

# SERVICES, SUPPORTS & SETBACKS:

## LEDGE RESEARCH REPORT

*A year-long initiative to gain understanding  
about the needs of young adults*

**LEDGE**  
LEADERSHIP

Researched & Written by Emjay Wright  
January to November 2022

The research project was made possible through a grant received from the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital Foundation Wellness Innovation Fund.

 **G&M HOSPITAL  
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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This report was prepared for Ledge Leadership and will be made accessible to other interested organizations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of Ledge Leadership, the funders, or the participating organizations.

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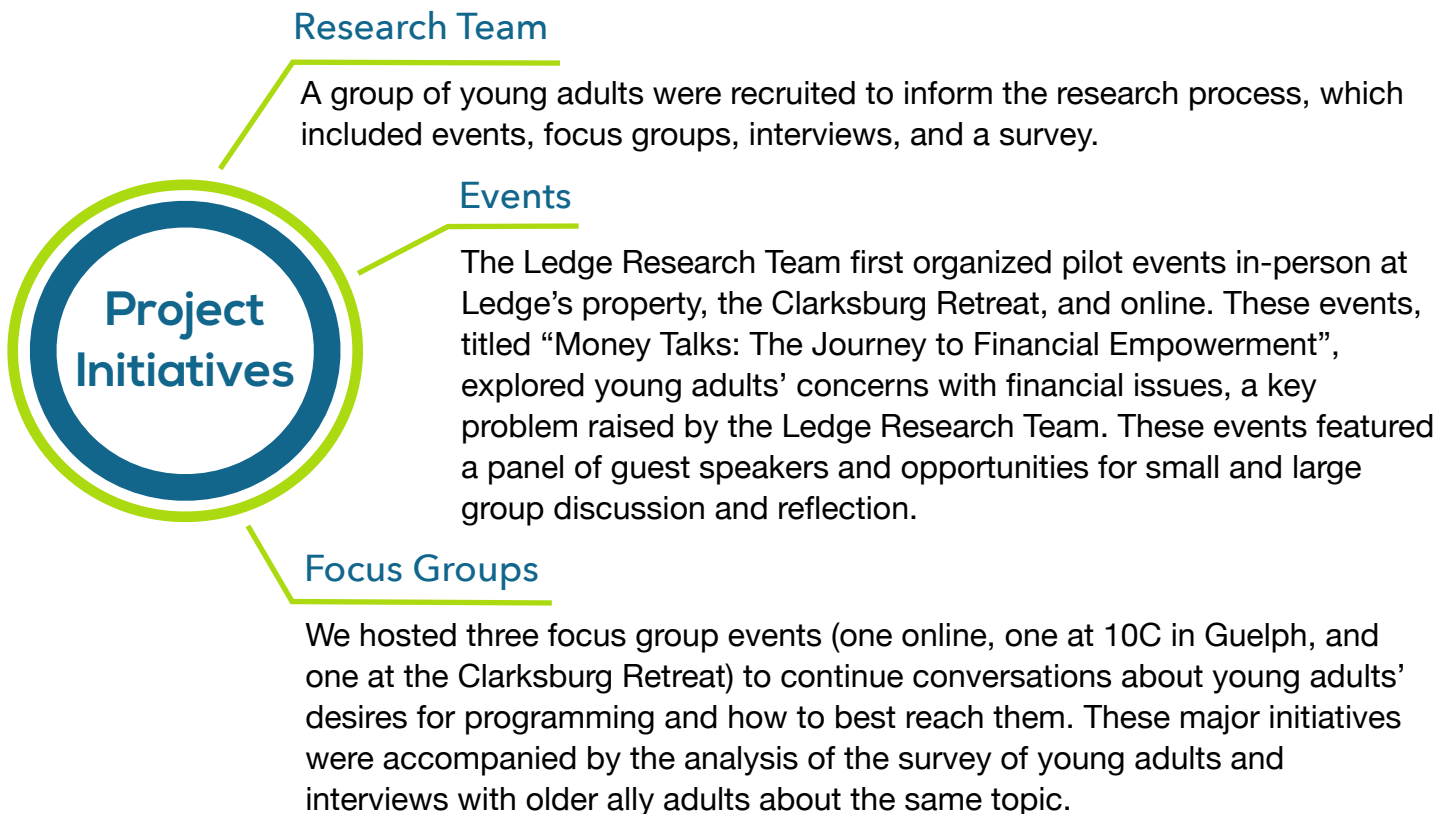
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# RESEARCH SUMMARY

Young adults aged 18 to 30 are in a liminal life stage. They are at the beginning of adulthood with societal expectations about adult behaviour and milestones, yet come from diverse and limited life experiences. Unlike children and more established or older adults, young adults have relatively few services designed to provide support before a crisis. Preventative services are created to help avoid mental and physical health crises, as well as foster material and social well-being. In 2022, the charity, Ledge Leadership, launched the Ledge Research Project, a year-long journey to gain insight into the needs of young adults, and curate preventative services to respond to those needs. The project included the following initiatives:



## 6 THEMES EMERGED FROM THE RESEARCH



While this report was developed for Ledge Leadership to guide their future work, much of the research is relevant to organizations that provide preventative support for 18-30 year olds.

For example, the Ledge Research Team provides a model for other organizations to engage young adults in the development of programming and collaboratively improve organizations.

# PEER-LED RESEARCH TEAM

the relationships that moved the project forward

In this report, we provide background on the project, the methods used, and the resulting key themes. The conclusion explores recommendations for Ledge Leadership and other organizations serving young adults.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

### Provide Multifaceted Resources

Young adults need a wide variety of program delivery options: in-person, online, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, text, audio, and video. Their issues are complex and require many options for content and programming to fully support their needs.

### Build Trust

Organizations need to build trust with young adults. Two key pathways to establishing trust are through employing them in positions of influence in the organization and by ingraining the organization in community spaces where young adults will learn more about them.

### Engage With Social Media

Having a robust social media presence and website is key to connecting with young adults. Young adults need to understand organizations well and/or have a personal connection in order to attend their programs.

### Provide Community

Organizations can leverage their resources to build spaces and programs to provide young adults with access to community, which they need and desire.

### Help Accessing Support

Young adults value resources that provide support in navigating the cost and complexity of mental health networks.

### Strengthen Capacity

Organizations could impact more young adults by orienting programs toward building capacity in young adults to support others as well as themselves.

# INTRODUCTION

Ledge Leadership is a charitable organization that envisions a world where people lead relationally and share power. Throughout the organization's history, they have worked with teams and individuals from diverse backgrounds, including community groups, businesses, nonprofits, faith communities, and learning institutions. Ledge provides whole-person training to help people discover their inner abilities, build their capacity for change making, and develop their self-leadership and ability to lead others. Ledge is particularly focused on working with young adults aged 18-30 to provide preventative support for their whole-person well-being.

In January 2022, Ledge Leadership began a year-long journey exploring the nuances of

current concerns and needs of young adults. This project was essential for ensuring the resources Ledge Leadership offers to effectively reach and support young adults.

While resources are available for people in crisis, there is a significant gap of non-therapy resources aimed at improving the well-being of young adults who are struggling, but not in desperation. Ledge offers preventive support of this nature. Through this research, Ledge hopes to inspire other organizations to find pathways to provide their own forms of preventative support for this age group.

## The Research Project was Guided by 3 Core Questions:

- 1 What are the primary concerns for young adults (ages 18-30)?
- 2 What would help young adults navigate the challenges they face, and thrive during this life stage?
- 3 What are recommendations for Ledge related to future young adult programs and use of their property, the Clarksburg Retreat?

The project was led by peer researcher, Emjay Wright, and was executed in several stages, including a young adult research team that organized pilot events, focus group events, and other research initiatives. This report explores the different stages, followed by core themes that emerged from the work we did, and a conclusion outlining recommendations to all organizations intending to support young adults as well as specific recommendations to Ledge Leadership.

The research project was made possible through a grant received from the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital Foundation Wellness Innovation Fund.

