Final Evaluation Report

for *Collective Impact: Youth Aging Out of Care (Phase 1)*

June, 2016

McCreary Centre Society
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McCreary
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BACKGROUND

McCreary Centre Society was asked to evaluate Phase 1 of the collective impact (CI) initiative, *Youth Aging out of Care*, from September 7, 2015 to June 9, 2016. Phase 1 of the initiative entailed assessing if there was a shared vision as well as willingness and ability to move forward collectively to support youth transitioning out of care in Vancouver.

The developmental evaluation focused on the initiative's process and evolution, and collected information on successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Methodology

McCreary distributed evaluation surveys at the four community gatherings that have taken place since the fall of 2015 (September 2015, November 2015, February 2016, and May 2016). Two gatherings occurred prior to this date. The brief surveys included both open-ended and forced-choice questions.

McCreary also distributed a separate survey to 14 agency decision-makers (e.g., Executive Directors, senior government officials) who attended the CI leaders' summit (March, 2016). In addition, four focus groups took place over lunch at the most recent gathering, and two individual interviews were conducted at other times.

The surveys, focus groups and interviews assessed the following:

- The extent to which partners have a shared vision for change.
- Partners' input/thoughts/ideas on backbone infrastructure.
- The extent to which partners' activities are differentiated yet coordinated through a collective plan of action.
- The amount and quality of communication among partners.
- The degree to which, and in what ways, the CI initiative supports learning, dialogue, and reflection.
- The extent to which the initiative has the capacity to keep the process moving forward and to implement its work as planned.
- So far, whether the CI partners are making changes in their work as it relates to the initiative (and if so, in what ways).
- Progress toward the overarching goal of supporting youth in care and their transition to adulthood.
- Any other successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

McCreary shared updated evaluation findings at the start of each community gathering (beginning in November 2015). The purpose was to share information with partners about the collective's thoughts and perceptions of the initiative, and to help inform the ongoing development of the initiative.

This Report

This is the fourth and final evaluation report that McCreary has written for this phase of the initiative. In addition to reporting survey and focus group findings from the most recent gathering, this report summarizes relevant survey findings from previous gatherings and from the leaders' summit.

This report also includes statistically significant results on changes across community gatherings to assess if participants' thoughts and feelings about the initiative changed over time. All comparisons included in this report are statistically significant at $p<.05$. This means there is up to a 5% likelihood the results occurred by chance.
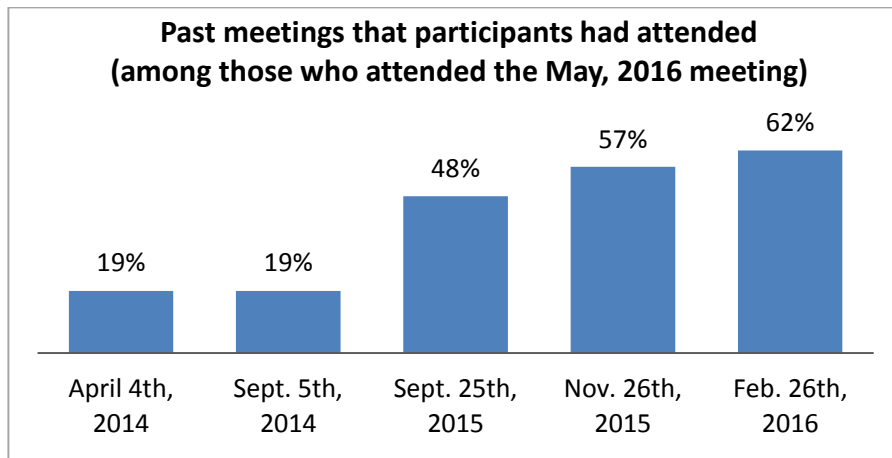
Quotes from participants who completed surveys, focus groups, and interviews are included throughout the report.

Evaluation Participants

Most individuals who attended community gatherings completed an evaluation survey before they left those gatherings. Also, the majority of partners at the most recent gathering in May (21 individuals) took part in a focus group that day.

