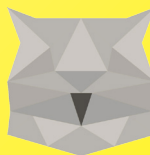




A model for engaging experiential youth  
in community-based research



McCreary  
Centre Society



YOUTH  
RESEARCH  
ACADEMY



# Youth Research Slam:

A model for engaging experiential youth in  
community-based research

YOUTH HEALTH • YOUTH RESEARCH • YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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## Thank you

Special thanks are due to all of the young people who took part in the Research Slam for their enthusiasm and commitment to addressing youth health issues in their communities. Thanks are also due to all of the young people who completed the online survey and shared their experiences with stress and coping.

Funding for this project was provided by the Vancouver Foundation.

vancouver  
foundation

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# Executive Summary

**McCreary's Youth Research Academy (YRA) is a group of youth aged 16 to 24 with government care experience who are involved in research projects aimed to improve the lives of youth in and from care. In March 2017, they hosted a Youth Research Slam, which trained other youth in community-based research skills over a two-week period.**



As part of the project, Research Slam participants created an online survey about how youth manage stress, which was distributed to 586 young people world wide over one weekend. Slam participants analyzed the survey data and found that 60% of respondents were 12 to 18 years old, and the rest were aged 19 to 24. The majority were female (79%), 13% were male, and 8% reported another gender identity.



In the week before taking the survey, 24% of respondents had experienced extreme levels of stress which made it difficult for them to function properly, and 36% had felt stressed every day. The most commonly reported causes of stress were school, thinking about their future, and their mental health.



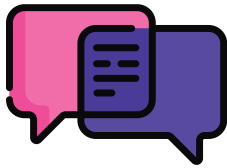
When asked how well they manage their stress, 40% of youth felt they managed it poorly, whereas 4% felt they managed their stress very well. The most common way youth tried to manage their stress which actually increased their stress was keeping to themselves, whereas the most commonly identified behaviour which lowered their stress was listening to music.



Youth most commonly turned to their friends, family members, and/or romantic partner for support when feeling stressed. Youth also commonly reported turning to the Internet and mobile apps for help to manage their stress. Most youth who accessed these services found them at least somewhat helpful. However, 70% of youth who accessed a telephone helpline did not find this experience helpful.



Half of youth felt they did not get the support they needed to manage their stress in the past year. The most common reasons for not accessing needed supports were not knowing where to go; thinking or hoping the problem would go away; and feeling too stressed to access supports.



Participants in the Research Slam created and delivered a workshop curriculum to share the results and engage youth and supportive adults in a dialogue about how young people manage stress. The workshops confirmed the survey results, highlighting the need to support young people to manage the stress they experience, and to ensure open and informed conversations about mental health take place between youth, their peers and supportive adults.



The process of developing a youth designed survey over a short period of time produced information about sources of stress and responses to stress which would not have otherwise been captured. The peer to peer approach to disseminating the survey ensured a high response rate from across the world. Similarly, the workshop curriculum developed by young people to discuss the survey results sparked important conversations and increased awareness among youth about local resources and sources of support in their community.



The Research Slam model was successful at engaging experiential youth in community-based research and in teaching them skills to support their educational and job prospects. The model has also been shown to be adaptable for use in different settings and with different groups of young people.

# Background

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**McCreary's Youth Research Academy (YRA) is a group of youth aged 16–24 with government care experience who are involved in research projects aimed to improve the lives of youth in and from care. YRA members learn community-based research skills and conduct community-based research projects of interest to youth in care and the organizations that serve them.**

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The final project of each cohort of the YRA is to carry out peer-to-peer training with other young people who are interested in learning about community-based research and who want to be involved in a research project. The first cohort of the YRA chose to carry out a project on how young people experience and manage stress. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of how youth can best be supported to manage their stress.

The goal was for the YRA to develop their leadership and facilitation skills, and to support other at-risk youth to gain skills and interest in community-based research as well as transferable education and employment skills. This was also an opportunity for youth to be engaged in a personally meaningful project.

The ensuing Research Slam was a fast-paced project that trained youth in community-based research in six sessions which took place over a two-week period during Spring Break 2017 (each session was four hours long).

On the final afternoon of the Research Slam, local community stakeholders from school districts, community agencies and the education sector were invited to a presentation of the results. The youth presented their findings and hosted a discussion. The presentation and discussion sparked interest from school personnel and counsellors to incorporate findings from the Research Slam into school curriculum.

Youth stayed involved in the project to develop and disseminate a workshop on stress and coping, which they delivered in four communities across British Columbia. The workshop curriculum has also been adapted for youth and adults to use to spark a dialogue with young people about stress and coping.



# Research Slam

## Participants

Priority was given to youth with experience in government care or alternatives to care, and no previous research experience was needed.

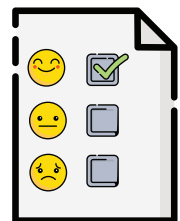
Working with members of the YRA, 10 youth took part ranging in age from 15 to 24 years. The group was made up of youth facing multiple barriers, including government care experience and mental health challenges.