# PROJECT TIMELINE

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report



# METHOD: Ledge Research Team

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report

The research began with the Ledge Research Team (LRT) composed of 7 young adults living across Southern Ontario. They worked together to answer the core research questions and create initiatives to benefit their peers. These young adults were found through direct invitations by organizations that work with young adults in Ledge's network including Georgian College, LaunchPad and HirePower, as well as through social media and email outreach. Ledge conducted conversational interviews with all who applied, discussing their interest in the project, introducing them to the organization, and exploring what is important to them in their lives. The team members were selected and worked together from February to August.

The LRT explored the core problems that people aged 18-30 face in their lives and planned two events to support those challenges. The team met virtually on a weekly basis, beginning in February, in-person for the first time in April for a team building weekend at the Clarksburg Retreat, and again for the events hosted in May. A shared intention of young adult betterment and support guided the team's work. Many members of the team said it was their first opportunity to invest time into serving their own age group, and how much they valued the experience.

*“The greatest improvement that LRT has delivered [to my life] is the way in which relationships are valued and shared. This overarching idea is endorsed across all participants and individuals who associate with Ledge Leadership. I felt that LRT is more about how we can impact each moment than each event. This unconscious shift has really affected the way I go about being a leader, coworker, friend, family member, and overall human being.”*  
- Nicholas Manglal-lan

A general need expressed by the LRT was for intentional space for young adults to understand themselves and build community with one another. This idea of wellness through community will be echoed throughout the research report. Other topics we discussed included:

- Financial Concerns
- Need for Physical Space
- Fear of Climate Change
- Life Uncertainty
- Need for Cross-Cultural Connections
- Grief
- Social Media

The structure and purpose of the LRT provides a model that organizations can draw from to empower young adults to take action towards bettering the mental health of their communities. The team was not only beneficial for the young adults who attended our events, but was transformative for the members themselves.

*“Ledge Leadership does not focus on hierarchies and power of authority. Rather, they emphasize the benefits of sharing our stress levels and gratitudes with the team, they encourage participants to lead themselves through supporting individuals' strengths and passions, and they create cohesive, collaborative environments for growth. I'm proud of the work we all did together. I deeply appreciated the opportunity to connect with young adults in varying fields and vicariously learn through their contributions.”* - Sarah Ortiz

The LRT became a community, with relationships formed separate from the work, and hope for the future created from the purpose shared in the work together. A major relational turning point for the group occurred



during the in-person team building weekend retreat. This experience solidified the connections that were already developing. The team was significantly impacted by the culture of Ledge Leadership as an organization and how that manifested in the team. The emphasis on relational work culture and whole person leadership caused them to think differently about the other teams they are a part of in their work and school lives.

*“Connecting with young people to discover what they need right now gave me a sense of direction and decreased my sense of helplessness in these difficult times.” - Samantha Tome*

Throughout the LRT’s internal conversations and their external discussions with young adult communities across Ontario, the problems of affordable housing, hopelessness with debt and the economy, and a general lack of knowledge around how to manage finances were consistently identified as main concerns. Considering these financial concerns led to the planning of Money Talks.

## MONEY TALKS: The Journey to Financial Empowerment

### EVENT GOALS



**Provide a welcoming space where young adults could become more empowered, financially distinct from traditional financial literacy environments.**



**Meet together in a space that was safe to process financial concerns and explore the impact of these challenges on their mental and emotional health.**



**Create a fun community space that would reduce feelings of loneliness through connections with others who shared their concerns.**

Money Talks was implemented both virtually and in-person at the Clarksburg Retreat. Each event brought together a group of 5-10 young adults who entered into open group conversations with professionals from a variety of financial areas including real estate and financial advising. These events provided intimate and fluid spaces for conversation and connection, in contrast with events in larger groups that the participants had attended in the past.

The attendees, guests, and Ledge staff all greatly appreciated the safe space Ledge and the LRT created to explore finances, often considered a taboo topic. They also appreciated the intimacy of the group, especially during the in-person event which developed into a small supportive community by the end of the day. The virtual event was a

success, but the in-person experience at the Retreat allowed people to come together even more significantly. The openness and warmth of the Clarksburg Retreat allowed for a vulnerable, intimate, and safe space in which participants, guests, and staff were comfortable.

Both sessions of Money Talks concluded with a lengthy sharing circle in which the participants could express their feelings and experiences about financial issues privately with their peers, and also evaluate the event’s successes and areas for improvement. All who participated appreciated the opportunity to provide immediate feedback about the event.

# METHOD: Focus Groups & Workshops

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report

The LRT concluded in August 2022, which led to the final steps of the Ledge Research Project. The final part of the research consisted of focus groups, interviews, and the analysis of a survey created by the LRT, all of which aimed to explore and fully understand the needs of young adults.

To conduct the focus groups, Ledge Leadership hosted three events for young adults throughout October called “**Services, Supports & Setbacks**”.

The first event took place in an urban environment at the co-working space, 10C in Guelph, the second in a rural location at the Ledge Clarksburg Retreat in Clarksburg, and the final event virtually through Zoom.

## Services, Supports & Setbacks had two purposes:

1

### RESEARCH GATHERING

First, the focus groups were aimed at directly qualitatively answering the research questions. This included exploring solutions to young adult concerns, and the barriers that exist to those solutions.

each event in two parts, before and after the focus group conversations.

Between all three events, 22 young adults attended and took part in the focus groups. Each event provided a wholly distinct experience. This uniqueness was due to the shifts in workshop material in response to ongoing participant feedback, as well as the diversity of each location where the events were hosted.

All participants gave incredible feedback, not only about the focus group, but also related to the workshop content.

2

### EDUCATIONAL OFFERING

Second, the attendees received a sample of what Ledge Leadership offers. Ledge Leadership staff members delivered a workshop called “Being Self-Led” designed for young adults to understand their reactive habits and explore healthy ways to lead themselves through life. The workshop was presented at



PEER-LED  
FOCUS  
GROUP  
EVENTS

# METHOD: Additional Research Initiatives

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## Survey

Alongside the in-depth conversations in the focus group events, a survey was developed collaboratively by the LRT and ran from May to October, aimed at answering the same research questions with a broader group of young adults across Ontario. Ninety-five individuals responded to the survey from a diverse range of backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. The results of the survey were used as the main categories that were applied to the rest of the research, providing the main problems, desired solutions, and perceived barriers that young adults face.

95  
respondents  
completed the  
survey

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Citizenship

- 55% of respondents identified as a child of Canadian citizens
- 20% of respondents identified as a child of first generation immigrants and/or refugees
- 11% of respondents identified as a first generation immigrant
- 5% of respondents identified as a child of Canadian citizens & first generation immigrants and/or refugees
- 1% of respondents identified as an international student
- 1% of respondents identified as Indigenous
- 1% of respondents identified as a first generation immigrant & child of Canadian citizens
- 1% of respondents identified as a first generation immigrant & child of first generation immigrants

### Age

- 15% of respondents were ages 18-21
- 71% of respondents were ages 22-25
- 5% of respondents were ages 26-30

### Gender

- 62% of respondents identified as women
- 28% of respondents identified as men
- 5% of respondents identified as non-binary

### Sexual Orientation

- 57% of respondents identified as heterosexual
- 22% of respondents identified as bisexual
- 7% of respondents identified as queer
- 4% of respondents identified as straight/bi-curious
- 1% of respondents identified as pansexual
- 1% of respondents identified as demisexual
- 1% of respondents identified as gay/pan-curious

### Location

- 51% of respondents live in an urban community
- 36% of respondents live in a suburban community
- 14% of respondents live in a rural community

### Disability

- 81% of respondents identified as not having a disability
- 18% of respondents identified as having a disability

## Older Adult Ally Interviews

To complement and contrast what young adults shared about their own needs, Emjay was interested in hearing the impressions of young adult needs from adults older than the 18-30 target range who serve and work with young adults. Emjay hosted conversations with 5 older adults throughout the year, with most articulating similar concerns and gaps in service as young adults highlighted throughout the rest of the research. The only issue expressed by older adults that was not often discussed by young adults was the need for physical and accessible public spaces for young adults to gather and connect.