Gathering date	Number of attendees	Number who completed a survey	Survey completion rate
September, 2015	44	32	73%
November, 2015	35	27	77%
February, 2016	38	31	82%
May, 2016	30	21	70%

It is important to note that participants were not always the same at each meeting. For example, 43% of participants at the February, 2016 meeting were attending their first gathering specific to the initiative. At the most recent meeting in May, most participants (81%) had attended at least one previous gathering, and they most commonly (48%) had attended two or three previous gatherings.

Past meetings that participants had attended (among those who attended the May, 2016 meeting)

April 4th, 2014	Sept. 5th, 2014	Sept. 25th, 2015	Nov. 26th, 2015	Feb. 26th, 2016
19%	19%	48%	57%	62%

At the May gathering, 30% of participants identified as a youth, which was comparable to the percentage at the previous two meetings (February 2016 and November 2015) and higher than the percentage at the meeting in September 2015 where only a couple identified this way.
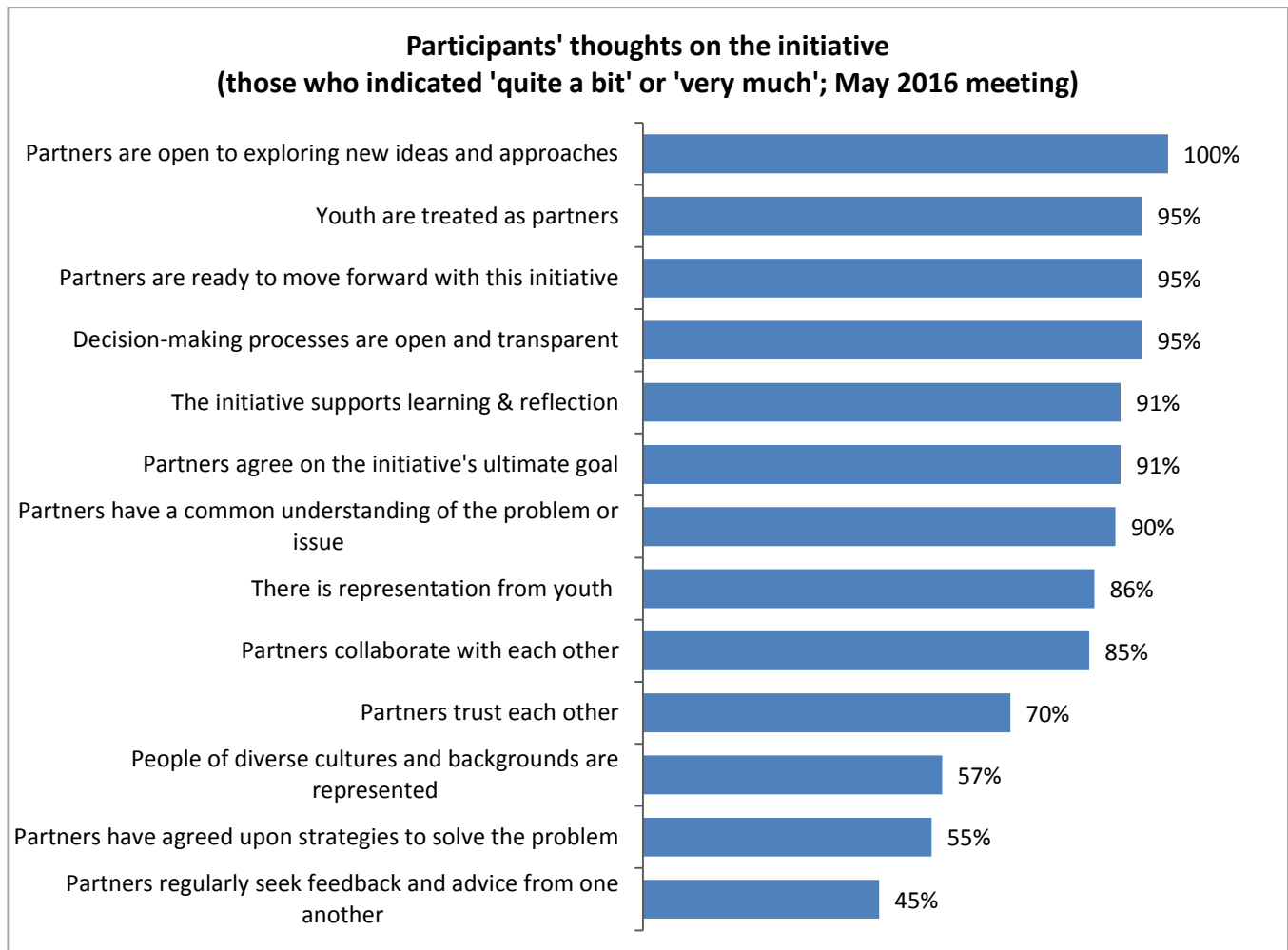
Most participants were representing a community-based social service organization, while 33% were from government or had another role.

