Battlefords Youth Network Report

June 26, 2018

The Students Commission
Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Queen's SPEG
30 YEARS & RISING

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Origin Story

The Battlefords Youth Network (BYN) was formed in March 2017 as a response to a community identified need to increase youth engagement levels and create opportunities for youth serving and youth involved agencies to work better together and create information sharing loops in the Battlefords and area. This includes the communities of Battleford, North Battleford, and numerous surrounding First Nations communities.

In the fall of 2017, the Students Commission of Canada in partnership with the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute led a series of trainings on youth engagement practices and youth resiliency workshop trainings. These sessions concluded with an overwhelming consensus by those in attendance that the Battlefords and area needed to build a strategy to engage young people in their community in order to see more positive outcomes.

The BYN approached the Students Commission of Canada to continue to support their youth engagement initiative through a series of stakeholder and community meetings that would also serve to identify some of the key areas of concern for youth serving organizations in the community.

The strategy resonated well within the community, as community-based organizations (CBOs), Government representatives, concerned citizens, and parents participated in these initial meetings regarding the formation of the Youth Engagement Initiative. Over 35 organizations and representatives were present at the first round of consultations.

The BYN continues to meet monthly on the second Thursday of the month at the Don Ross Community Centre. Subcommittees centred on various aspects of the Youth Engagement Initiative continue to meet as necessary, focused on topics such as funding opportunities, collecting other various data available, and the adult ally support system. Another subcommittee focused on developing the Youth Forum has also begun to meet.

The Battlefords and area has recently been the focus of national attention due to increasing crime statistics, which were covered by both national and international media. This attention from the rest of the country has lead to increased interest and action on the part of the policy and decision makers in the community, and province as a whole. In addition, the community has experienced an alarming number of youth suicides since the beginning of 2018 and has been further examined in the news media for increasing racial tensions due to a high profile trial. These racial tensions and instances of racism have been an ongoing concern for the community for a number of years, if not decades.

The Students Commission of Canada has committed to an in-kind donation of the Sharing the Stories (StS) services to help the BYN uncover some valuable data that might point to some possible solutions and ideas for increasing engagement levels of young people in their community and providing direction for youth led directives, projects, and actions.

Executive Summary

Purpose

In November 2017, an article published by Maclean's magazine thrust North Battleford into the national spotlight with an article titled "*Canada's most dangerous place, North Battleford, is fighting for its future*" The article mentions a lack of resources for youth and youth serving organizations in the community. Combined with increased calls from citizens to re-implement nighttime curfews and end alternative sentencing initiatives, North Battleford is poised to react to these challenges and is ready to move forward with an evidence-based approach.

Sparked by a sobering rise of youth suicides in the Battlefords and area, this report is a starting point in uncovering valuable data to understand youth engagement in the Battlefords and area. This report highlights a sizeable gap between Battlefords and area youth and youth in other communities. Additionally, this report sketches out early solutions and ideas for increasing engagement levels of young people in their community and provides a sense of direction for youth led directives, projects, and actions.

Process

To start the process of collecting data about youth engagement, BYN selected the Engaged in Community tool, a quantitative module created by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. This module examines the extent to which youth are engaged in their communities including how youth participate, their influence on decisions in their communities, and their sense of belonging. 123 participants completed the Engaged in Community survey over approximately 3 months. Surveys were also collected through BYN-supported youth gatherings and events. Results were compared with the StS aggregate, which includes voices of young people involved in programs outside of the Battlefords and area communities.

Highlights

Overall, participating Battlefords and area youth indicated statistically significant lower community engagement compared to other Canadian youth (i.e., aggregate group). Integration into the community and having a sense of community were particularly low for Battlefords and area youth. Among numerous lower performance indicators, findings suggest that Battlefords and area youth understand what is happening in their community, participate and seek to become involved, and feel a part of their communities less than other youth. These findings also point to a low sense of belonging, a major risk variable for suicide.

Conclusions

The ultimate cultivation of meaningful opportunities for youth to participate, engage, and feel a sense of belonging remains imperative for the Battlefords and area communities. To this end, youth-oriented and research-informed actions alongside continued monitoring of youth engagement are vital. Future guiding questions and next steps are discussed.

Process and Tools to Date

The BYN chose a *Stepping Up* quantitative survey to discover trends and outcomes for Battlefords and area youth. 123 participants filled out the module used to evaluate the trends and outcomes:

- Engaged in Community tool examines the extent to which youth participating in the survey are engaged in their community.

Youth Serving Group	Stepping Up Modules	Other Sharing the Stories Tools
The Battlefords Youth Network	- Engaged in Community Module (n=123)	

The module consists of 15 questions.[1] All of the questions within the module used a 5-point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree) to determine how much participants agreed or disagreed with the statements.

The BYN data is graphed alongside the StS aggregate data, which includes youth voices from other programs across Canada. The StS aggregate provides a useful comparison to contextualize the results. Differences between the BYN outcomes and StS aggregate outcomes have been tested statistically[2].

For background about StS, please see Appendix I.

Organization of the Report

This report will be broken down into two sections:

Demographics: This section will give an overview and breakdown of the various demographics of youth who took part in the quantitative survey. The information in this section will be displayed as an infographic to allow for a visual representation of the data.

Engaged in Community Module: This section is a quantitative analysis of how youth answered the Engaged in Community Module and is supported by the use of graphs to allow for a visual representation of the data.

[1] Questions are grouped into statistically reliable sets. Reliability is a measure of internal consistency of a set of questions. In other words, each set of questions is good at measuring the related, but different aspects of what is being studied.