# RESULTS: Research Themes

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report

The research initiatives, from initial conversations with the Ledge Research Team, to the conclusion of the survey, have been amalgamated into the core themes and conclusions of the project. All the data was impressively aligned, with six core themes emerging and a clear pathway for young adult support to recommend to Ledge and other organizations.

## 1 Complexity of Young Adult Concerns

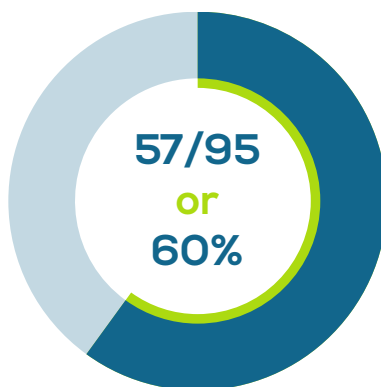
The most dominant idea expressed throughout the research is that young adults are struggling with mental health issues. These struggles include anxiety, depression, addiction, loneliness, and fear of an uncertain future.

*“[I’m concerned about] feeling connected and supported, stressed about the state of the world/our collective future” - Survey Respondent*

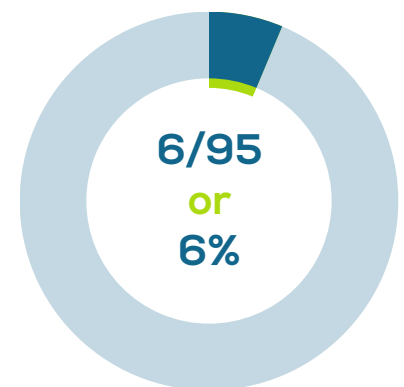
Young adults’ physical health was also commonly mentioned. Accompanying and amplifying these health concerns are financial and career instability, systemic frustrations, lack of access to community, and societal frustrations with public bigotry and general inaccessibility for marginalized groups and people with disabilities.

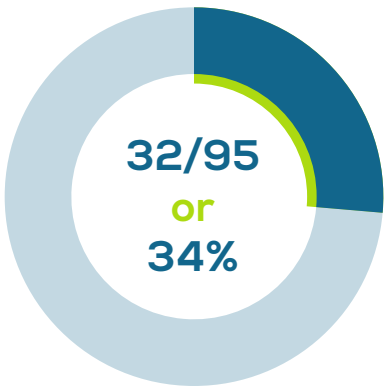
*“My ability to make enough money to support myself, whether I’ll find fulfillment in my job, being able to relax” - Survey Respondent*

Mental health was the dominant theme of the survey, with 57/95 of respondents saying it was a part of their well-being they were concerned about.



However, mental health was referenced in only 6/95 surveys when young adults were asked about the best possible program to impact their well-being.





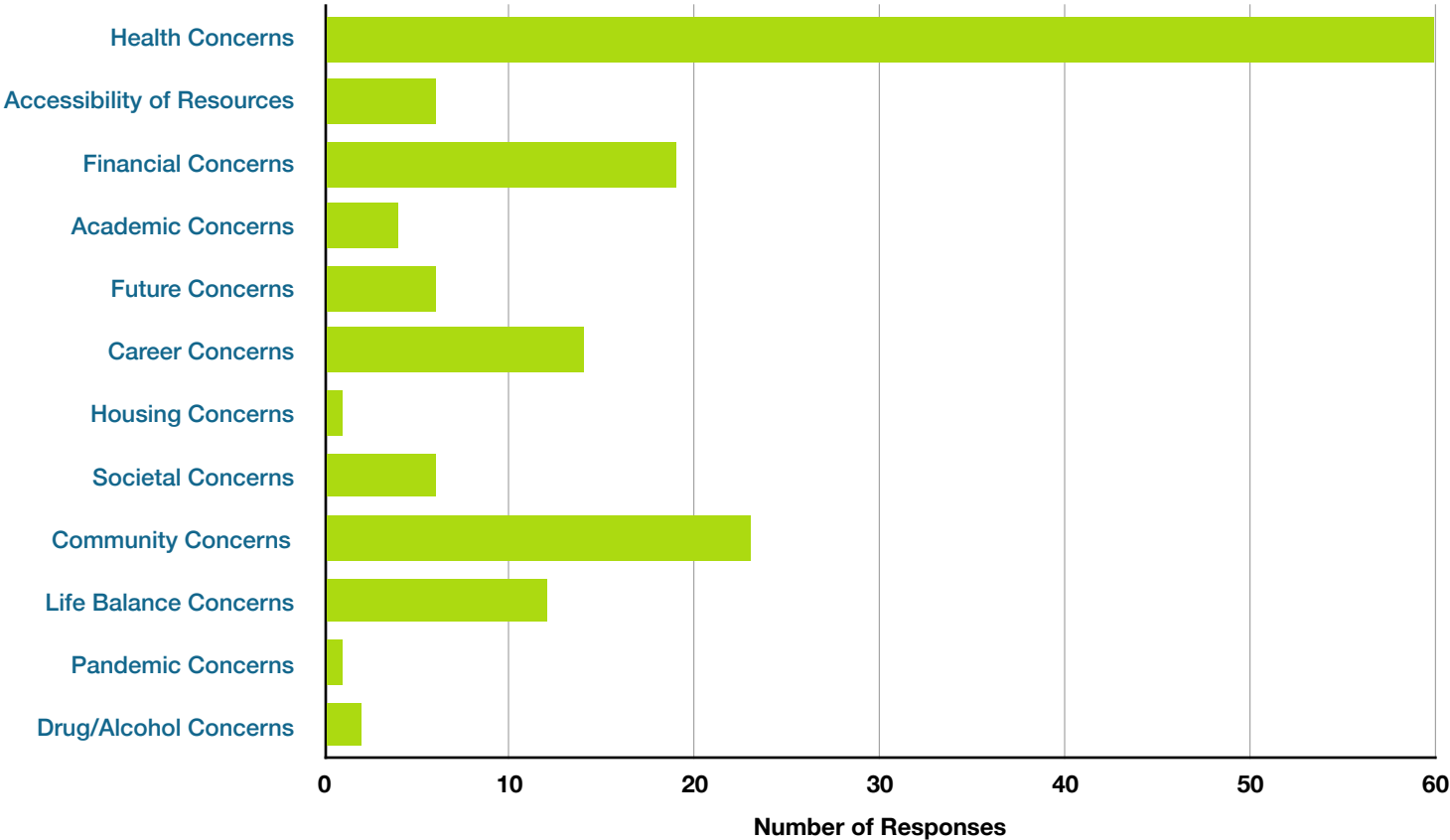
32/95 of respondents said that physical health is part of their well-being concerns.

The chart below shows how many of the highlighted problems were divided between other issues.

*“Consistency of support, personal action to take on well-being, dependency on support, overall health, ability to access the right care, waitlist time” - Survey Respondent*

The issues young adults face are multitudinous and complex. Adding to that complexity is the fact that young adults are deeply aware that most in their communities are struggling. In order to not burden others, they often minimize their own emotional difficulties. Thus, young adults may not have a full understanding of the problems their peers face and are unable to support one another. As a result, many individuals feel isolated in their problems.