FINDINGS

Participants' Ratings of the Initiative

   "Change is definitely going to happen."

As illustrated in the following graph, all participants who completed an evaluation form at the most recent meeting in May 2016 felt that partners are open to exploring new ideas and approaches. This was an increase from the previous meeting (79% felt this way in February 2016). The majority also felt positively about other aspects of their experience in the initiative. For example, 95% felt that decision-making processes are open and transparent, which was an increase from 63% in February.

Participants' thoughts on the initiative
(those who indicated 'quite a bit' or 'very much'; May 2016 meeting)

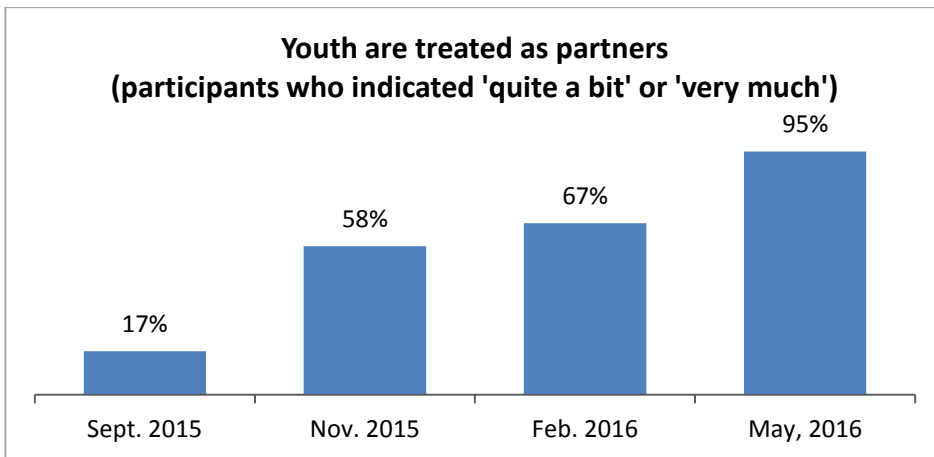|	
Partners are open to exploring new ideas and approaches	100%
Youth are treated as partners	95%
Partners are ready to move forward with this initiative	95%
Decision-making processes are open and transparent	95%
The initiative supports learning & reflection	91%
Partners agree on the initiative's ultimate goal	91%
Partners have a common understanding of the problem or issue	90%
There is representation from youth	86%
Partners collaborate with each other	85%
Partners trust each other	70%
People of diverse cultures and backgrounds are represented	57%
Partners have agreed upon strategies to solve the problem	55%
Partners regularly seek feedback and advice from one another	45%

At the earlier gatherings, participants were uncertain about others' readiness to move forward with the initiative, but at more recent gatherings there was an increase in the percentage who felt that partners were ready to move forward. There were also increases since September 2015 in the percentage of participants who felt that people of diverse cultures and backgrounds are represented; that partners agree on the initiative's ultimate goal; and there is representation from youth.