An additional 12 youth based in another BC community engaged in the project remotely and provided input throughout the process including supporting survey development, distributing the survey through their networks, interpreting the results and facilitating workshops.

With support from McCreary staff, youth developed and distributed an on-line survey about stress and coping; conducted quantitative data analysis; wrote up the results; and disseminated the findings.

During the first week, participants learned what youth in Canada and other countries identified as stressors in previous research, and how other researchers have asked youth questions about stress. Participants were then taught how to create a survey (e.g., learning when to incorporate open-ended and closed-ended questions, and different types of scales that could be used).

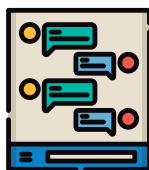
Participants identified what they wanted to learn through their survey, and then developed, edited, piloted and finalized the on-line survey.



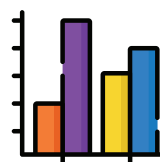
# Research Slam Survey



The survey included questions about youth's stress levels; their sources of stress; responses to it; perceptions of when stress might be helpful; and supports and services youth turned to when feeling stressed, as well as barriers to accessing these supports.



The survey was launched online at the end of the first week and was available for youth ages 12 to 24 to complete over four days. The youth researchers shared the survey link through their online networks, and 586 young people completed it world-wide.



In the second week of the Research Slam, the youth learned how to analyze the survey data, pull out key findings, and write up the results (including creating tables and graphs).

# Survey Findings

**Of the 586 young people who completed an online survey, 60% were 12 to 18 years old, and the rest were aged 19 to 24. Most (79%) were female, and the rest were male (13%) or another gender identity (8%).**

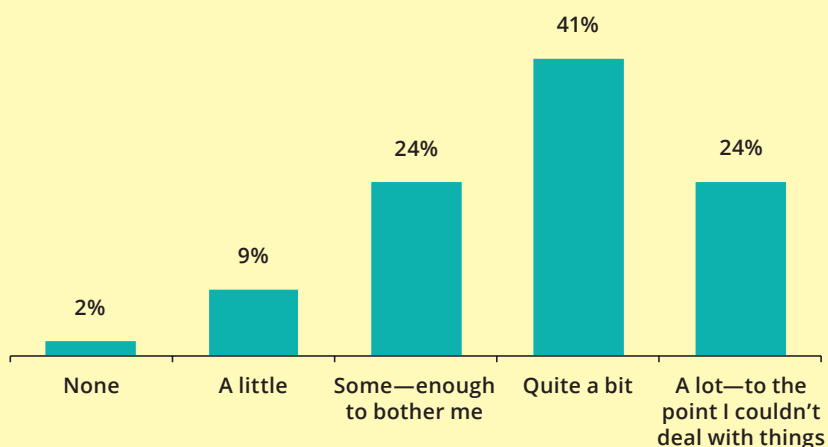
**The majority of youth (66%) identified as European. A little over half were from outside BC, including other places in Canada, as well as other countries (e.g., USA, England, Ireland, Australia, Singapore, Germany, Iraq, Brazil, Malaysia).**

## Stress Levels

Most youth who completed the survey (98%) experienced at least a little stress in the past week, including 24% who reported extreme levels which made it difficult for them to function properly. Males were less likely than females and than youth who identified as another gender to report extreme stress. Stress levels were similar among younger and older youth.

When asked on how many days in the past week they felt bothered by stress, youth most commonly reported feeling stressed on all seven days (36%). Males were the least likely to report feeling bothered by stress on a daily basis (18% vs. 36–39% of females and youth who identified as another gender). Youth with government care experience were more likely than those without care experience to feel bothered by stress every day in the past week.

How much stress youth experienced in the past 7 days



Around half of youth thought they experienced more stress than their peers (with males the least likely to feel this way).

Youth were asked an open-ended question about how they would describe stress. Many described feeling as though they did not have enough time to complete

all that needed to get done; that they had to live up to others' expectations and were worried about disappointing people; and many described the physical sensations in their body.

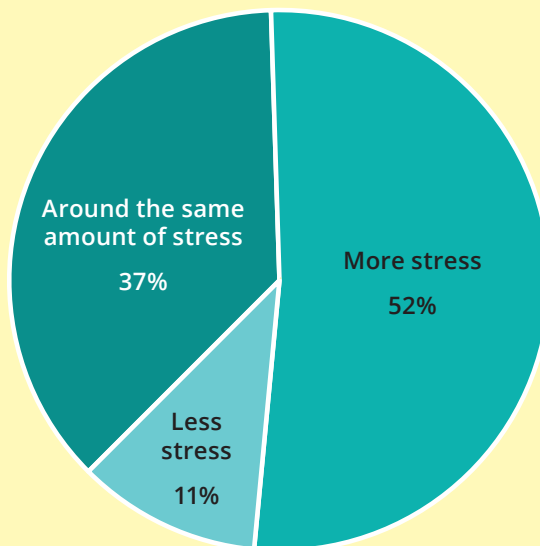
Some also provided metaphors such as the following:

