Council Connections)
- Armen Svadjian (Oakville Public Library)
- Linda Lambert (Halton Public Health)
- Andrea Scott (Halton Public Health)

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