**Changes over time
(participants who indicated 'quite a bit' or 'very much')**

■ Sept., 2015 ■ May, 2016

- There is representation from youth: 3%, 86%
- People of diverse cultures and backgrounds are represented: 23%, 57%
- Partners are ready to move forward with the initiative: 45%, 95%
- Partners agree on the initiative's ultimate goal: 48%, 91%
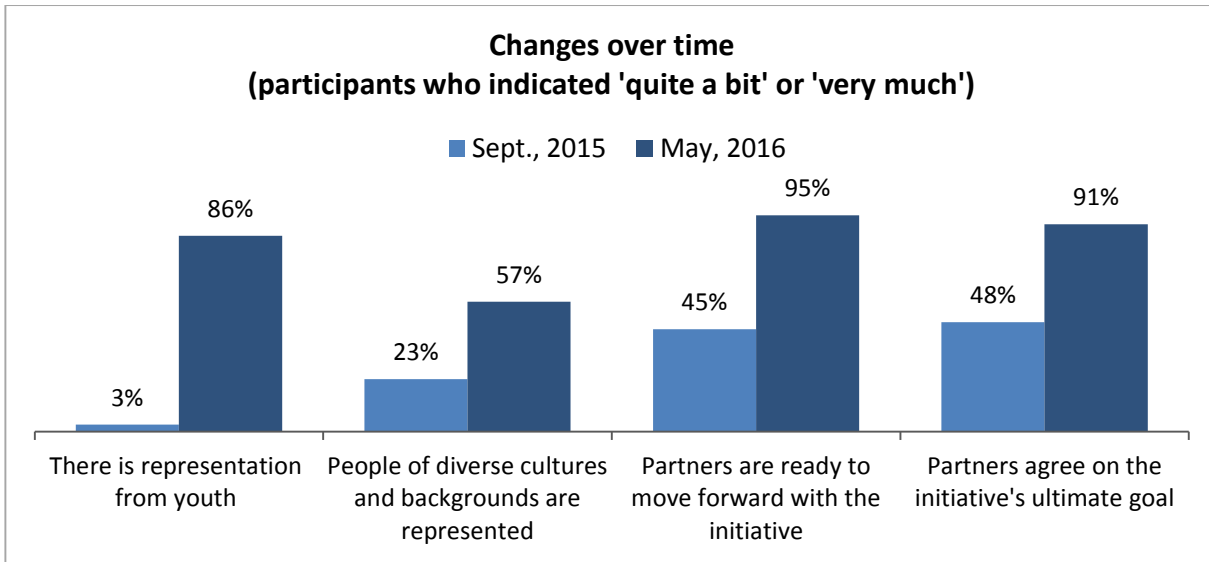
Note. Participants were not necessarily the same at each meeting.

In addition, there was a steady increase over time in the percentage of participants who felt that youth are treated as partners.

**Youth are treated as partners
(participants who indicated 'quite a bit' or 'very much')**

- Sept. 2015: 17%
- Nov. 2015: 58%
- Feb. 2016: 67%
- May, 2016: 95%

Note. Participants were not necessarily the same at each meeting.