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***"Stress feels like I am a beautiful house with a nice garden and it looks like there is nothing wrong from outside but from inside the whole house is on fire."***

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**How much stress youth thought they experienced compared to their same-age peers**

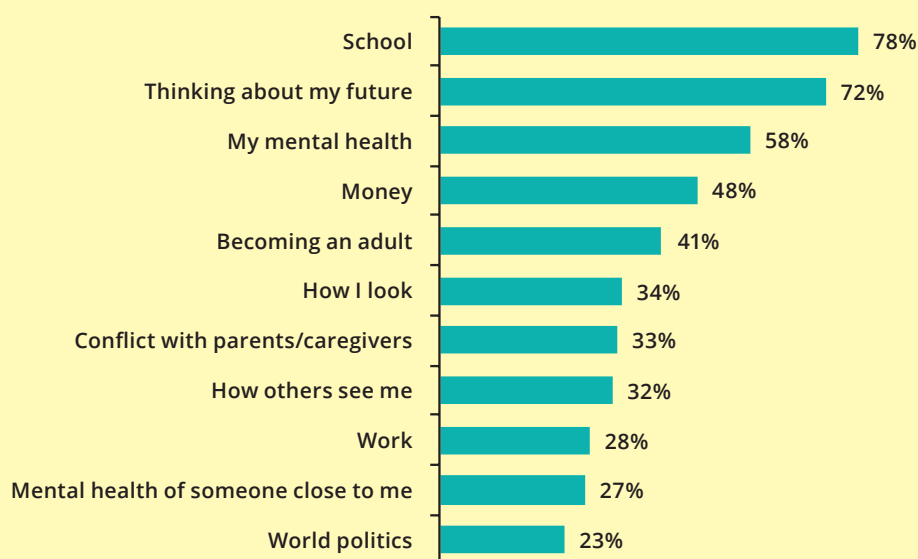


## Causes of Stress

Youth were asked about factors that have caused them the most stress. The most commonly reported causes were school, thinking about their future, and their mental health.

The five most common causes of stress were examined among youth 18 or younger and those 19 or older. The only difference was that younger youth had conflict with parents or caregivers among their five most common causes, whereas older youth had money among their most common sources of stress.

### Most commonly reported causes of stress



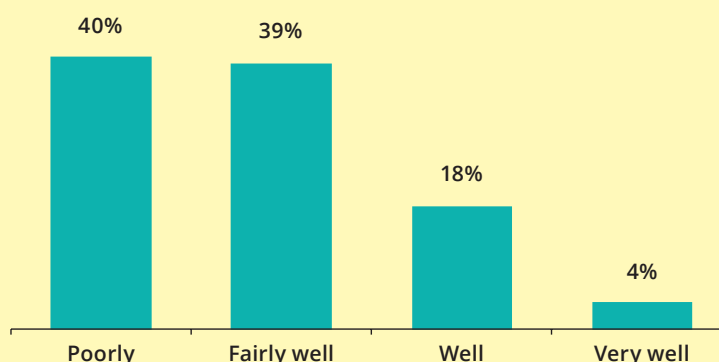
## Responses to Stress

When asked how well they manage their stress, 40% of youth felt they managed it poorly, whereas 4% felt they managed their stress very well.

Males were the most likely to feel they managed their stress well or very well. Youth who identified as transgender or another gender identity were most likely to feel they managed their stress poorly

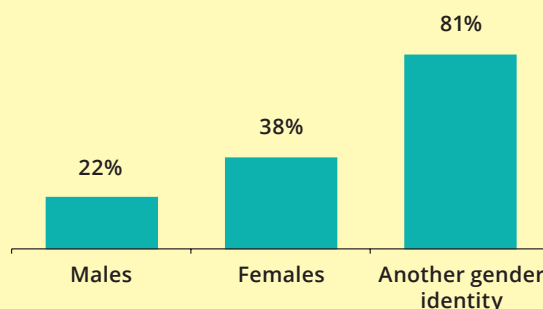
There were no differences between older and younger youth in how well they felt they managed their stress. However, older youth were more likely to feel it was important for them to properly manage their stress.

How well youth felt they managed their stress



Note: Percentages exceed 100% due to rounding.