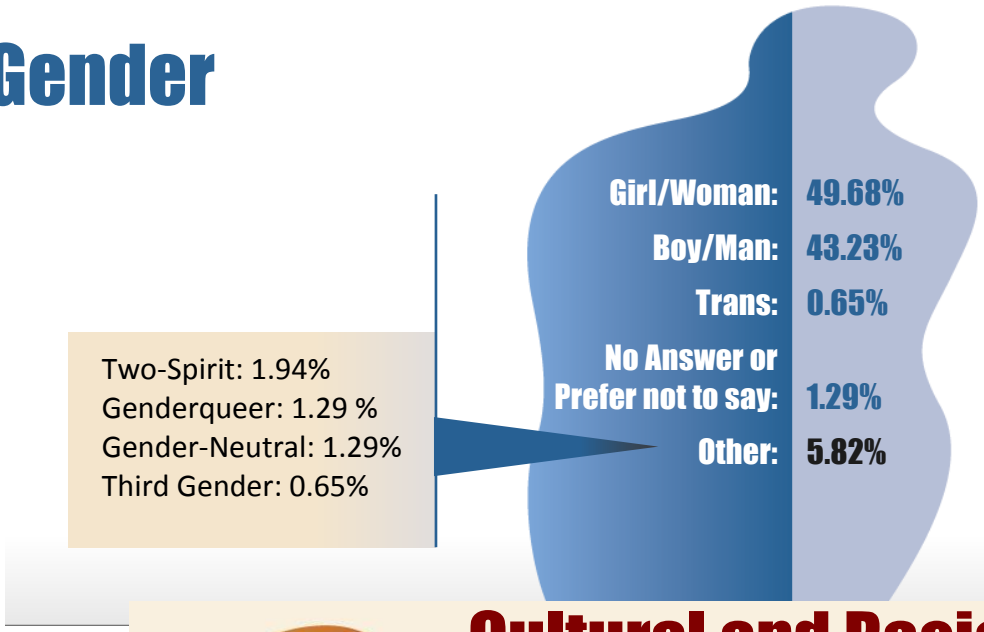
[2] If a result is statistically significant, it means that it is very unlikely that it occurred randomly. In other words, if the difference between your program and the StS aggregate is statistically significant, it means that there is a meaningful difference between your program and other programs.

Demographics

17.1
Average Age

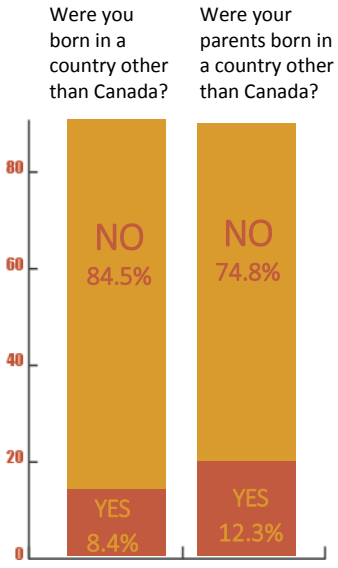
This section outlines the demographic breakdown of the Battlefords and area youth who participated

