



Youth engagement policy

Review date: January 2018

This youth engagement policy is intended to ensure that the values, [guiding principles](#) and [core components](#) of the Centre's youth engagement framework are realized within the Centre's mandate, policies and strategic plan. This will ensure that youth engagement at the Centre takes place in meaningful ways.

Scope

This policy applies to all Centre staff and volunteers, including individuals representing the Centre in training, facilitation and consultation roles.

Definitions

A **youth** is defined as a person between the ages of 12 and 24 years old.

Youth engagement is an active and ongoing process that embeds youth voice at all levels. It is a set of practices that offer youth opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with adults, learn skills, work on issues they're passionate about and contribute to social change (<http://www.yetoolkit.ca/content/definition>).

Purpose and rationale

As the Centre supports Ontario's child and youth mental health agencies to build their capacity in youth engagement, this policy provides a framework for the implementation of youth engagement within the Centre.

This policy was developed in alignment with the Centre's youth engagement model. The Centre's theory of change (including the core principles for youth engagement) is embedded within the practices and processes presented within this policy.

The Centre is committed to involving youth in the planning, delivery and evaluation of its services. As a leader in youth engagement, the Centre also promotes meaningful youth engagement among its stakeholders. By engaging youth in things that are important to them, youth experience many benefits, as do the organizations and the communities in which they live. Youth have lived experience and knowledge about what it's like to navigate the mental health system. This gives youth a unique ability to inform and advise organizations to create services and partnerships that serve them effectively. Engaging youth means giving them the power to influence and shape their lives in the direction that they believe is right for them. One powerful way of doing this is to give young people an opportunity to contribute to positive change. This can occur on an individual level, local community level or on a societal or system level.

The Centre creates meaningful partnerships with young people so they can support and contribute to system level change in the mental health care of children and youth. Many of the Centre's products and services are co-created by youth and adult partners so they more accurately reflect the needs of young people across Ontario. As a result, engaged young people have an opportunity to learn new skills, make new connections and contribute to something they consider valuable.

Roles and responsibilities

All Centre employees have a role to play when it comes to practicing meaningful youth engagement at the Centre. The specific roles and responsibilities pertaining to Centre positions are outlined below.

Leadership team

Members of the Centre's leadership team play an essential role in supporting the implementation of this policy. Specifically, they are responsible for:

- ensuring youth representation on the Strategic Advisory Council
- reviewing needs and resources (financial and human) to meet the Centre's youth engagement needs;
- reflecting youth engagement in the development of the Centre's strategic plan; and
- ensuring clinical support is available for all youth (both staff and volunteers) as required, specifically crisis and referral support.

Centre staff

Centre staff are responsible for:

- ensuring that youth feel included and valued as a member of the team;
- providing constructive feedback, when and where appropriate;
- being aware of how their own role is impacted by or impacts youth engagement;
- identifying and addressing barriers that may prevent or negatively impact the participation of youth in Centre programs/services; and
- engaging young people in the development of products or services for youth.

Youth positions

The Centre engages youth in various ways to ensure that youth perspectives are captured in the design, planning and implementation of products and services. Youth roles can include youth advisors, youth engagement facilitators, [Dare to Dream](#) review team members, youth who co-develop products and Strategic Advisory Council members. The specific roles and responsibilities of these positions are outlined below.

Youth advisors (YAs)

The Centre employs part-time youth advisors (YAs) on a term basis. YAs are responsible for various youth engagement services (e.g. youth engagement facilitated sessions, primers, the Dare to Dream program, etc.). They also offer their expertise to stakeholder agencies to advance their youth engagement principles and practices. YAs are subject to the same policies and workplace regulations as all Centre staff and CHEO employees.

Youth engagement facilitators

Youth engagement facilitators help to plan and facilitate critical conversations between youth and agency staff within a service area. Youth engagement facilitators are responsible for:

- participating in youth engagement facilitated sessions offered by the Centre, including planning and debrief activities;
- working with knowledge brokers, agency staff and where possible, youth from the community, to develop customized agendas for the session; and
- co-facilitating youth engagement facilitated sessions.

Dare to Dream (D2D) review team

The D2D review team is made up of a diverse group of youth from across Ontario. The responsibilities of a review team member are to:

- download and review the assigned applications prior to the review team meeting;
- attend review team meetings as required (1-2 times per year); and
- review submissions with other review team members and make funding recommendations to the Centre's leadership team to bring the projects to life.

Product co-developers

The Centre routinely reaches out to youth with relevant experience to either co-develop and/or be consulted in the development of a specific program, project or service. Their main responsibilities include:

- committing to the responsibility of product development support and connecting with the project lead or youth advisor if their commitment changes; and/or
- participating fully in the consultation by bringing their knowledge and lived experience to the co-development process.