Youth who felt they managed their stress poorly

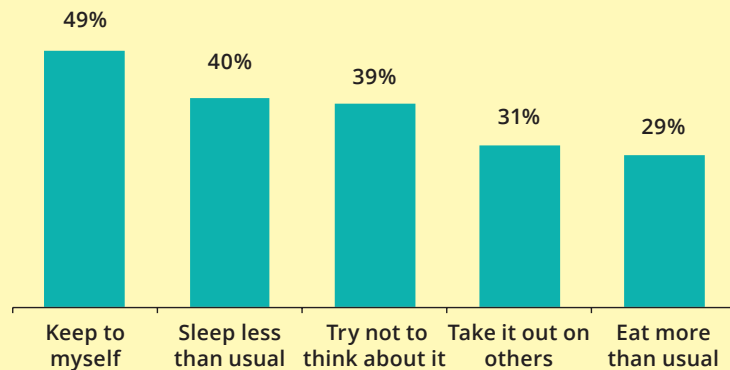


**Youth were asked what they did when stressed, and if it lowered their stress, made their stress worse, or had no effect.**

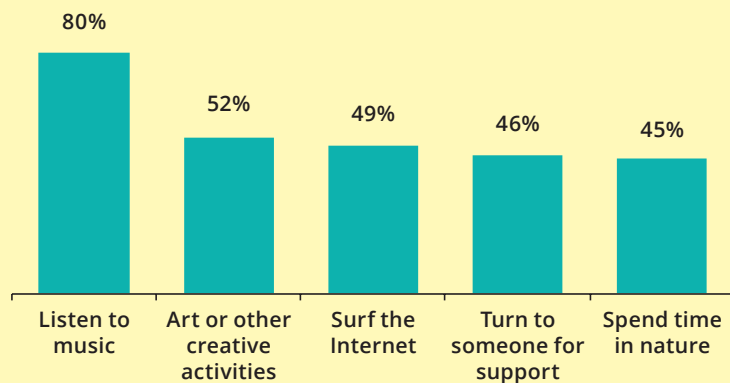
The most commonly identified behaviour which increased their stress was keeping to themselves, whereas the most commonly identified behaviour which lowered their stress was listening to music.

The group of youth researchers were interested in the link between marijuana use and stress. Youth who were 19 or older were twice as likely as younger youth to use marijuana to manage their stress (18% vs. 9%). Further, youth in British Columbia were twice as likely as youth in other places to feel that smoking marijuana was effective in lowering their stress (22% vs. 11%).

**Top 5 things youth do when stressed, which increases their stress**

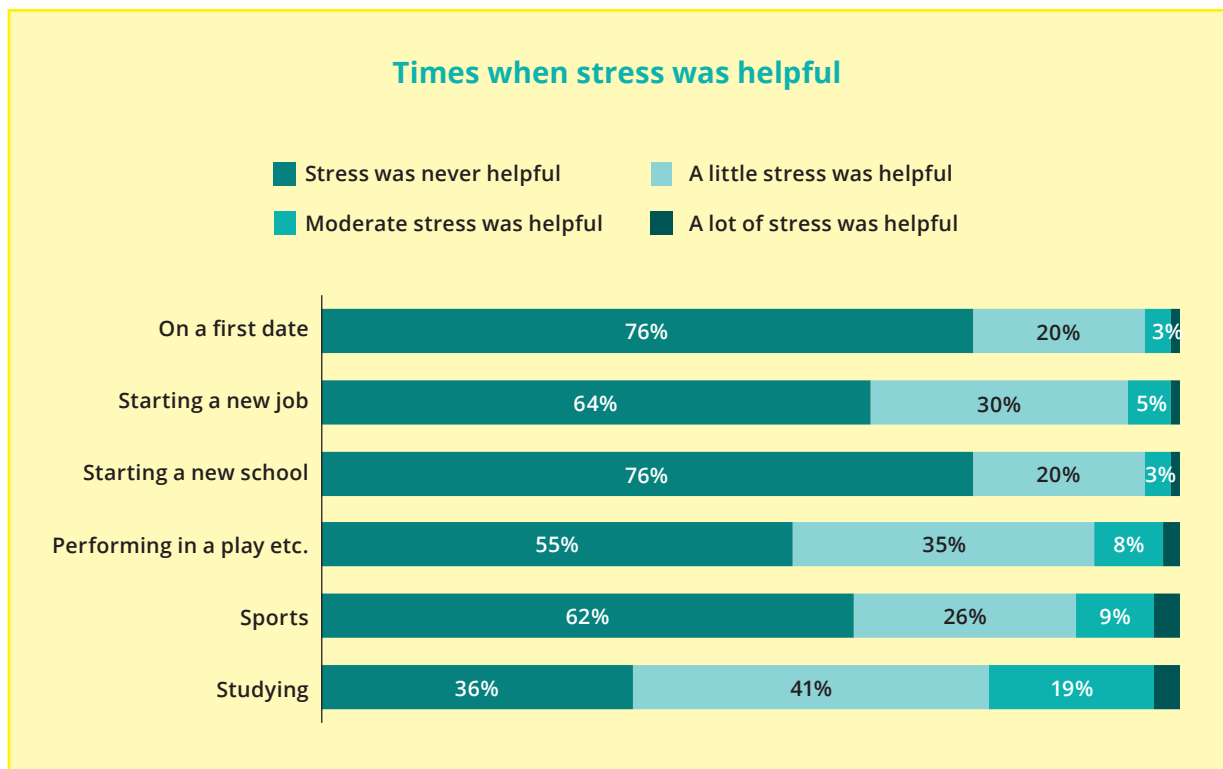


**Top 5 things youth do when stressed, which decreases their stress**



Around 20–40% of youth who completed a survey acknowledged that small amounts of stress could be helpful in certain situations (e.g., studying for an exam, performing in front of an audience, starting a new school, or on a first date). Few youth felt that a lot of stress was helpful in any situation.