### What aspects of your well-being concern you the most?



# 2

## Barriers to Accessing Support



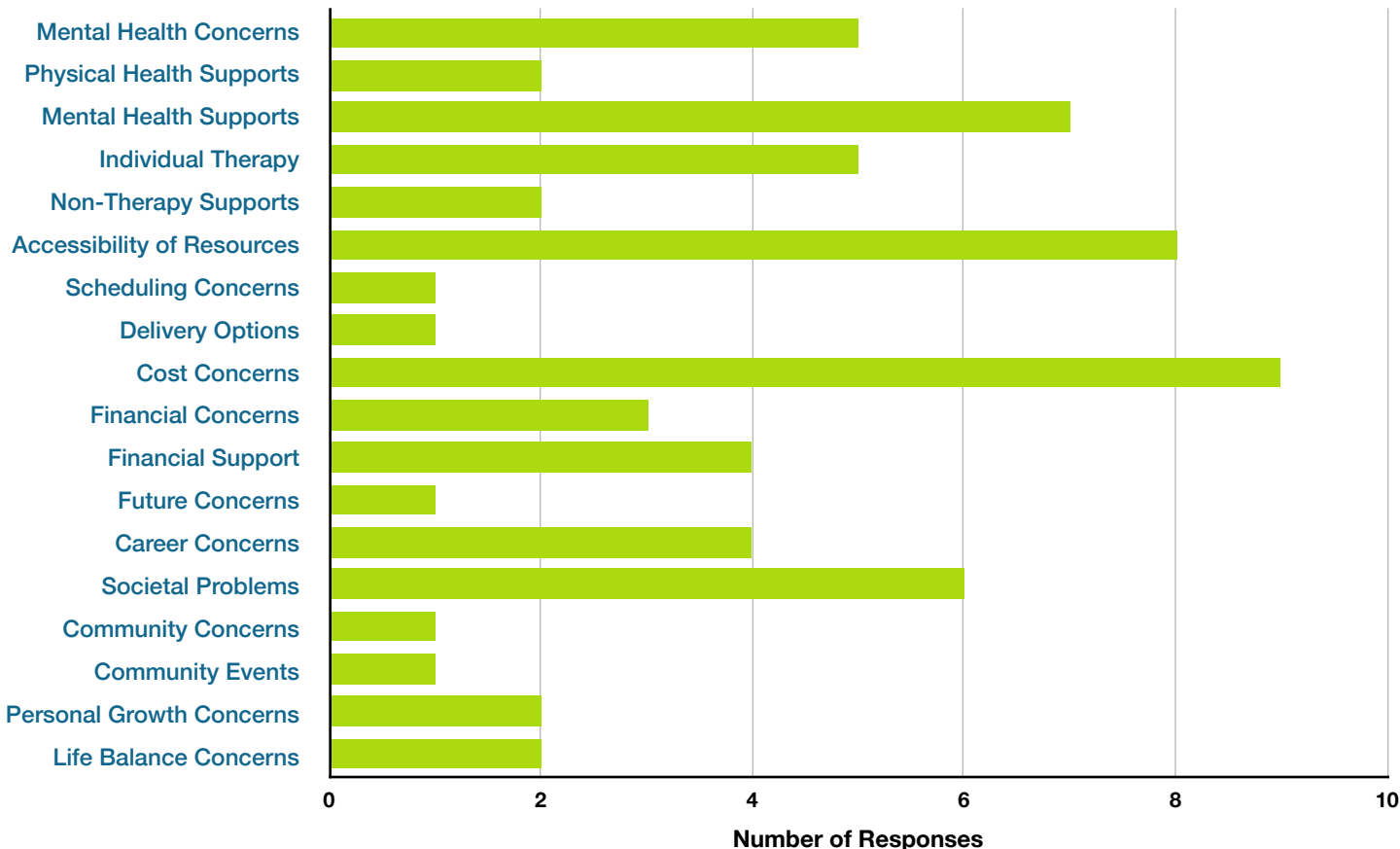
Many focus group participants struggled with the accessibility of mental health resources. Almost everyone wanted a therapist but most could not access one for a variety of reasons. The barriers included the high cost, 3-6 month wait times, or needing a referral from a doctor. Moving through the systems to find support is laborious, with few resources in place to assist with navigating this complex network.

Mental health services were often discussed as inaccessible by the survey respondents, primarily because of cost. The high cost of resources was the most dominant accessibility issue that was mentioned in the survey when

respondents were discussing general concerns, gaps in services, and the qualities of the best possible program for their support.

*“I’ve had issues getting certain healthcare. [...] I had to get a family doctor, so now I technically have one, but they are in my hometown which is two hours away. I don’t actually go to see them, it’s not really that type of support. To get one in [the city that I live in] is an over 6-month long waitlist, so it’s not worth it. It doesn’t feel accessible in that sense.” - Focus Group Participant*

### Are there any other concerns or gaps in services that you have not mentioned?



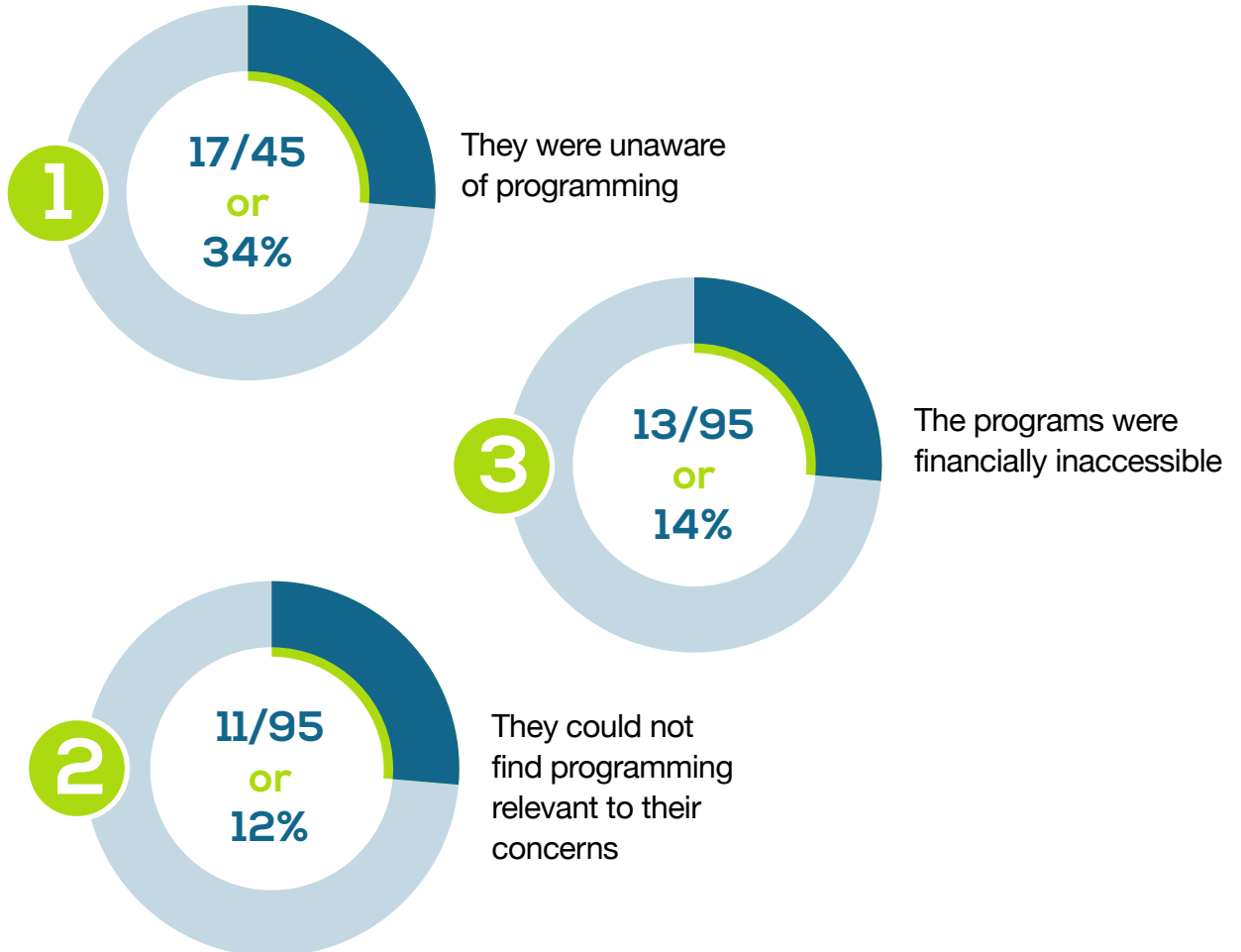
The primary reasons that survey respondents did not access resources were that they were unable to find programs related to their concerns, they were unaware of programming that could help them, or programs were inaccessible financially.