Gender

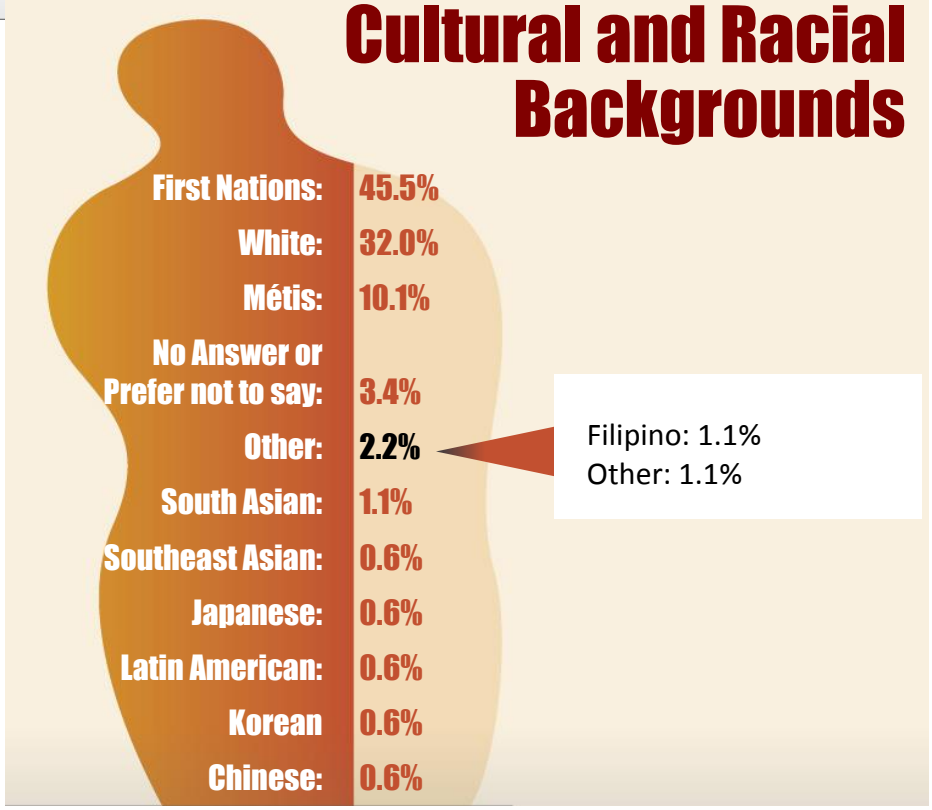


Country of Origin

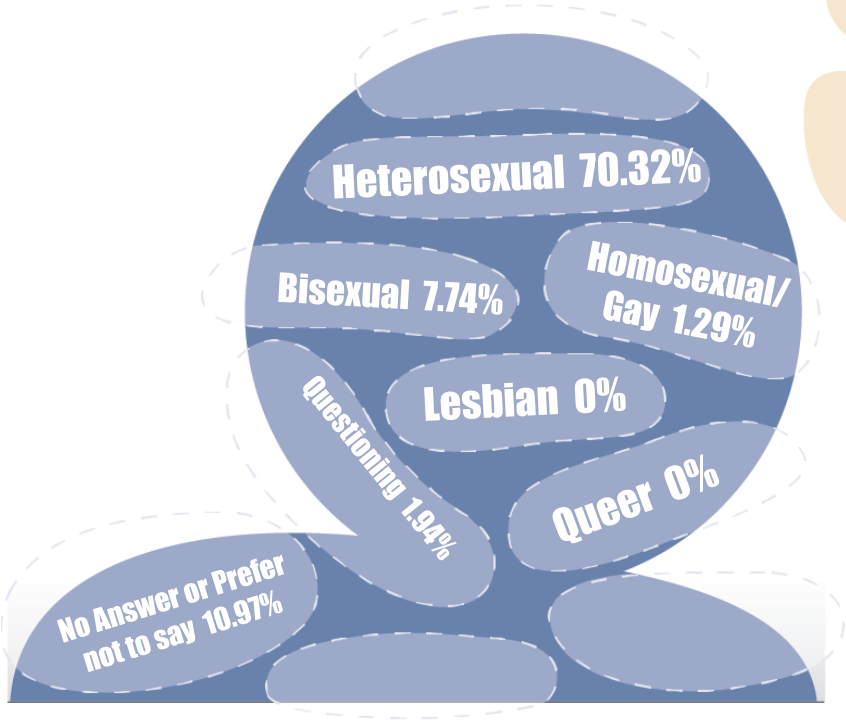
Participants were asked two questions to determine their country of origin.

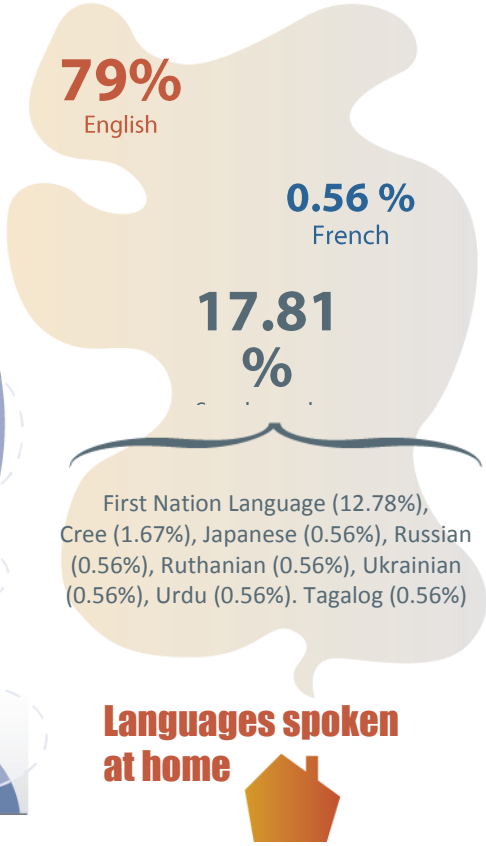


Cultural and Racial Backgrounds



Sexual Orientation

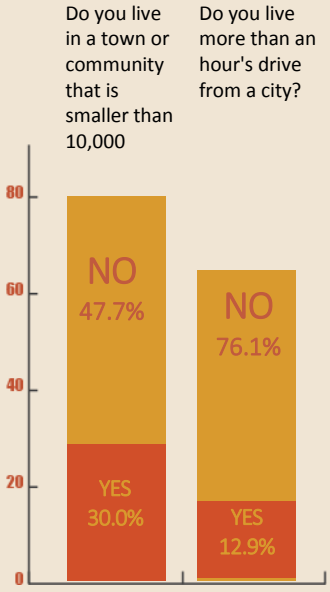




Languages spoken at home

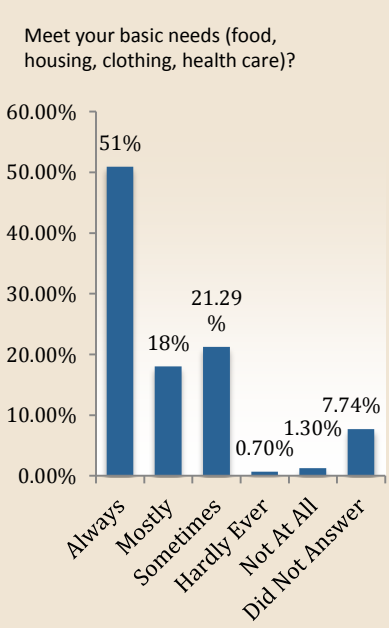
Rural or Urban

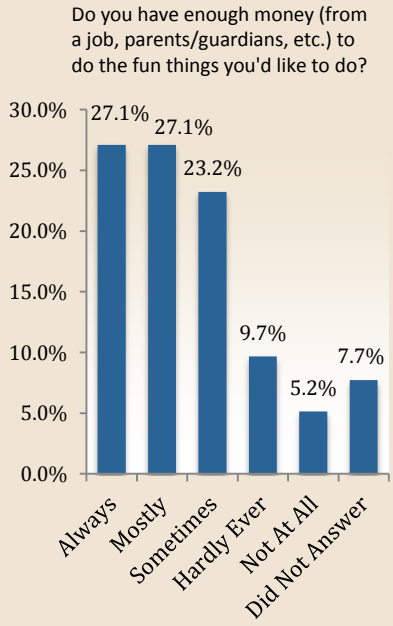
Participants were asked two questions to determine whether they lived in rural or urban areas.



Money for Basic Needs & Fun Activities

Finally, participants were asked the degree to which they had enough money to meet their basic needs and participate in fun things





Income differences between rural and urban youth

Youth who responded that they sometimes, hardly ever, or did not have enough income for basic needs did not correlate with living away from the city or living in a smaller community; youth in and outside cities were just as likely to respond that they didn't have enough money for basic needs. However, having less money for fun things was significantly correlated for both of these attributes (r=-.195, p=.015 & r=-.183, p=.023); youth living in a community with less than 10,000 people or living one hour or more from a city were more likely than youth who live in cities to answer they only sometimes, hardly ever or do not have money for the fun things they'd like to do.