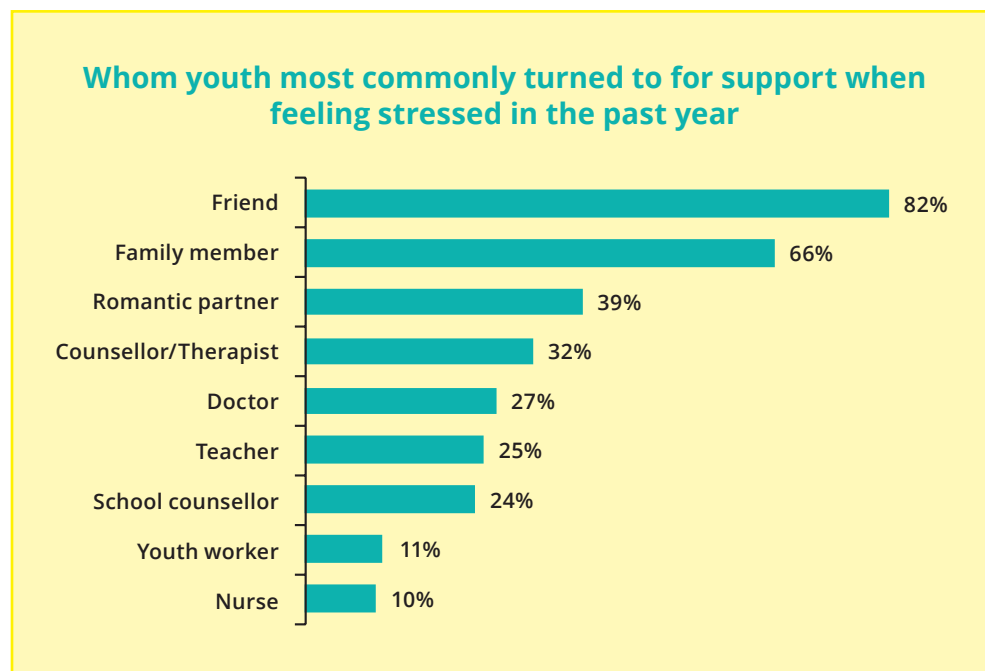
Older youth were more likely than younger youth to feel that a little stress was helpful when starting a new job (38% vs. 24%) or on a first date (27% vs. 13%).





## Accessing Support

**Youth most commonly turned to their friends, family members, and/or romantic partner for support when feeling stressed in the past year.**



**Note:** Youth could mark all responses that applied.

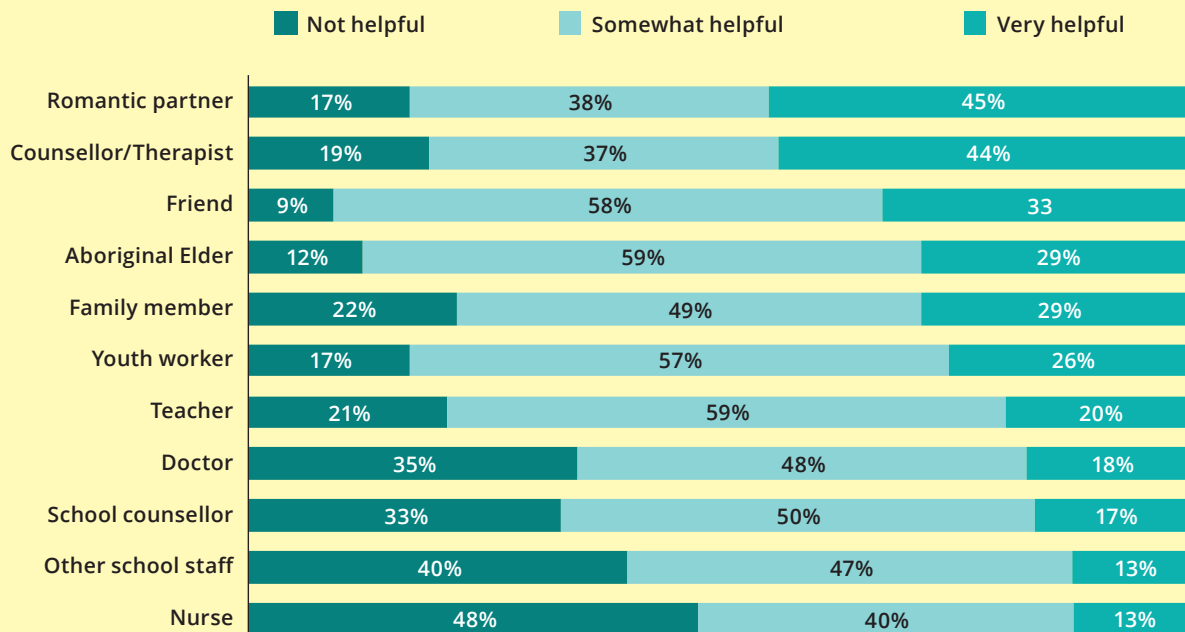
Most youth who had asked for help generally found the support at least somewhat helpful. They were most likely to find their romantic partner and their counsellor very helpful.