*“Sometimes I feel like [therapy] can be patronizing and categorizing me with others with my same disabilities. But it doesn't come from a place of malice. Sometimes I don't feel like I can make progress because I don't feel trusting of the counsellor yet, but it's just hard to speak about deeper issues in general for me” - Survey Respondent*

take an unbearable amount of time and effort. The difficult journey to get support often negatively impacts an individual’s mental health, making them feel that the process requires more effort than it’s worth to receive support. Young adults also have self-imposed barriers. Some hesitate to attend mental health programming, because they do not want to take a place from someone who may need the resource more. Additionally, as was learned from the experience with low attendance at the Clarksburg Retreat events, young adults are hesitant to travel outside their personal context to access resources. The individuals who attended the events at the retreat had a previous personal connection with someone who was attending as well.

In the focus groups, it was discussed frequently that finding a therapist who works for you can

**The top three reasons respondents gave for not attending programming:**



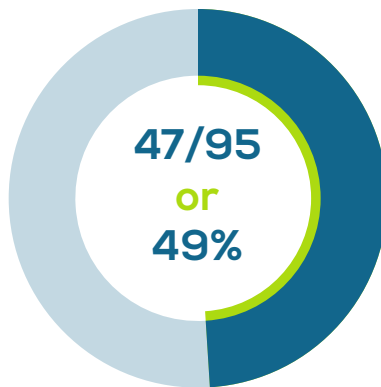
## 3

# Distrust of Institutions

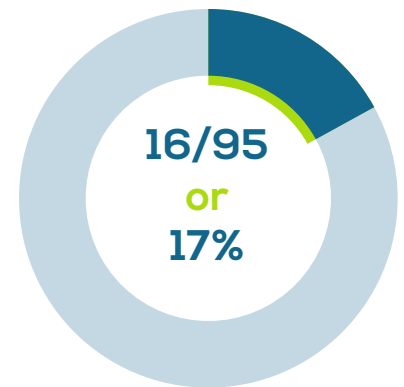
Young adults in the focus groups expressed much distrust for the institutions that position themselves as supportive.

*“I think one of the big factors distrusting any organization or program or company or group or person is just the fact that it is an organization based in a capitalist society, and I think that any time money is involved that is already an ulterior motive.” - Survey Respondent*

Among survey respondents, 47/95 had accessed a program, service, or event for their well-being in the last 2 years



Only 16/95 said that a mental health support service was a main source of support for their well-being



Medical institutions were often described in the focus groups as unwelcoming and unsafe for LGBTQ2S+ individuals and inaccessible and corrupt based on personal experiences. Mental health initiatives in high school were seen as ineffective. There are many resources in post-secondary institutions, but they can often feature long wait times and are inherently untrustworthy to some young adults.

In general, capitalism makes young adults skeptical of many organizations, with questions about the underlying motivations for support offered. This is especially true of health and educational institutions, and is a distinct barrier that some organizations may have trouble overcoming. However, nonprofit and charitable organizations were seen as more trustworthy than profit-driven institutions.

*“I’ve seen well-being centred events advertised; for some reason I don’t trust them. I don’t really think they’re meant for me, or I think they’re meant to be for show... By for show, I mean from a university or institution perspective, universities in particular can be a really harmful environment, and they have been for me. I think that they’re somewhat aware that they are harmful environments and they do a lot of things to cover their ass so to speak. I feel like a lot of these well-being centred events and rooms and even therapists at the university are not for us, but they’re for the media and for [the university’s] reputation. They’re not even for me to go to, they’re for display.” - Focus Group Participant*

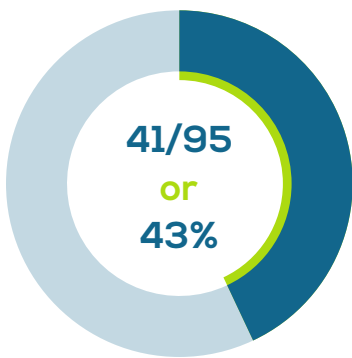


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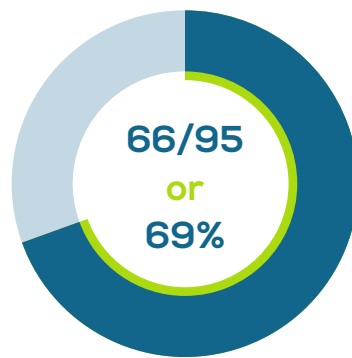
# Wellness Through Community



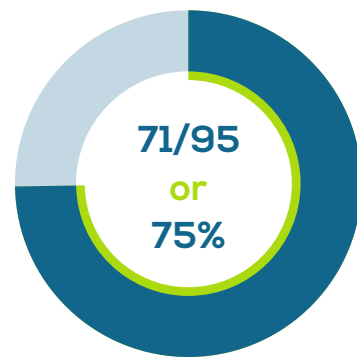
Throughout the research, community was almost as common a topic as mental health. Young adults consistently articulated their isolation from community and need for deeper relationships. When describing the best possible program to support them, ideas of community were the most dominant theme.



41/95 of respondents referenced community or relationships as being essential in programming, events, or services



66/95 of respondents find support for their well-being through family



71/95 of respondents find support for their well-being through friends

In a post-lockdown world, young adults are still in the process of rebuilding their connections and community after losing direct access to those relationships for a number of years. As a result, community oriented programming and resources are desired. Events or programs with opportunities for connections with others were often articulated as beneficial to young adult well-being, regardless of whether the event concerned mental health.

*“So much is individualized when really, as humans, we need others for support sometimes.”*  
- Survey Respondent

In the focus groups, many said that they felt much less alone with their problems when they could discuss them with their peers. Young adults will benefit in many ways if resources can be oriented around bringing people together, rather than supporting people in isolation.

*“[The best program for my well-being] is just general community involvement, facilitating music events, facilitating spaces that people can go to and having resources so that they don’t have to be scared for whatever reason, but making it for fun and pleasure and relaxation [...] having [a] range of different activities, having space where people can come together and do what they need.”* - Focus Group Participant

# 5

## Need for Holistic Support

Throughout the survey and focus groups, young adults regularly referenced the need for holistic options for their mental health support. This need came through regular references to the multiple dimensions of well-being: mental, emotional, physical, contextual, and spiritual. However, holistic support was also specifically requested due to the wide variety of issues young adults are facing and how interrelated those issues can be.

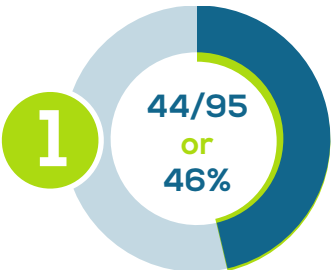
*“[The best program would be] holistic, it would be able to connect on all the different facets of health and well-being, and one thing that I would really value, is understanding that we’re affected by greater forces. Capitalism will affect our well-being, the socio-economic and material conditions we live inside of will affect how well we deal with everything that’s going on and how we interact with*

*mental health. [An organization] being aware of that would make it easier to help people.” - Focus Group Participant*

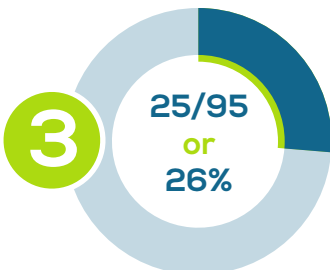
Mental health was rarely directly referenced when survey respondents discussed what would give them a more fulfilling life. Instead, what was discussed more frequently was a desire for financial support, support for career concerns, and personal life skills development. These ideas point to the possibility that young adults recognize that mental health is influenced by social situations and that support with external issues will improve their internal conflicts and frustrations.