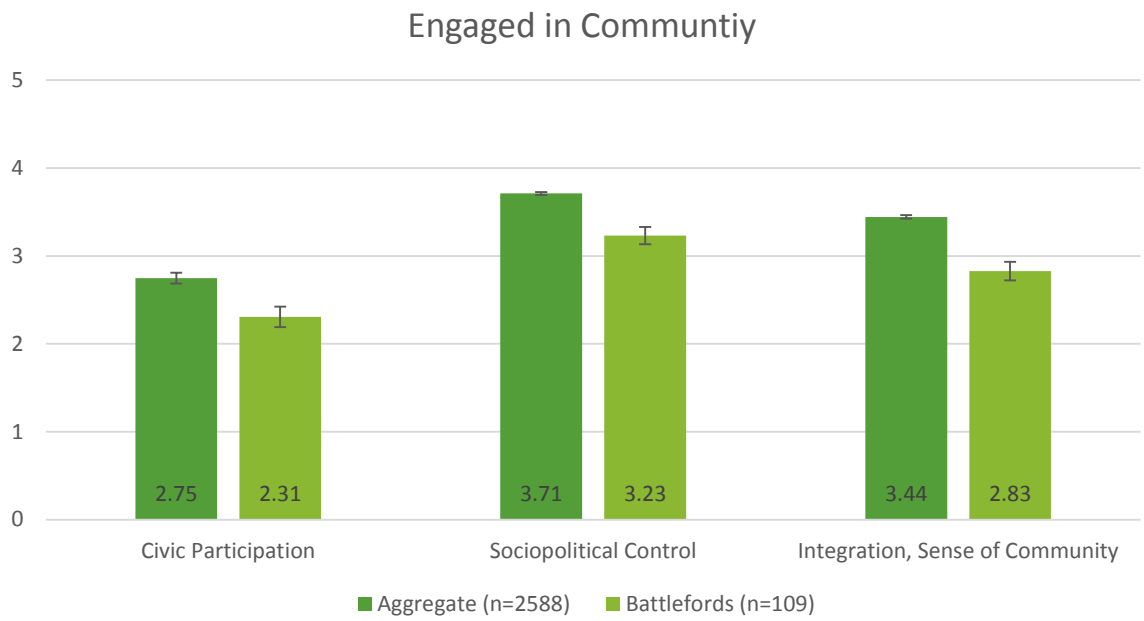
Results: Youth voice

The resulting data can be interpreted in different ways in order to support several conclusions. To frame this data, it is important to approach the data objectively while also making meaningful contextual connections. Ultimately, these are the voices of young people and they are their own most accurate interpreters.

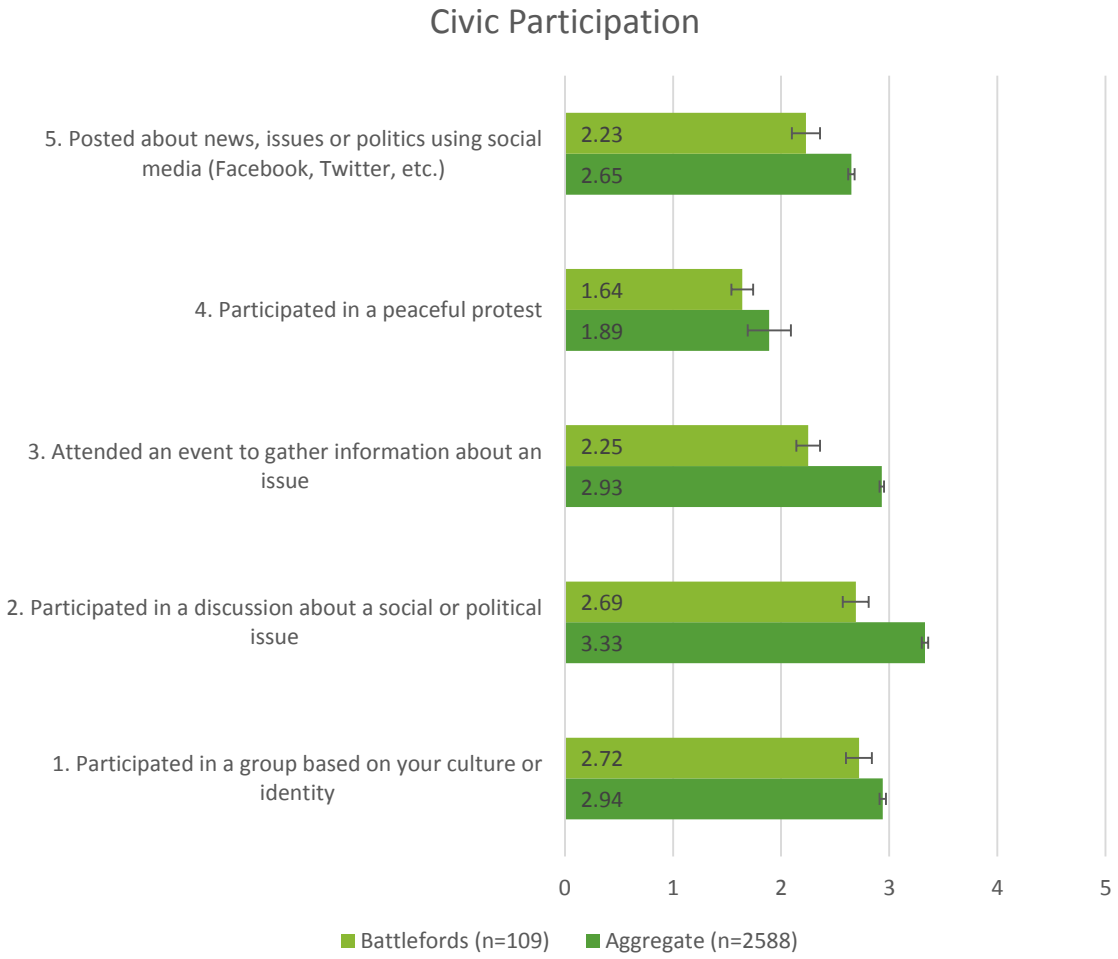
The Engaged in Community Module survey is a tool that is used to evaluate the degree to which youth feel they play a part in their community. Statistical analyses have been performed in order to establish if the differences between the Battlefords and area youth who participated and the StS aggregate data are significant. When differences are statistically significant, this implies that we can be very confident that the differences are not due to chance alone – that the differences are meaningful.