Youth were also asked where they went for support when feeling stressed in the past year. Most reported turning to the Internet, and the second most common answer was a mobile app. Most youth who accessed these services found them at least somewhat helpful. However, 70% of youth who accessed a telephone helpline found it unhelpful.

#### Where youth went for support when feeling stressed in the past year.

Internet	63%
Mobile app	36%
Online chat room	25%
Walk-in clinic	11%
Emergency room	8%
Telephone helpline	6%

#### Helpfulness of supports (among those who had asked for help)



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**Fifty percent of youth felt they did not get the support they needed to manage their stress in the past year.**

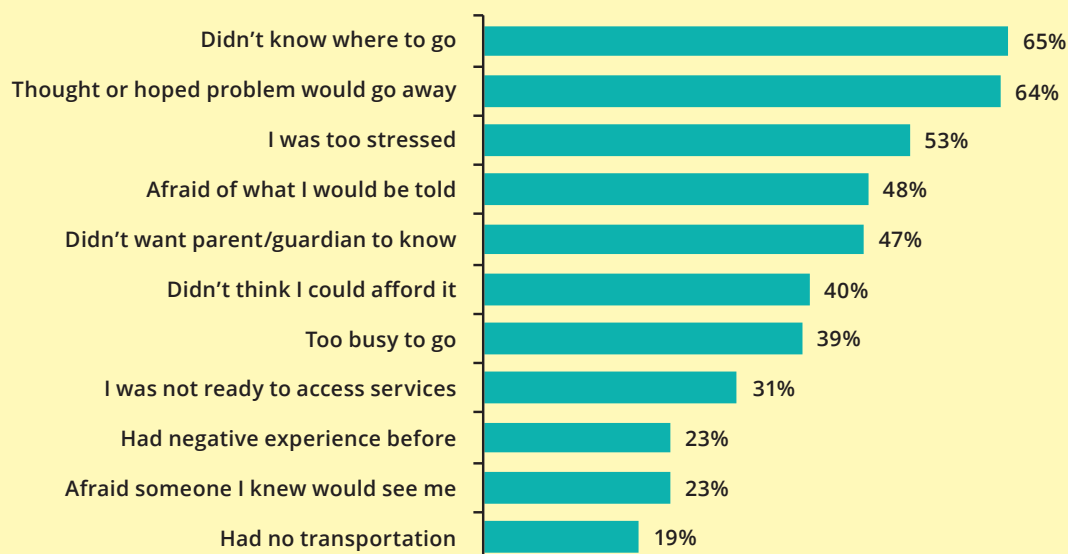
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The most common reasons for not accessing needed supports were not knowing where to go; thinking or hoping the problem would go away; and feeling too stressed to access supports.

Youth 19 or older were more likely than those 18 or younger to report not accessing supports because they felt

they could not afford it (54% vs. 31%) and because they were too busy to go (52% vs. 31%). In contrast, younger youth were more likely to identify not wanting their parents to know (55% vs. 36%) and being afraid that someone they knew might see them (32% vs. 10% of older youth) as barriers to accessing needed supports.

**Youth's most commonly reported reasons for not accessing needed support to manage their stress**



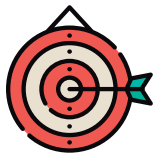
Note: Youth could mark all responses that applied.

# Dissemination of Findings

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**Once the Research Slam ended, youth expressed a desire to stay involved with the project. McCreary applied for and received additional funding for the youth to create a workshop.**

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The goal of the workshop was to share the project findings and encourage a dialogue with other youth pertaining to stress and coping. The curriculum also included tips for managing stress, and resources to help youth access services.

Research Slam participants facilitated four interactive workshops with 22 young people in the communities of Squamish, Surrey, Vancouver, and Victoria. The workshops included a trivia quiz designed to share the findings of the survey. The quiz was played using the online platform of *Kahoot!* and was effective at engaging workshop participants with the results of the survey in a fun and interactive way.