The percentage of participants who felt that partners collaborate with each other went up from November 2015 (50%) to February 2016, and the February percentage was comparable in May (85%).
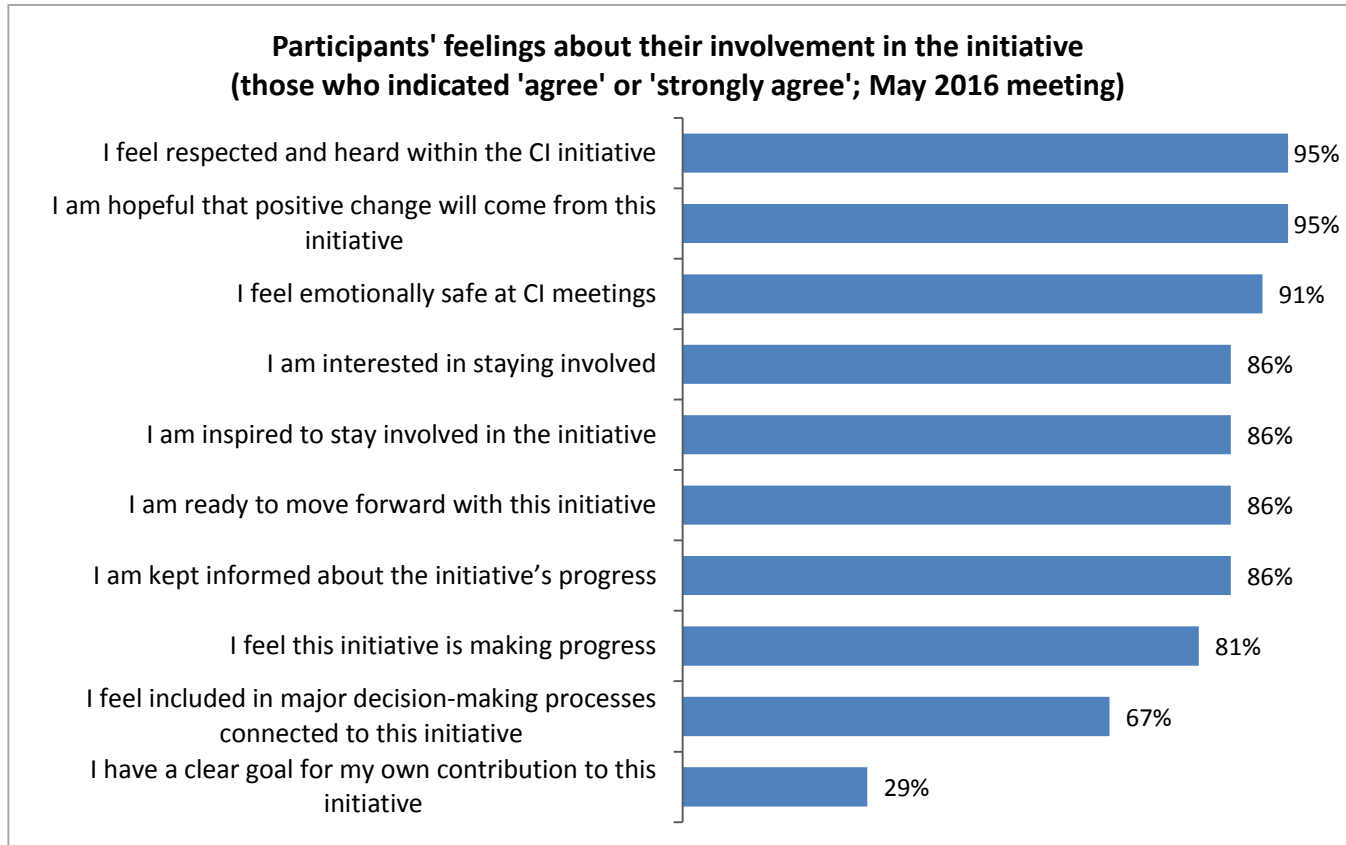
Until the most recent gathering, around half of participants felt that partners trusted each other. The majority of participants (70%) felt this way at the May gathering. When asked about trust, some participants noted on the surveys and in focus groups that it was difficult to establish trust because different people attended each meeting which resulted in participants questioning who was truly invested. Others identified the competition for funds among agencies as a barrier to establishing trust, as well as different philosophies and approaches among organizations which sometimes undermined trust and the ability to work together. Some pointed out that trust is developed over time and requires repeated interactions with the people involved. Participants felt that having regular attendance at meetings would improve trust, and that it would also improve once smaller working groups were established and people had an opportunity to work closely with one another.

Participants were also asked on the surveys to rate their personal feelings relating to the initiative. Consistent with findings from previous meetings, most at the recent meeting felt emotionally safe at CI

gatherings, were inspired to stay involved, were ready to move forward, and were hopeful than positive change would come from the initiative. Also, a new item added to the most recent survey indicated that the majority felt the initiative was making progress.