Youth members of the Centre's Strategic Advisory Council

Two youth with lived experience will be recruited to join the Centre's Strategic Advisory Council for a membership term of two years with the option to renew for one additional year. Youth members will receive a thorough orientation prior to joining the Council to ensure they are well prepared and able to fully participate. Their responsibilities will include:

- drawing on their lived experience to strategically advise and provide input on items of relevance to the Centre's work; and
- acting as ambassadors for the Centre throughout their membership term.

Procedures

Centre leaders and staff are required to consider and apply the following procedures when conducting youth engagement activities at the Centre.

1. Youth recruitment

The Centre's processes for recruiting youth vary depending on the engagement opportunity or position being filled. Key recruitment considerations are listed on the following page as they pertain to the different youth positions available at the Centre (staff and volunteer positions).

All recruitment of youth is targeted. Throughout the recruitment process, the Centre will strive to ensure that the skills and strengths of the youth engaged are an appropriate fit for the activities for which they will be engaged.

The Centre is committed to recruiting youth using an anti-oppressive framework, a way of working that recognizes existing social inequalities and power imbalances. The Centre strives to ensure that youth are engaged from various marginalized identities to reflect the demographic of youth accessing mental health services.

Youth advisors

- The recruitment process for youth advisors follows the same general processes used for recruiting and hiring all Centre staff.
- A job posting is created and posted on CHEO's internal and external websites. It is also forwarded to community partners and networks outlining the requirements and responsibilities of the youth advisor role, as well as the application process for the position. Applications are reviewed and interviews are arranged.
- All youth candidates selected are interviewed by members of the leadership team, as well as a young person who is familiar with the Centre's youth engagement model.

Youth engagement facilitators and Dare to Dream review team members

- A call for volunteers is sent to the Centre's provincial youth engagement networks. The Centre ensures that promotion is targeted to regions that are underrepresented within the existing group of youth engagement facilitators and Dare to Dream review team.
- Youth advisors conduct informal phone interviews with all interested candidates. These interviews may include discussions about interests, knowledge of mental health and mental health services, skills, strengths, teamwork, etc.

Youth product co-developers

- Recruitment for youth product co-developers varies based on the product to be developed and the youth expertise required. Refer to the Centre's stakeholder engagement plan for more detailed information.

Youth members of the Centre's Strategic Advisory Council

- Refer to the Centre's Strategic Advisory Council Terms of Reference for more details on the recruitment process.

2. Youth engagement orientation

Centre staff

New Centre staff are required to complete an extensive orientation process (refer to the Centre's Staff Orientation Manual for more information). Staff are encouraged to review [*Walking the talk: A toolkit for engaging youth in mental health*](#) to promote their familiarity with the Centre's model of youth engagement. They are encouraged to view youth advisors and youth volunteers as assets and equitable partners, engaging youth in their work and fostering opportunities for youth development wherever possible. Depending on the specific duties of the role, new Centre staff will work with their supervisor to determine the appropriate orientation plan for each individual.

Youth advisors

New youth advisors go through the same orientation process as all Centre staff. In addition, youth advisors are provided with a youth orientation manual which outlines the roles, responsibilities and procedures specific to youth volunteers within the Centre.

Meetings are arranged with key Centre leaders and staff to help them better understand the Centre's people, roles, programs and services. Youth advisors are also informed of which staff members to lean on for support.

Youth volunteers

All other youth who volunteer with the Centre are provided with the youth orientation manual and assigned a key point of contact so they can ask questions of a Centre staff should they arise.

3. Youth learning and development

In an effort to promote continuous growth and learning over the course of their employment, the Centre provides youth advisors with many opportunities for professional development. In addition to regular coaching and flexible scheduling to pursue academic studies, youth advisors have access to a limited amount of financial resources, consistent with other Centre staff, to apply to their professional development (refer to the Centre's PD policy for more information).

The Centre also promotes new opportunities for youth advisors and volunteers within and across the organization and broader community, for instance presenting at conferences.

The Centre is committed to ensuring sufficient resourcing in its annual operational budget to support meaningful youth engagement in all facets of the Centre's work, as outlined in this policy. Examples include: staff time, honoraria, pay for youth roles and funding for youth engagement activities.

4. Youth compensation and recognition

Youth advisors and volunteers are compensated appropriately for their work in support of the Centre. Youth advisors, like other Centre staff, are paid for their time via CHEO's payroll department. Youth volunteers receive honoraria corresponding to the amount of time they spend working on a project (refer to the Centre's honoraria process for more information). Non-monetary incentives are also offered to youth in the form of recognition, meaningful participation in projects, connections in the field, etc.