## Managing stress workshop agenda

### 1. Introduction

- a. Introductions
- b. Acknowledgment of traditional territories
- c. Share agenda of workshop
- d. Group agreement

### Ice-breaker

Participants select a meme to represent how youth in their community experience stress

### Trivia game

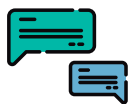
See Appendix 1 for trivia questions

### Discuss local resources

### Closing and thank you



Youth at each of the workshops discussed the survey results and reported that the findings reflected their personal experiences. Participants consistently reported that the level of stress they experience can lead them to isolate themselves from peers, and felt it was important for youth to support their friends who they knew to be stressed.



In addition to peer support, participants raised the need for youth to have supportive adults in their lives, including the ability to access counselors who could teach them techniques to manage their stress.



Youth participants wanted more information about how to manage stress available in places where they hang out, including youth hubs and schools. In addition to general tips about recognizing and managing stress, they suggested there also needs to be an individualized approach which acknowledges that stress can look different for different people.



Following completion of the four workshops, the curriculum and workshop materials were adapted for use by other youth and youth service providers. The curriculum is designed to allow facilitators to start a conversation about healthy ways of managing stress.



Youth researchers who participated in the Research Slam trained a group of 12 youth in Victoria to facilitate the workshop in their own community, and these youth in turn hosted workshops at their schools throughout the academic year.



A 'Train the trainer' style workshop aimed at adults has also been developed in collaboration with the Psychology Foundation of Canada. The workshop uses activities and resources from the Psychology Foundation in combination with the findings from the Research Slam as a way of sharing information and generating a discussion about local resources. This workshop has been shared with youth service providers in Victoria and will be shared with other youth-serving organizations.

# Evaluation Findings

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**All youth who took part in the Research Slam completed a survey at the end of the first session as well as at the end of the last session (sessions 1 & 6).**

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When asked on the first survey what interested them in taking part, they most commonly reported wanting to gain research skills (78%), wanting to gain knowledge about youth mental health issues (56%), and to participate in something meaningful (56%). At the end of the first session, all youth indicated they were interested in staying involved to disseminate the findings from the Research Slam.

By the final session, the vast majority of youth reported that their involvement helped to improve their skills and interest in research, as well as their skills in other areas including teamwork and critical thinking. Most also reported improved connections with others because of their involvement.

Their responses to an open-ended question about what they had learned also indicated that they learned both “hard skills” in the area of research, as well as “soft skills” such as patience and understanding.

## Some of what youth learned



***“Research and analyzing skills.”***



***“Patience, understanding, how to accept other people’s ideas without judgment.”***



***“I learned that in a short period of time, teamwork can tackle really tough looking projects.”***

All youth felt they had taken part in a meaningful project and that the staff were supportive. The vast majority also indicated the environment felt safe, and they felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.

All the youth indicated they were interested in staying involved in the project. Some commented that they wanted to be involved in sharing the findings, and wanted to see where this research goes in terms of helping to support youth cope with stress.

A few youth indicated that they wished the Research Slam was longer than two weeks because they enjoyed taking part and would have liked to have spent more time conducting analyses and creating a comprehensive report of the findings.

The Research Slam model has been adapted for use in different settings. McCreary has recently partnered with two different Aboriginal agencies in the province to teach youth research and evaluation skills, and support them to analyze data. The next YRA-led Research Slam will take place in 2018.

## Youth participants' comments



***"I feel like I got what I wanted from this experience."***



***"It felt amazing to take part in this project!"***

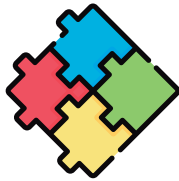


***"I felt it was productive and fun!"***



***"Thank you so much for this experience. I had a blast."***

# Conclusion



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**The Research Slam model was successful at engaging experiential youth in community-based research and in teaching them skills to support their educational and job prospects. The model has also been shown to be adaptable for use in different settings and with different groups of young people.**



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**The process of developing a youth designed survey identified sources of stress and responses to stress which would not have otherwise been captured. The peer to peer approach to survey dissemination also resulted in a high response rate from across the world.**



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**The survey findings and workshops conducted to discuss those findings showed the need to support young people to manage the stress they experience. They also highlight the importance of supportive adults facilitating open and informed conversations with youth about mental health.**



# Appendix 1: Trivia Quiz

## Instructions

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To facilitate the quiz, split youth into teams. Read out each question and have the teams discuss and then share their answers. Share the correct answer and explore the discussion points below each question (or add your own additional questions).

### Before you start the game...

Let participants know the background to the survey results:



This quiz is based on a survey created by youth about stress and the ways young people cope with it. In total, 586 young people between the ages of 12 and 24 completed the survey. Around 60% of the people who responded were under 19, and the rest were over 19.



The majority of the youth were female—79% of the people who filled it out identified as female; around 13% identified as male, and nearly 8% identified as transgender or other gender identities.



Around half of the people who responded were from BC, and the rest were from across Canada, and the rest of the world.