Ratings from decision-makers who attended the leaders' summit were comparable to those from participants at the most recent community gathering.

At the February meeting, there had been a decrease from earlier meetings in the percentage who felt respected and heard within the initiative (71%). However the percentage increased again in May (95%) and was comparable to the earlier levels.

Participants' feelings about their involvement in the initiative (those who indicated 'agree' or 'strongly agree'; May 2016 meeting)

Statement	Percentage
I feel respected and heard within the CI initiative	95%
I am hopeful that positive change will come from this initiative	95%
I feel emotionally safe at CI meetings	91%
I am interested in staying involved	86%
I am inspired to stay involved in the initiative	86%
I am ready to move forward with this initiative	86%
I am kept informed about the initiative's progress	86%
I feel this initiative is making progress	81%
I feel included in major decision-making processes connected to this initiative	67%
I have a clear goal for my own contribution to this initiative	29%

At the February gathering, youth were less likely than adults to feel they were kept informed of the initiative's progress. However, this was not the case at the most recent meeting, and there were no differences among youth and adults in any of their ratings.

Analyses from previous gatherings indicated no differences among participants who were attending their first meeting and those who had attended at least one of the other gatherings. Such comparisons could not be reported for the most recent gathering due to the small number of participants attending for the first time (reliability of the findings were compromised).

Qualitative Feedback

Successes

> *"We got there! I feel the excitement of the next phase."*

Participants were asked about successes during the first phase of the initiative. They listed the willingness of organizations to work collectively, learn from each other, and network; the opportunity for youth to network with each other and with youth-serving organizations; information sharing; that feedback from gatherings was incorporated into subsequent gatherings to facilitate progress; agreement on the vision and shared goals; the engagement of youth, including their meaningful involvement in developing a journey map; identification of a backbone organization; and organizations' desire to move forward and take action.

Many participants appreciated that the project manager communicated with the group through newsletters between meetings, and made time to meet with people individually to discuss the initiative if they wanted to do so. Some described the project manager as accommodating and open to new ideas and approaches.

A number of youth felt encouraged that adults were interested in hearing their opinions and that many organizations wanted to contribute to the initiative and to work collectively to affect positive change for youth transitioning out of care. Many also praised the project manager for her dedication to the cause and for striving to engage youth in a meaningful way so they could have a role in bringing about change.

Some adults felt it was a positive decision to not include many youth at the start because it had been important to first develop a safe space for youth and a sense of what their role would be, before inviting them to take part. These participants appreciated the increasing role for youth and the increasing number of young people who were now involved in the initiative.

Challenges

> *"It's tough to be patient when we want to make progress!"*

Participants commonly identified lack of clarity as a barrier to staying engaged. They explained that it was unclear what their specific roles and contributions would be, and what overall success would look like. They also felt that the focus on process as opposed to action in Phase 1 created challenges to keeping people engaged, which may have contributed to inconsistent attendance and new people in the room at each meeting, as well as reduced engagement over time from MCFD.

They felt that clarity of direction and concrete action in the next phase would help with consistent attendance at the meetings, and that consistent attendance would facilitate maintaining momentum and making progress.

Although consistent attendance was seen as important, participants appreciated that the initiative was welcoming to new partners and felt there were agencies and sectors that still needed to get involved (e.g., Vancouver School Board, post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal agencies, neighborhood houses, business sector, medical and mental health professionals, and government). Some felt the transition stage (between Phases 1 and 2) was a good time to reach out to these agencies.

Some focus group participants discussed external challenges to the initiative which were beyond its control, specifically the decreasing affordability of living in Vancouver and finding housing. They explained that this situation creates immense barriers for youth to transition out of care and experience stability in the community, and this reality could be a barrier to the initiative's success.