Engaged in Community

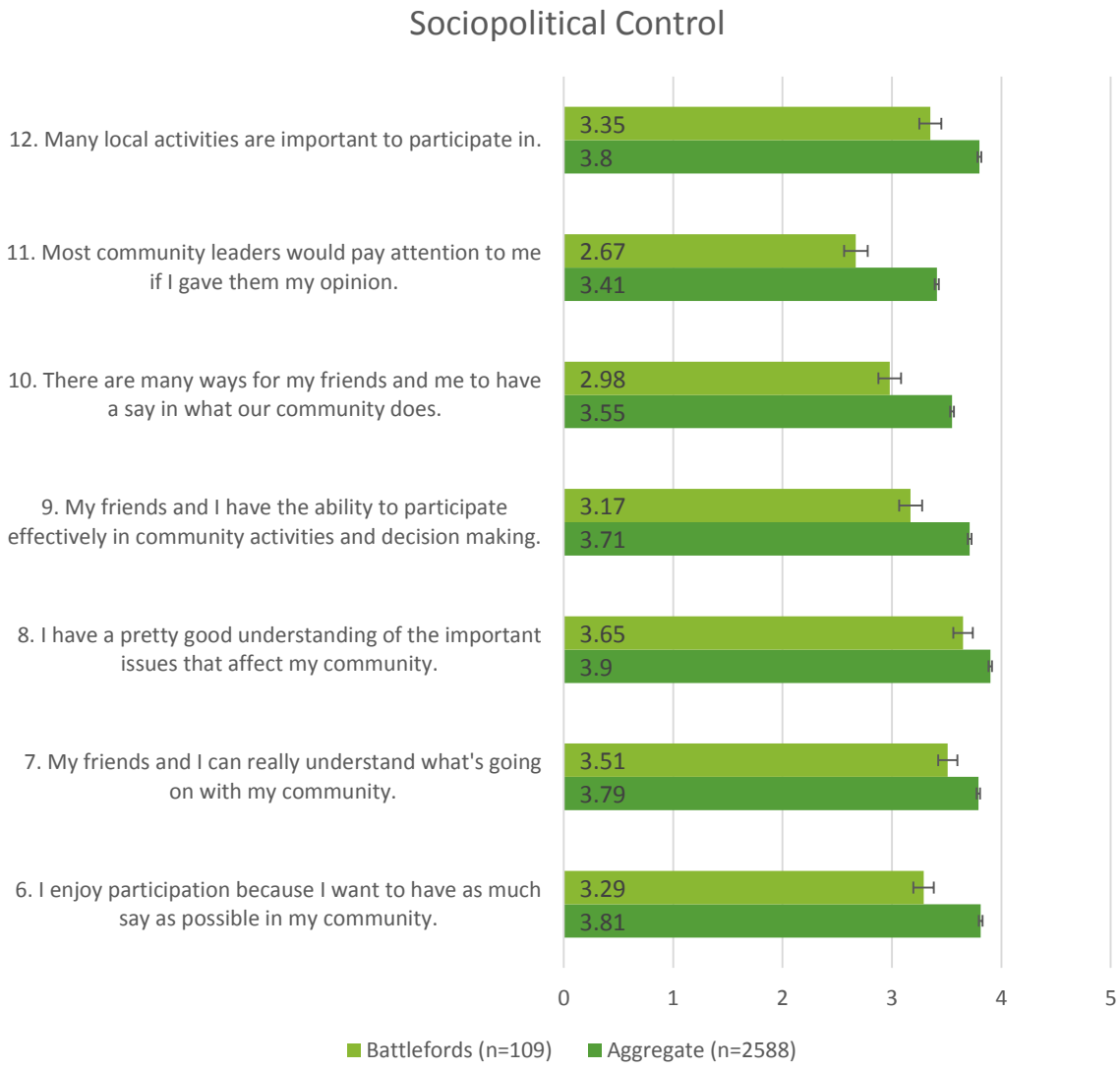
The evidence drawn from the voices of youth in the Battlefords and area suggest there are significant differences between their community and the aggregate. The module is divided into three key indicators: 1) Civic Participation, 2) Sociopolitical Control and 3) Integration, Sense of Community. These indicators are elements that, together, measure community engagement.