# Quiz Questions

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1. Youth aged 18 or younger reported better mental health than youth aged 19 or older.

- a. True
- b. False

*Answer: A, true*

- While younger youth reported better mental health overall, they have reported similar levels of stress as older youth.
- Males were the least likely of all genders to report feeling extreme stress.
  - Why did you answer the way you did? Did this surprise you?
  - Why do you think this might be?

2. What percentage of youth reported feeling stressed on all 7 days in the past week?

- a. 16%
- b. 36%
- c. 56%
- d. 76%

*Answer: B, 36%*

- When asked how many days in the past week they felt bothered by stress, youth most commonly said all 7 days.
- The majority of youth said they had at least some stress in the past week.
- About a quarter of youth said they had experienced extreme levels of stress in the past week.
  - Does this seem similar to what you see for youth in your community?
  - What do you think is creating stress for youth?
    - The top causes of stress reported on the survey were school and 'thinking about my future'.

3. What percentage of young people felt they managed their stress poorly?

- a. 20%
- b. 40%
- c. 60%
- d. 80%

*Answer: B, 40%*

- Only 4% of youth felt they managed their stress very well.
  - Do you think this reflects what is going on for young people here?
  - What are some of the things that can help young people feel like they can better manage the stress in their lives?

4. What percentage of youth reported listening to music to manage stress?

- a. 20%
- b. 40%
- c. 60%
- d. 80%

*Answer: D, 80%*

- Music was the most common thing youth reported doing to manage their stress, which they found helpful.
  - What are other things which can be helpful for managing stress?
  - Are there helpful things for youth in your community?
    - Along with listening to music, the top things youth reported on the survey which helped them when they were stressed were art or other creative activities, spending time on the Internet, turning to someone for support, and spending time in nature.

5. What percentage of youth reported keeping to themselves when stressed?

- a. 9%
- b. 29%
- c. 49%
- d. 69%

**Answer: C, 49%**

- While 49% of people who filled out the survey kept to themselves, this was one of the things that they said that didn't help them cope well.
  - What are some of the things people might do to cope with stress that may actually increase stress?

6. Seventy percent of youth who accessed a telephone helpline for support reported that it was:

- a. Helpful
- b. Not helpful

**Answer: B, Not helpful**

- Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
- The survey also asked about *who* youth turned to for help, and the most common were friends (82%), family (66%), and romantic partner (39%).
- According the survey, the people youth found most helpful were a romantic partner and a counsellor.
- When asked about places they go to for support, the most common responses were the Internet (63%) and a mobile app (36%).
  - Why do you think this is? How could you increase access to in-person supports? Would this be helpful?
  - What kinds of website and apps do you think youth might find helpful?

7. In the past year, what percentage of youth reported they did not know where to go to get help to manage their stress?
- a. 25%
  - b. 45%
  - c. 65%
  - d. 85%

**Answer: C, 65% didn't know where to go**

- 64% of youth said they thought or hoped the problem would go away and 53% said they were too stressed to access supports
- When it comes to age differences, youth under 19 were more likely than older youth to report 'not wanting their parents or guardians to know' as a barrier to accessing help, and youth over 19 were more likely to report 'thinking they couldn't afford it'.
  - Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
  - What are some other barriers youth face to accessing help for their stress?
  - What can be done to remove barriers to getting support?

8. At what times did youth find having a little bit of stress helpful?
- a. Studying
  - b. Starting a new job
  - c. On a first date
  - d. All of the above

**Answer: D, All of the above**

- Did any of these surprise you? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you think a little bit of stress might be helpful in these situations?
- What other situations do you think a little bit of stress might be helpful in?

# Appendix 2: Resources

## Mind Check

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[www.mindcheck.ca](http://www.mindcheck.ca)

Mind Check is a website designed to help youth and young adults in BC check out how they're feeling and connect to mental health resources and supports.

The site includes information on stress, a stress check quiz, mindfulness resources, tips for managing stress, and self-care resources.

## Kelty Mental Health

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[www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)

Kelty Mental Health offers information for people and their families who are dealing with mental health and substance use challenges.

The website has helpful tools and resources, and offers information on stress and coping.

## Additional Resources

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Helpful resources youth can connect to online, on the phone, by text, or by instant message.

### Kids Help Phone

Tel: 1-800-668-6868 (24/7)

Live chat: [www.kidshelphone.ca](http://www.kidshelphone.ca)

### Youth Space

Text: 1-778-783-0177

Live chat: [www.youthspace.ca](http://www.youthspace.ca)

### Crisis Centre

Tel: 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE) (24/7)

### Youth in BC

Live chat: [www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com)

### KUU-US Crisis Services for Aboriginal youth

Tel: 1-800-588-8717 (24/7)

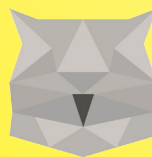
### Nurse Line

Tel: 811 (24/7)





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