*“The best program would be something therapy based that included general life skills support. Maybe somewhere you could go see a doctor but also receive help writing a resume.” - Survey Respondent*

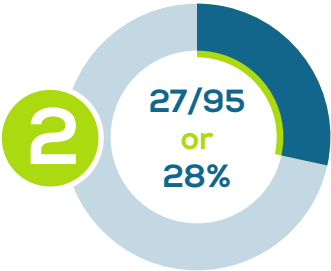
The following are the top four responses participants provided when asked what would help them engage in a more fulfilling life:



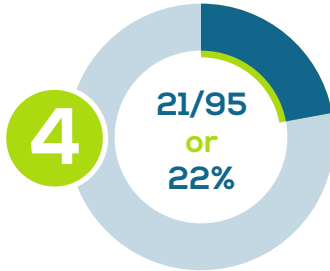
Access to community and relationships



Support for career concerns



Support for financial concerns

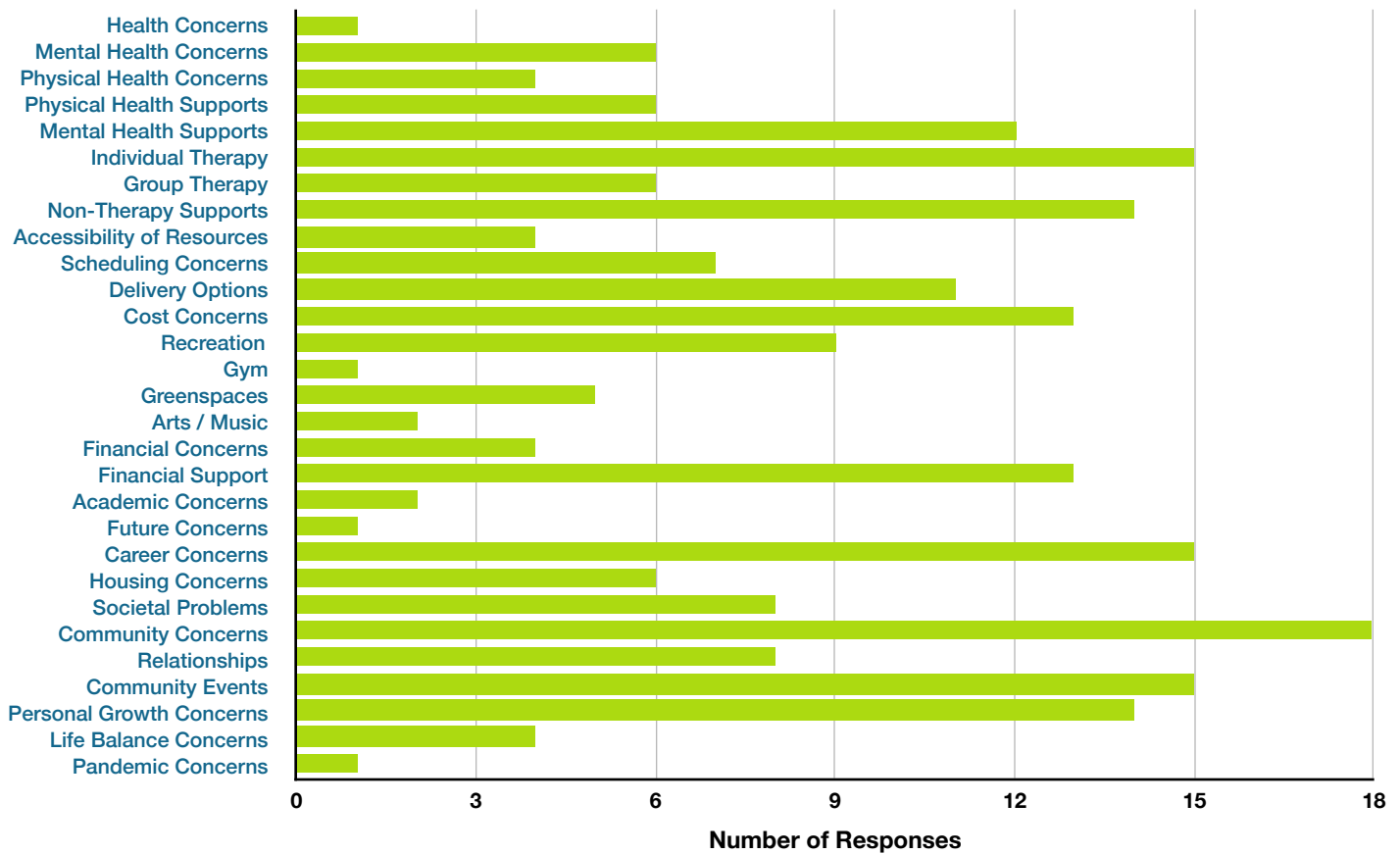


Access to more life balance

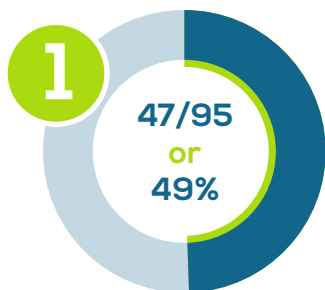
Young adults also desire variety in how programs are delivered, including virtual, in-person, hybrid, as well as pre-recorded video, and through text. The variety would increase the accessibility of resources. If resources can be offered in all these ways, and ideally at a low cost, an organization will be able to reach and engage more young adults.

*“Have tried therapy to help with feeling unfulfilled with life due to work but it feels like that doesn’t really address the problem, just more of a band-aid solution. Would be good to have more access and awareness about mental health services that are actually able to positively impact your life or shift your perspective to not feel this way.” - Survey Respondent*

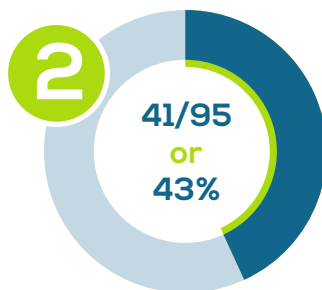
### Imagine the best program, service, or event to help support you with the concerns you are facing. What would that include and look like?



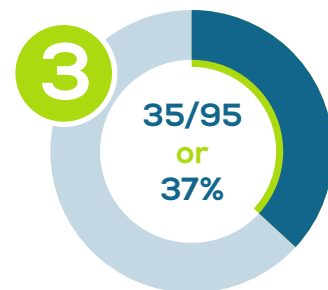
### The top 3 desires respondents expressed for programming that supports young adult needs:



Mental health supports



Community



Accessible

## 6

# Steps to Building Trust

While trusting organizations can be difficult for young adults, there are many ways that organizations can become more trustworthy, and therefore reach more people. This was a major issue discussed in all of the focus groups.

*“For me, [the best program for my well-being would be] very grassroots. Connecting to how a community functions and trying to make positive changes around that. It would be diverse, being able to interact with a range of people: ethnicities, orientations, genders. Being able to reflect the diversity that you see in real life in their organization, or in what they’re trying to do.” - Focus Group Participant*

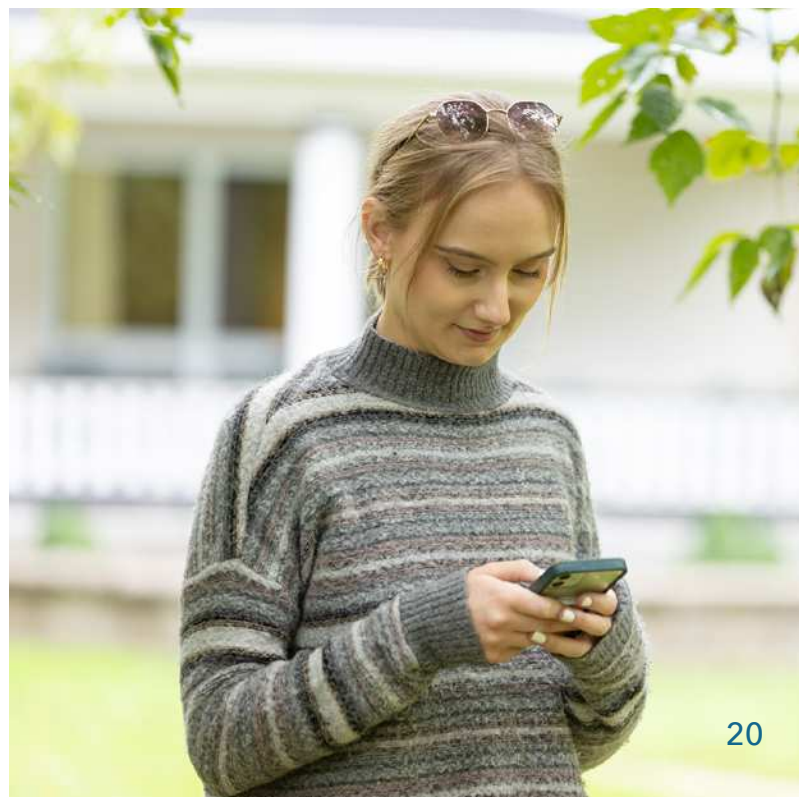
First, young adults from marginalized communities need to see that people who reflect their identity work with the organization in meaningful ways, holding positions of power in the organization, or being a part of providing services directly.