Changes in practice

> *"Now that we have information about the lack of support for youth aging out of care we can find new solutions."*

Participants were asked in the focus groups if they had made any changes to their work so far, based on their involvement in this initiative. Several said they had not made changes yet but were eager to be involved in such changes in the next phase. Some said their involvement to this point has helped to improve their understanding of the issues, the gaps in services, and what more needs to be done to support youth transitioning out of care.

A few reported that discussions at the community gatherings, including about approaches to address challenges in the field, have impacted their broader practice. It was also noted that the initiative's work was aligning with changes being made at MCFD to ensure that youth transitioning out of care in Vancouver were asked about their meaningful connections and whom they could contact if they needed support.

Backbone support

Participants at the February, 2016 gathering were asked what the backbone structure should look like, if the initiative were to move forward. Many were unsure while others listed certain criteria for a single backbone agency, such as the need for it to be independent and not provide direct service to youth. Others felt the backbone must have a core capacity, including infrastructure and data expertise, to increase the likelihood of success. Having legitimacy among Aboriginal agencies and following youth engagement practices were also identified as important.

Most agency decision-makers at the leaders' summit agreed the backbone should not provide direct service in order to increase the likelihood of neutrality. Various options were explored, as well as the willingness of agencies to take on the backbone role. A few agencies were identified as possibilities, and after further discussion a decision was made to explore the possibility with McCreary Centre Society. The reasons participants gave included McCreary's knowledge and experience around data collection and research, which would be helpful for developing shared measures in Phase 2, as well as their youth engagement practices and positive working relationships with Aboriginal agencies.[1]

Moving into Phase 2

The majority of participants (86%) were interested in staying involved in Phase 2. The rest indicated they were unsure, that other commitments might hinder their involvement, or it would be difficult to commit without defined roles and funding.

Among the agency decision-makers who answered the question, 100% felt the initiative should move forward and 100% reported their agency would commit to staying involved if the initiative continued. They all felt their agency was able to participate in moving the initiative forward. The vast majority felt the initiative would likely succeed if it continued.

To best achieve the goals of Phase 2 (developing a governance structure, developing shared measures, implementing a 'caring connections' success pillar), participants identified the need for smaller working groups which meet between gatherings and present their ideas to the larger group at the gatherings. Participants also felt there needs to be a clear understanding of agencies' and individuals' roles,

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[1] McCreary accepted the role of backbone organization but will not complete the advocacy role which will be assumed by another partner agency. McCreary's role will be reviewed upon completion of Phase 2 (12-18 months).

responsibilities and expectations. In addition, clear decisions need to be made on the desired outcomes and how they will be measured.

To implement the 'caring connections' success pillar, a few participants identified the importance of a continued sense of transparency and of examining and incorporating promising practices that have worked well in the past. They also identified the need to look at all the services and sectors involved in 'caring connections' to ensure they are engaged in the initiative.

Ongoing youth engagement was also identified as important. In addition, many youth commented that the continued involvement of the current project manager was important for Phase 2 to ensure consistency and to help keep the initiative on task.

Agency decision-makers at the leaders' summit also identified the need for more trust among service providers as well as the need for partners to trust the initiative's backbone structure and leadership. In addition, they commented it was necessary to have continued funding to support the ongoing facilitation of the process.

In addition, all decision-makers who completed a survey at the leaders' summit reported that their agency is able to participate in moving the initiative forward.

Some of participants' reasons for wanting to stay involved in Phase 2...

"I think it is important work, and collaborative work is key to success on a big scale."

"I feel like this initiative is going to really help the youth aging out of care in the near future."

"Focussed work will mean greater agency buy-in – we are ready!"

"I want to see change happen."

"I would love to help develop concrete shared measures."

"I think the next phase is very important."

Participants' Suggestions

Evaluation participants shared their suggestions for the next phase of the initiative:

- All-day gatherings were too great of a time commitment and created a barrier for decision-makers and other partners to attend, given their other commitments and responsibilities. A common suggestion was to have half-day community gatherings, with perhaps some working groups taking place during the other half of the day.

- Some felt that a start-time of 9:30 am is early for youth, so the gatherings should start later in the morning or take place in the afternoon/evening.