5. Positive, safe and accessible spaces for youth

The Centre strives to be inclusive and accepting of all identities, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or ability. We recognize that being accessible and helping people feel safe is an ongoing process of critical reflection and adjustment. The following section outlines some of the ways that the Centre creates positive, safe and accessible spaces for youth.

Positive space or safe(r) space

The Centre takes pride in providing a safe, comfortable and positive working environment for all staff. Centre staff are required to comply with related CHEO policies. Key principles that are strongly encouraged include:

- Do not use discriminatory language.
- Be inclusive and accepting of different identities.

- Be respectful of the sensitivities of others.
- Ask which gender pronouns someone uses and use them respectfully.
- Do not insult or put people down.
- Do not gossip.

For more detail on related CHEO policies, refer to CHEO's health and safety policy statement, CHEO's workplace conflict/complaint policy, and CHEO's workplace harassment policy.

Clinical safety

Clinical safety refers to the measures taken by the Centre to ensure the care and well-being of the youth engaged. The Centre has plans in place to provide support during larger events where youth are present at the event and a young person becomes distressed or triggered. This means that the Centre ensures that the youth engaged have access to support where and when they need it.

Accommodations

Youth are informed of options to accommodate them if they require any extra support to suit their learning styles and participation needs. These discussions take place both during their interview and once they are working on a project.

The Centre's office is accessible to most people with limited physical mobility (e.g. no stairs, bathrooms that can be accessed by someone who uses a wheelchair). The Centre also strives to ensure that all events are wheelchair accessible.

The Centre's office has a single person washroom that is shared by everyone regardless of their gender.

Health and safety

The Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) at the Centre is dedicated to monitoring and maintaining the overall health and safety standards of Centre office space. These standards apply to all Centre staff, including youth advisors and volunteers (refer to CHEO's health and safety policy statement for more information).

6. Police Record Checks

In order to safeguard the wellbeing of vulnerable persons, any staff and volunteers working on behalf of the Centre are required to have a Police Record Check (PRC). This is in line with CHEO's own policy which is meant to minimize the risk to CHEO employees, patients and families and assets through proper screening of employees, potential employees and volunteers. See CHEO Policy No. 136 for complete details on CHEO requirements related to PRCs. The Centre can provide youth with a copy of the policy if requested.

The Centre will cover the cost to youth volunteers of obtaining a PRC.

In line with CHEO policy, hiring and volunteer selection will only be influenced by findings of a PRC if it has a direct bearing on safety related to working with vulnerable persons. PRC reports will be kept confidential and stored securely.

Strategic planning and evaluation

The Centre strives to be inclusive and accepting of all identities, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or ability. We recognize that being accessible and helping people feel safe is an ongoing process of critical reflection and adjustment. The following section outlines some of the ways that the Centre creates positive, safe and accessible spaces for youth.

In addition to engaging two youth to actively participate as members of the Centre's Strategic Advisory Council, the Centre also engages youth to help strategically inform and guide its work on projects and initiatives (refer to the Centre's stakeholder engagement plan for more information).

As a learning organization that works with young people, the Centre actively collaborates with its youth advisors and volunteers to evaluate and improve programs and activities. Youth advisors are invited to provide input and feedback about what is working, what is not and how we can improve from a youth engagement perspective.

Communications, media relations and social media

To ensure the Centre's material is easily understood by all stakeholders, the Centre must communicate to a broad audience. All Centre external products must be evaluated by the communications team before being shared externally. All written products that are developed for use by external stakeholders are written according to the Centre style guide. Before using the Centre's logo, all staff and volunteers are asked to consult with the Centre's communications team.

For specific products and resources, the Centre may choose to target communications to a youth audience (e.g. Dare to Dream program material). When communicating with youth by writing or other means, a focus is placed on using a level of language that is appropriate for their level of comprehension. This means refraining from using overly academic words and jargon. This is best done in collaboration with young people.

The Centre is required to collect informed consent from engaged youth prior to their identity being shared in the media. This includes pictures or videos displaying their face, written words or anything that identifies them by name. Youth under the age of 18 are required to provide written consent from a legal guardian or caregiver.

Regarding social media, all youth representing the Centre are asked to protect the Centre's reputation and not use the organization to make personal political statements (see CHEO's media relations policy).

Youth advisors and volunteers are supported and encouraged to share their stories in an empowering and safe way (see the Centre's [strategic sharing tip sheet](#)).