Second, if young adults have a personal connection to the organization, they will consider attending their programming. This connection can come from a friend’s recommendation or through the organization being present in the community.

Organizations could increase their credibility by being present in events and spaces with diverse groups and integrated into the community they serve. A resource becomes less stigmatized if it is familiar to community members.

Finally, trust can come from a shared purpose between the organization and those who attend their programming. Organizations would build more trust with the people they serve by being open about their values, articulating the credentials of those who provide services, and putting not only a face but also a personality to their names. Whenever possible, there would be immense benefits to providing space for young adults who attend programming to come together through shared intentional action.

*“There’s an elitism in a lot of these programs [due to the cost of them], so it needs to be very open and it needs to be a safe, welcoming and diverse space, even if that’s not part of my individual process interacting with a wide variety of people.” - Focus Group Participant*



# RECOMMENDATIONS: For Organizations

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report

## Provide Multifaceted Resources

Young adults need a wide variety of program delivery options: in-person, online, hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, text, audio, and video. Their issues are extremely complex and require many options for content and programming to fully support their needs.

## Build Trust

Organizations need to build trust with young adults. Two key pathways to establishing trust are through employing them in positions of influence in the organization and by ingraining the organization in community spaces where young adults will learn more about them.

## Engage With Social Media

Having a robust social media presence and website is key to connecting with young adults. Young adults need to understand the organization well and/or have a personal connection with them in order to attend their programming.

## Provide Community

Organizations can leverage their resources to build spaces and programs to provide young adults with access to community, which they need and desire.

## Help Accessing Support

Young adults would value resources that provide support in navigating the cost and complexity of mental health networks.

## Strengthen Capacity

Organizations could impact more young adults by positioning their programming as building capacity in young adults to support others as well as themselves.

# RECOMMENDATIONS: For Ledge Leadership

Services, Supports & Setbacks | Research Report

## 1. Continue to Provide Programming Aligned with Ledge's Mission

Ledge's value of non-hierarchical relational team building and self-leadership make it an organization primed to explore shared purpose and community building through their programming. The feedback heard from young adults made it clear that the kind of resources Ledge offered during the Services, Supports & Setbacks events were of great value.

The events gave people an opportunity to think about themselves differently and reduce isolation through sharing about mutual problems in a safe space. Additionally, the attendees greatly appreciated the intimate conversational space provided during Money Talks, and more events could be designed with this in mind, regardless of the topic.

## 2. Expand Ledge's Online Presence

Since the core values of Ledge and the content that they offer are already aligned with the needs of young adults, Ledge needs to ensure that people are aware of the organization, understand the resources offered, and can trust them. Throughout the research, Ledge received feedback that their website was difficult to navigate and the event descriptions were vague, both of which hinder people's understanding of Ledge's mission and content.

Ledge also needs an active social media presence on networks that young adults use, on Instagram and possibly TikTok, in order to spread their resources to more people, and create more awareness about Ledge's work.



### 3. Be Immersed in Young Adult Communities

In order to be able to offer preventative support to the greatest number of individuals, Ledge would benefit from ingraining themselves in communities, particularly urban spaces, where many young adults live and work. For organizations that are focused on crisis recovery, bringing individuals into a space separate from their context may be necessary, but for preventative support, giving people the tools to support themselves and others in their communities would be of more value.

This ingraining can happen through building partnerships with organizations that already have connections to the space, or actively focusing on cities currently outside of Ledge's context by hiring young adults who live in those cities. In general, diversifying Ledge's staff by hiring young adults from a variety of backgrounds and identities, and ensuring that they are active in decision-making would be very wise.

### 4. De-Emphasize Use of Clarksburg Retreat for Young Adult Support

Throughout the research project, encouraging young adults to come to the Clarksburg Retreat was a consistent difficulty. Although participants who attended events greatly appreciated the property for a variety of reasons, all events that were hosted at the Clarksburg Retreat had less attendance than virtual events and the event in the urban setting of Guelph.

Until more young adults know of Ledge, trust the organization enough to attend their programming, and value the resources they provide, it will be very difficult to bring them to an unfamiliar property for Ledge events, especially if young adults live far from the Clarksburg Retreat. Ledge Leadership would be wise to focus on becoming better known to young adults by following the previous recommendations. Additionally, for a period of time de-emphasizing the property's use in serving 18-30 year olds would be valuable. It is unlikely that more young adults will grow to trust and value Ledge if the property is continued to be used as a central point of Ledge's programming.



## 1. Values of the Property

The Clarksburg Retreat is a unique space due to its physical location. Members of the LRT and participants who attended the in-person events throughout the year commented on the distinctness of the space compared to the urban environments they typically occupy. They appreciated the openness of the property, the large green space, the comfort of the Retreat's interior, and the separation they felt from the rest of the world while there. These qualities, in particular the separateness and the large amount of green space the property has access to, would be difficult to achieve without the retreat's rural location. While the separateness is a barrier to young adults accessing the space, they are also what makes the space such an asset to Ledge.

The retreat is also unique due to its socio-economic placement. As Ledge is a not-for-profit charity, there lies incredible potential in providing young adults open space without need for the organization to profit from its use. There are a dearth of public spaces for young adults to freely gather, share ideas, and heal. Public parks are one of the last bastions of public space for all to use and provide a good comparison to the Clarksburg Retreat's open green space. However, parks lack privacy, and there are social obligations and limitations when sharing space widely with the public. They can also be located in areas that provide no relief from the presence of urbanity, limiting the emotional transformation that could occur in the environment. The Clarksburg Retreat's privateness removes these limitations, while providing the openness and malleability of a public park.

## 2. The Property's Alignment with Ledge Mission

Ledge's emphasis on wanting to impact the "settings... in which [young adults] live, work, and learn" as found in the Statement of Change is in conflict with the physical location of the Clarksburg Retreat. Clarksburg (and the wider rural area of Grey Bruce) is generally not where young adults are living, working, and learning. In general, people aged 18-30 move out of rural areas into urban environments, for reasons of seeking education, career, and community. According to Statistics Canada, in 2021 only 7.3% of Ontarians aged 20-29 lived in rural environments.<sup>1</sup> The Clarksburg Retreat, in a location which requires an hour-plus drive from the nearest GO Transit stop and the few transit options that are available are completely separate from where the majority of young adults live.

For the most part, the individuals Ledge wishes to serve do not live close to the facility's location. As mentioned, until Ledge becomes more well known and builds trust with young adults, few will be willing to overcome the distance barrier to access programming in the space. Additionally, Ledge needs to make connections with other organizations to find space to deliver content in urban environments if they hope to directly impact the majority of young adults.

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1. Statistics Canada. (2022). *Annual demographic estimates, rural and urban areas* [Data visualization tool]. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2021030-eng.htm>



### 3. Overcoming Barriers to Property Use

There are a number of steps Ledge can take to make the Clarksburg Retreat viable as a resource in the future. The barrier of distance is a major concern. The challenge is that even when people are personally invested in Ledge, the distance barrier may still be more than many young adults can overcome on their own.