- While holding the meetings on a consistent day of the week (e.g., Fridays) works for some people, others may never be available on that day given their work schedules. A suggestion was to alternate the meetings to different days of the week so that a wider range of people could attend.

- Partners appreciated the shared learning that took place at the gatherings and felt that having more guest speakers would be helpful. One suggestion was to invite someone from the SEARCH Institute to talk about the benefits of having five caring connections.

- Partners felt it was important for everyone at the gatherings to know who was in the room (names and agency affiliations), such as by doing a round of introductions at the start of each meeting.

- Some felt the community gatherings could be more interactive. They suggested the meetings include more activities and less passive listening.

- Youth said that young people had been invited to previous meetings without understanding collective impact and the purpose of the meetings, and therefore could not participate in a meaningful way. They recommended educating young people on the initiative prior to attending their first meeting.

- Participants were hoping for more concrete decision-making and action items to come from future gatherings.

- Participants appreciated that the project manager did a lot of CI-related work between meetings, but few others had clear responsibilities and tasks to accomplish in between gatherings. They hoped their individual roles and responsibilities would be clarified in the next phase, and felt that work needed to be done in between meetings for progress to occur.

- Partners felt there were individuals, agencies and sectors who should be encouraged to participate in the initiative moving forward (e.g., Vancouver School Board, post-secondary institutions, more Aboriginal agencies, neighborhood houses, business sector and employers, medical and mental health professionals, addictions counsellors, government ministries, social workers, foster parents).

- The website should be re-designed to make a dedicated space for CI updates and more detail about the initiative (e.g., who is involved and what is happening).

- A suggestion was to create a video of the vision of the initiative, including an explanation of the CI model and ways that agencies can support the initiative.

- A few participants felt that partners should adopt a "circle of care model" and be open to sharing information about individual youth so that different agencies can work together to support young

people in and from care. This approach would be in line with the development of a shared measurement system.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

There were a number of consistencies in partners' thoughts about the initiative across all four gatherings. For example, most participants consistently felt emotionally safe at the gatherings, felt they were kept informed of the initiative's progress, were hopeful that positive change would arise from the initiative, and were inspired to stay involved.

Throughout Phase 1, partners did not typically feel they had a clear goal for their own contribution to the initiative. This feeling was perhaps not surprising during this phase of the initiative which entailed assessing if there was a shared vision as well as willingness and ability to move forward collectively. Partners felt the focus on process as opposed to action created challenges to keeping people engaged, and that clarification on agencies' and individuals' roles and responsibilities would be helpful moving forward.

Evaluation findings indicated a number of improvements over time, including a greater percentage of partners who felt decision-making processes are open and transparent; that people of diverse cultures and backgrounds are represented; partners agree on the initiative's ultimate goal; partners are ready to move forward; there is representation from youth; and youth are treated as partners.

Until the most recent gathering, around half of participants felt that partners trusted each other. The majority of participants felt this way at the most recent meeting but as some pointed out, a foundation of trust takes time to develop. Participants felt that trust would improve once smaller working groups were established and people had an opportunity to work closely with one another and get to know each other.

Participants identified a number of successes during the first phase of the initiative. These included agreement on a shared vision and goals, the identification of a backbone agency, and organizations' desire to move forward and take action.

The majority of partners were interested in staying involved in Phase 2. Also, the decision-makers felt the initiative should move forward and reported that their agency would commit to staying involved if the initiative continued. As well, the vast majority felt the initiative would likely succeed if it continued.

A limitation of the evaluation is that it does not include the perspectives of those who chose not to join or who disengaged from the initiative. However, given the available data, the findings indicate that the initiative met its Phase 1 goals and suggest readiness and capacity to move forward, if funding is secured for Phase 2.[2]

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[2] If the initiative continues, McCreary will need to ensure that their role as backbone remains as independent as possible from their role as evaluator. They will do so by designating certain staff to work specifically on the evaluation and not on other aspects of the initiative.