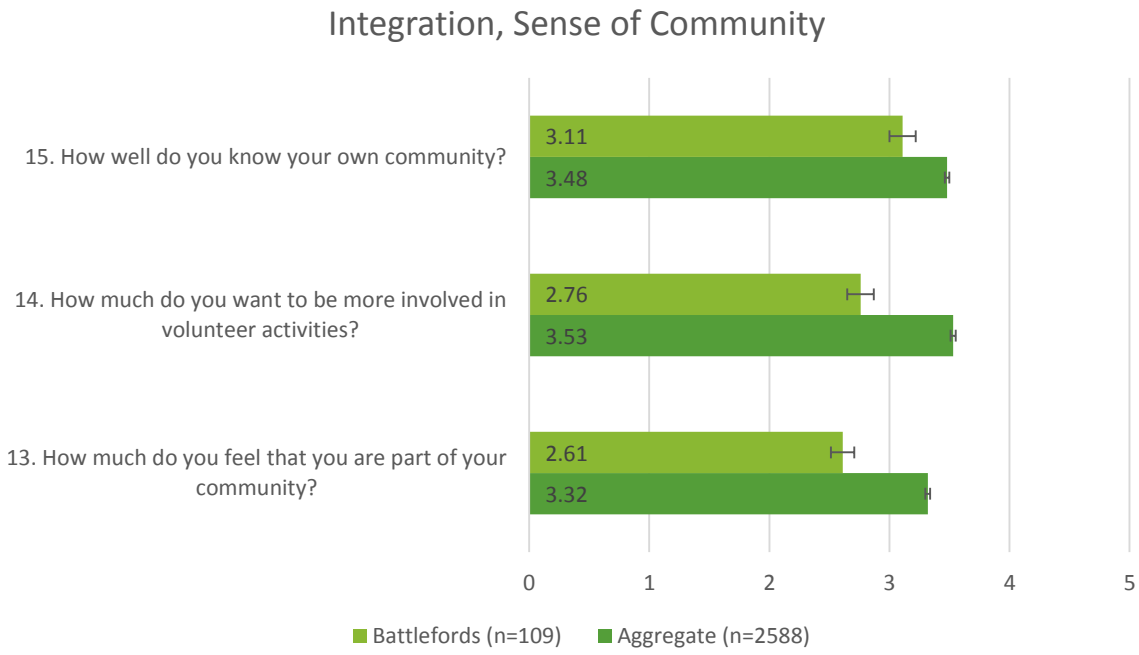
Overall, Battlefords and area youth who participated have lower average scores than the StS aggregate in all 3 key indicators. This lower tendency can be used as a baseline for improvement. The discrepancy is greatest in the third indicator, Integration, Sense of Community. The following graphs provide a more detailed breakdown.



The graph above is a question breakdown of the first indicator: Civic Participation. This indicator focuses on the activities youth do that connect them to their communities. The Battlefords and area youth participants scored significantly lower than the youth from the aggregate.



The graph above shows the largest indicator: Sociopolitical Control. This indicator focuses on how knowledgeable and influential youth feel in their communities. Again, the Battlefords and area youth participants scored significantly lower than the youth from the aggregate.



This last graph shows the final indicator: Integration, Sense of Community. This indicator examines young people's sense of belonging and connection to their communities. Once again, the Battlefords and area youth participants are on average scoring lower than the aggregate youth.

Through t-tests[3], the Battlefords and area youth participants can be compared with the aggregate statistically. All but one of the 15 survey questions were negatively and significantly statistically different. This means in large majority, Battlefords and area youth participants had statistically significant lower scores than youth in other programs across the country (StS aggregate).

Before moving on to the questions that achieved statistical significance, it is important to examine the question that did not:

1. Participated in a group based on your culture or identity ($t(2643)= -1.65$, $p= 0.099$)

This question pertains to whether or not an individual has been part of a group based on their culture or identity. Since this result did not achieve statistical significance, it suggests that Battlefords and area youth participants are engaged in cultural or identity groups to a similar extent as other youth across the country.[4]

[3] A t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. The larger the t-score, the more difference between the two groups.

[4] There are no significant differences in responses between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth for this question; Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth were just as likely to participate in a group based on their culture or identity.

As for the rest of the questions, all fourteen of them were statistically significantly lower. To see the full questionnaire breakdown accompanied by the t-test result, please refer to Appendix II. In the context of this section, there will be a focus on the 3 questions with the largest and smallest discrepancies to the aggregate.

Highest discrepancies

The questions that are the most different from the aggregate are the following:

> 11. Most community leaders would pay attention to me if I gave them my opinion. (t(2715)=-7.437, p=.000)
>
> 13. How much do you feel that you are part of your community? (t(2754)=-7.145, p=.000)
>
> 14. How much do you want to be more involved in volunteer activities? (t(2746)=-7.561, p=.000)

These questions are the lowest scoring questions in the module. These findings suggest participants are feeling less likely to be heard by community leaders, less a part of their community, less interested in volunteering than other youth who responded to this survey. Two of just three questions in the Integration, Sense of Community indicator are lowest in comparison to other youth in the aggregate, which might be an important finding about how youth are feeling as members of their communities.

Interestingly, the next largest difference between the Battlefords and area youth participants and the aggregate is for the extent they agree with the following statement:

> 10. There are many ways for my friends and me to have a say in what our community does.

Lowest discrepancies

The questions that are the most similar to the aggregate are the following:

> 4. Participated in a peaceful protest. (t(2633)=-2.575, p=.011)
>
> 5. Posted about news, issues or politics using social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). (t(2689)=-3.033, p=.002)
>
> 8. I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues that affect my community. (t(2811)=-2.849, p=.005)

It is important to understand although these questions are considered the most similar to the aggregate they are still (statistically) significantly lower. The first question that is the most similar to the aggregate asks the participant if they have ever been a part of a peaceful protest. It is important to consider this question has the lowest mean response for both the aggregate and the Battlefords and area youth participants. This could simply mean youth, in general, are not participating in peaceful protests that much. As for the second question, a reasonable observation would be Battlefords and area youth participants are posting on social media about their issues in a lower, but more similar fashion as youth in the aggregate sample. Once again,

the question averages for these elements in the aggregate are not very high. This could be telling us, in general, youth are not using social media as much to post about news, issues or politics. It could be interesting to inquire about their social media use and explore whether it can be a channel for increasing engagement in their community. The third question reflects upon the knowledge youth have regarding their own community. This is the highest scoring question of the module. Although it is still significantly lower than the aggregate, this question is a great measurement of how well youth are aware of their surroundings and the issues their community is facing.

In a further examination of differences between responses from Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, there was a significant difference regarding civic participation which is the first subscale of the Engaged in community measure ($t(107)=1.74$, $p=.003$): Indigenous youth were more likely to participate in civic activities than non-Indigenous youth.