Recommendations were made throughout the research for Ledge to invest in a means of transportation for young adults outside of the Clarksburg area to access the space. Considering efficient and accessible transportation, such as a bus, would be highly beneficial.

Hiring property management would allow current staff the ability to stop dividing their energy and priorities between Clarksburg Retreat property maintenance and Ledge programming. Steps toward making the facility accessible will be time-consuming, and likely costly. Ledge's focus must remain on providing preventative young adult support. If the property is a barrier to this, or is occupying valuable time that could be spent in pursuit of Ledge's mission, a dramatic change in how Ledge uses the Clarksburg Retreat may be the best solution.



## Primary Concerns for Young Adults

The information gathered from the research clearly identifies a series of concerns for 18-30 year olds. People are struggling with many overlapping issues, including their health, their emotional well-being, their finances, and general societal frustrations. Intensifying the impact of these problems are barriers to support that young adults face. These challenges are internal, due to mistrust of resources from institutions and the guilt associated with seeking support from their own communities, and external, due to the high costs that often accompany support and the complexities of navigating mental health networks.

Young adults find that mental health concerns are often supported best in community contexts rather than in isolation. Any opportunity that young adults can be given to connect and build relationships can be highly beneficial to their wellness, even if mental well-being is not the main goal of the event.

## Supporting Young Adult Challenges

The pathway to supporting young adults is rooted in alleviating their concerns and mitigating barriers as much as possible. Due to the immensity and complexity of these concerns, an effective response would be equally multifaceted. One can begin by offering affordable community-oriented resources that are delivered through as many service streams as possible.

Young adults value emotional support programming that is thoughtful, holistic, and considers the numerous ways that young adults can heal and grow. They also appreciate programs featuring a wide range of delivery options to account for a vast range of

accessibility needs, including synchronously in-person and virtually, and through asynchronous methods such as text-based media and video.

There is an opportunity to craft programming with the intention of not only benefiting the individuals who attend a program but also working to build capacity for collective support with their friends and communities. These strategies could decrease the guilt of taking another individual's spot, as the attendees would know they could support others from what they learn in their attendance. Another opportunity could come through providing assistance for young adults with navigating mental health support networks and being an advocate or resource for more accessible therapy and non-therapy resources.

Organizations who want to provide support for young adults can also look internally to find ways to make their work more trustworthy to young adults. Increasing trust can be done by hiring young adults from a variety of backgrounds as staff members in key decision-making roles for the organization. Additionally, trust can be built through organizations being transparent about their services. Ingraining the organizations in their communities through participation in local events and partnerships can be extremely helpful. If organizations are more connected to each other and the communities they serve, young adults will be able to more easily access the resources they need most.

And the story does not have to end here! We greatly encourage any organization to draw from the Ledge Research Team model to develop their own feedback-driven initiatives, not only to increase the effectiveness of their work, but also

to immediately benefit the young adults they serve. Young adults know their own needs better than anyone else and can thrive when they have space to advocate for themselves.

As we found from the Ledge Research Team, the process of working with an organization in a relational group is a well-being initiative for young adults in and of itself. The process gives them a shared purpose and access to community. By working in collaboration with

18-30 year olds and responding to their needs, there is opportunity to work towards filling identified gaps in ways that will be desirable and beneficial to young adults.



## Limitations

This research has some limitations. First, certain groups were not consulted during the research process. The survey was exclusively conducted through an online platform, so those without internet access were limited from participating. In the focus groups, we did not speak with anyone who was unhoused, and thus their specific needs and desires were not featured in the focus group section of the report. Individuals with disabilities are somewhat better represented in the survey, as some respondents self-disclosed having a disability, but we did not speak directly to anyone who articulated having a physical disability in the focus groups.

Additionally, due to the size of the research team and limited access to broad outreach channels, many of the respondents to the survey and participants in the focus groups already had personal connections to other members of the research team, in particular lead researcher Emjay Wright. This resulted in a disproportionate representation of LGBTQ2S+ participants in the survey, making up 38% of the respondents. Additionally, although the goal was to gain feedback from individuals aged 18-30, the survey has a higher representation of those in the 22-25 range, totalling 68% of the respondents. Once again, this is likely due to how many of the participants were drawn from Emjay's personal connections.

## Services, Supports & Setbacks - Young Adults Survey

Ledge Leadership is conducting a survey to gather the feedback of 18-30 year olds throughout Ontario. This information will be used to assess the needs of young adults and develop effective programming to meet those needs. Your feedback is voluntary and anonymous.

### About You

For these questions, think about how you are doing right now.

#### How satisfied are you with your personal and social life?

Not Satisfied  Somewhat Satisfied  Satisfied  Very Satisfied

#### How satisfied are you with your work and/or school life?

Not Satisfied  Somewhat Satisfied  Satisfied  Very Satisfied

#### How satisfied are you with your overall well-being?

Not Satisfied  Somewhat Satisfied  Satisfied  Very Satisfied

### About Your Well-Being

For these questions, think about your personal well-being and how you are supported.

#### Where do you find the most support for your well-being? \*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Family                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Older Adults/Mentors           | <input type="checkbox"/> School                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental/Physical Health Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Community/Social Media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I Don't Have Support           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe)       |

#### What aspects of your well-being concern you the most? \*

#### In the last two years have you accessed a program, service, or event to get support for some or all of these concerns? \*

- Yes  No
- Not applicable

## Programming Experiences

For these questions think about the last program, service or event you participated in.

**What was the last program, service, or event you accessed? \***

**How was this program, service, or event delivered? \***

In-Person

Virtual

Hybrid

Other (please descri

**What did you appreciate about this program, service, or event? \***

## About Your Well-Being

For these questions, think about your personal well-being and how you are supported.

**Where do you find the most support for your well-being? \***

Friends

Family

Older Adults/Mentors

School

Work

Recreation

Mental/Physical Health Service

Online Community/Social Media

I Don't Have Support

Other (please descri

**What aspects of your well-being concern you the most? \***

**In the last two years have you accessed a program, service, or event to get support for some or all of these concerns? \***

Yes

No

Not applicable

**Why have you not accessed a program, service, or event in the last two years? \***

- Programs were not physically accessible
- Programs were not financially accessible
- Programs did not feel welcoming
- Programs were not offered at times I could attend
- Past experiences with programs were not helpful
- Social anxiety makes programs difficult to attend
- Virtual options for programs are inaccessible
- Virtual options for programs are not available
- In-person options for programs are inaccessible
- In-person options for programs are not available
- I did not need programming or services
- I am unaware of programming or services
- I could not find programming that related to my concerns
- 

**Future Possibilities**

For these questions, think about your hopes and ideas for a better future.

**What would help you engage in a more fulfilling life? \***

**Imagine the best program, service, or event to help support you with the concerns you are facing. What would that include and look like? \***

**Are there any other concerns or gaps in services that you have not mentioned? \***

## Demographic Questions

You're almost done!

**What is your age? \***

- 17 or younger
- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 31 or older

**What best describes the community you live in? \***

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban
- 

**Which of these best describe your current career/education status? \***

- Attending University / College
- Attending Trade School or an Apprenticeship
- Part-Time Employment
- Full-Time Employment
- Contract Work / Freelance
- Unemployed
-

**Which of these best describe your current career/education status? \***

- Attending University / College
- Attending Trade School or an Apprenticeship
- Part-Time Employment
- Full-Time Employment
- Contract Work / Freelance
- Unemployed
- 

**How do you identify?**

- First Generation Immigrant and/or Refugee
- Child of First Generation Immigrants and/or Refugees
- Child of Canadian Citizens
- Indigenous (First Nations/Inuit/Metis)
- Prefer not to answer
- 

**What is your ethnicity or background?**

**What is your gender?**

**What is your sexuality?**

**Do you identify as a person with a disability?**

- YES
- NO



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# Services, Supports & Setbacks

## RESEARCH REPORT

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*Thank you for your interest in our work*