Taken together, Battlefords and area youth understand their community and what is problematic, but they might not want to give their opinion because they think they will not be heard or taken seriously. This could be one of the reasons that influence their sense of being an important part of their communities and discourage them from volunteering or engaging further.

Discussion: Making meaning of the findings

Results from the Engaged in Community survey point toward low youth engagement amongst youth in the Battlefords and area, especially across the Integration and Sense of Community indicator. They are less likely to participate or feel like they are contributing to their community, less likely to feel they have meaningful influence on what happens in their community, and less likely to feel a sense of belonging to their community. More data is needed for a more complete picture of youth engagement (next steps for data collection are considered later in the discussion section). However, findings from this initial dataset coupled with present suicide prevention theory and youth engagement literature outline considerations for how the BYN might continue to create opportunities for youth-serving and youth-involved agencies to work better together, improve information channels, boost youth engagement, and support Battlefords and area youth to thrive.

Low Youth Engagement, Increased Suicide Risk

Low engagement findings may shed fresh light on the startling rise of youth suicide in the Battlefords and area. A body of youth engagement literature explains feeling engaged, or being involved in a meaningful activity with a connection to something greater than one's self (such as one's community), reduces risks for suicidal ideation (Armstrong & Manion, 2013; 2006; Ramey et al., 2010). According to a study with over 800 Canadian youth, when youth are at-risk of considering suicide, (for example, if they are feeling depressed or have low self-esteem) finding meaning in a regular activity they look forward to reduces the likelihood of suicidal thoughts (Armstrong & Manion, 2013). This connection was reinforced by another study involving over 5000 Canadian youth, which found young people's enjoyment in engaging activities that are meaningful, structured and social are important factors for predicting lower risks (such as disconnection, depression, or health concerns), which in turn, reduce likelihood of suicidal thoughts (Ramey et al., 2010).

The lack of youth engagement can be particularly challenging in rural communities, where there are limited opportunities or spaces for youth to be meaningfully involved, and barriers for youth to get to the opportunities that do exist. For example, in a study in a rural Canadian community, distance from school was related to higher suicidal ideation for boys and young men. In other words, the farther young men were from their schools, the less likely they were to be engaged in a meaningful activity, and the more likely they were to have suicidal thoughts (Armstrong & Manion, 2006).

Finer Variables of Youth Engagement: The Vital Need to Belong

Belonging, or one's sense of significant connection to others, is one factor and measure of youth engagement that is particularly important to suicide risk. Several findings within the Engaged in Community dataset indicate a low sense of belonging among Battlefords and area youth. For example, Battlefords and area youth participants were significantly and statistically lower than other Canadian youth (i.e., the aggregate) in feeling apart of their community, knowing and understanding what goes on their community, wanting to have a say of what happens in their communities, and participating in community activities. These initial findings point to an overall low sense of belonging among Battlefords and area youth.

The Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTS) is a leading suicide theory that places belonging at the heart of saving lives. IPTS has been used to understand suicide in the most vulnerable populations to suicide—veterans, clinical populations, and youth. Given IPTS' strong body of supporting research, the theory holds great promise for shedding fresh light on the present tragedies suffered by the Battlefords and surrounding communities, but also for what steps can be taken by the communities for future preventative efforts.

Alongside burdensomeness and capacity for suicide, belongingness is one of three essential variables to understanding suicide and prevention (Chu et al., 2017). A low, or even failed, sense of belonging stems from a complete lack of connection with family, friends, and others. Loneliness and feeling uncared for are debilitating symptoms of failed belongingness (Van Orden et al., 2010). When feelings of failed belongingness appear unshakable, taking one's own life can seem like the only way out (Chu et al., 2017).

IPTS' founding author, Thomas Joiner, outlines a promising starting point for preventing suicide. He champions an intentional focus on the innate needs undergirding burdensomeness and failed belongingness—effectiveness and belongingness. Joiner (2005) explains how belonging and effectiveness are the "key ingredients of the will to live" (p. 118). Tending to and improving these needs is an imperative for those especially vulnerable to suicide. Belonging is a particularly vital aspect of suicide prevention. Joiner (2005) explains how belonging is the "saving grace" of suicide's dark pull. If the need to belong stays kindled, "the will to live remains intact" (Joiner, 2005, p. 117).

Future Guiding Questions

Based on this report's findings taken with existing literature surrounding youth engagement, belonging, and suicide prevention, there are several questions that should be considered for future research and action with Battlefords and area youth. This section is not an exhaustive list of questions that can be derived from data and theory. Rather, the questions listed below are a starting place for a meaningful dialogue about youth engagement and suicide prevention.

- What opportunities presently exist in the Battlefords and area communities that foster meaningful youth engagement?
- What barriers limit Battlefords and area youth from engaging in these experiences?
- Where are the opportunities for the Battlefords and area communities to create spaces and opportunities that promote positive youth engagement?
- What are the individual, social, and system influences that make up Battlefords and area youth's sense of belonging?
- What relationships, experiences, and community factors thwart Battlefords and area youth's sense of belonging?

Next Steps in Research

The Engaged in Community Module provides an early snapshot and a baseline starting point that helps to understand youth engagement and youth suicide in the Battlefords and area communities. Based on these findings and academic literature, there is a strong case to be made for continuing to monitor and focus efforts in increasing youth sense of belonging and opportunities for meaningful engagement. Below are next step recommendations that would fill in knowledge gaps regarding Battlefords and area youth engagement and belonging. Further

exploration in these areas will facilitate practical actions to be taken by the BYN and community partners. All next step tools have been created by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement.

- Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit tool: Head, Heart, Feet, Spirit is an open-ended module that can be used by youth and adults in various ways and is flexible for reflecting on an experience of engagement, for evaluating the experience, and for providing feedback about particular community engagement activities. Specifically, the different components of the HHFS Sheet examine the cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of participants' experiences. This module is a holistic measure of engagement, containing questions that explore participants sense of belonging.
- Youth Engagement Qualities survey: The Youth Engagement Qualities survey focuses on the key youth program features that are associated most strongly in the academic literature with positive outcomes for youth and their communities.
- The Sharing the Stories youth program evaluation platform also includes other tested surveys and tools that measure relevant outcomes and indicators of community health, such as young people's feelings of safety, their experiences of healthy and close relationships, the presence of consistent and caring adults in their lives, and opportunities for informing decisions, etc. See www.sharingthestories.ca for more.
- Finally, focus groups or arts-based methods, such as photovoice, can provide youth with a way to share their experiences in more detail.

Overall, evaluation and research tools such as these are important for ensuring youth voices are gathered and heard, and by engaging youth in the process of making meaning, this process itself can serve to deepen their sense of belonging, contribution and influence in their communities.

Conclusion

This report showcases an initial snapshot of youth engagement for youth in Battleford, North Battleford, and surrounding First Nations communities. With the exception of participating in a group related to their culture or identity, participating Battlefords and area youth scored statistically and significantly lower across community engagement measures compared to aggregate youth.

Between the three key indicators of the Engaged in Community module, Battlefords and area youth expressed an especially low integration and sense of community. These findings spell out a dire need to focus on meaningful youth engagement and youth's sense of belonging. As reviewed in the Discussion section of this report, engagement and belonging are outlined by recent literature to be preventative factors of youth suicide. As such, future efforts by BYN and supporting community partners should focus on understanding and improving opportunities for youth to belong and participate in their community in meaningful ways. A combination of knowledge mobilization efforts taken by the BYN coupled with continued monitoring of youth engagement will lead to increasing engagement levels of young people in their community and provide a sense of direction for youth-led directives, projects, and actions.

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Appendix I: Sharing the Stories Background

The Students Commission of Canada (SCC) is the lead organization for the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE). CEYE is a network of youth, organizations, and academics focused on generating evidence and best practices on youth engagement programs, initiatives, and interventions. CEYE has developed a youth engagement definition for the Canadian context as well as a comprehensive youth engagement framework.

In 2011, the Students Commission of Canada identified a consistent gap in the capacity of Canadian youth-serving organizations to effectively tell their story. In fact, most organizations did not have the capacity or resources to rigorously evaluate their programs or compare the effectiveness of their programs with other organizations. As a result, there was a lack of Canadian evidence for youth engagement programs, initiatives, and interventions. Through support and funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation, the SCC launched the Sharing the Stories (StS) research and evaluation platform. StS includes reliable and valid quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools. More importantly, it includes a team of coaches and analysts who support organizations to effectively tell the story of their programs.

Sharing the Stories is based on a membership model. Each organization pays a relatively small fee to subscribe to the platform. They also agree to pool their data into an anonymized database so that comparisons can be made across programs using similar evaluation tools, processes, and measures. The platform's tools and processes are cleared by Queen's University's General Research Ethics Board (GREB). Queen's University acts as the academic anchor of the platform. StS now has 151 unique programs and organizations that subscribe to the platform.

Sharing the Stories Vision

Sharing the Stories is focused on building an anonymized database of information for youth, the youth sector, policy-makers, and funders. The information gleaned from the database supports:

1. Youth Voice: StS provides a platform for young people to have their voices heard in the programs and initiatives that work with them.
2. Youth Sector: StS provides a platform for organizations to learn about what's working in their programs and what might need to be improved.
3. Policy-Makers: StS identifies trends in the youth-serving sector and shares them with policy-makers so that policy can be informed by evidence.
4. Funders: The evidence generated from StS informs funders on the effectiveness of their programs.

Sharing the Stories is also grounded in organizing data collection and analysis to examine four types of impact:

1. Short Term Impact: This focuses on answering the question: What are the short-term outcomes (positive and negative) that occur as a result of the program and intervention? We collect data within two weeks of a program ending to demonstrate short term impact.
2. Long Term Impact: This focuses on answering the question: What are the long-term outcomes (positive and negative) that occur as a result of the program and

intervention? We collect data after 6 months of a program ending to demonstrate long term impact.

3. Individual Success Stories: This focuses on identifying individual success stories that occur as a result of sustained involvement. We track individuals and organizations over time to demonstrate the impact of a program and/or intervention.
4. Community Impact: This focuses on matching outcomes from the other three layers with population-level outcomes and/or changes. For example, looking at a neighbourhood that is receiving funding for a program and/or intervention and seeing if there are any changes in graduation rates.

Appendix II: Detailed statistics

Engaged in Community Questions	Statistics
2. Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue	$t(2691)=-5.151$, $p=.000$
3. Attended an event to gather information about an issue	$t(2687)=-5.630$, $p=.000$
4. Participated in a peaceful protest	$t(2633)=-2.575$, $p=.011$
5. Posted about news, issues or politics using social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	$t(2689)=-3.033$, $p=.002$
6. I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say as possible in my community.	$t(2796)=-6.044$, $p=.000$
7. My friends and I can really understand what's going on with my community.	$t(2733)=-3.126$, $p=.002$
8. I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues that affect my community.	$t(2811)=-2.849$, $p=.005$
9. My friends and I have the ability to participate effectively in community activities and decision making.	$t(2767)=-5.031$, $p=.000$
10. There are many ways for my friends and me to have a say in what our community does.	$t(2740)=-6.190$, $p=.000$
11. Most community leaders would pay attention to me if I gave them my opinion.	$t(2715)=-7.437$, $p=.000$
12. Many local activities are important to participate in.	$t(2734)=-4.399$, $p=.000$
13. How much do you feel that you are part of your community?	$t(2754)=-7.145$, $p=.000$
14. How much do you want to be more involved in volunteer activities?	$t(2746)=-7.561$, $p=.000$
15 How well do you know your own community?	$t(2763)=-3.294$, $p=.001$

Table 1: Questionnaire breakdown of statistically significant questions