

ASSESSING ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMING FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

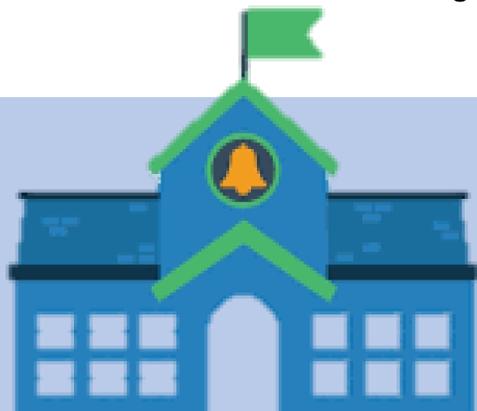
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Background

There are six alternative education centres overseen by the TLDSB, located in Bracebridge, Fenelon Falls, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Haliburton, and Lindsay. The six centres offer the services of a mental health counsellor to address the needs of at-risk youth. Academic programming is also available for youth and adults who have not completed high school and who were not successful in the traditional school setting.



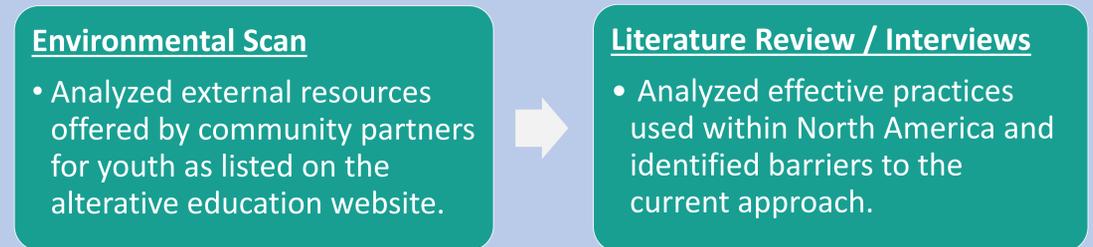
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify barriers to attendance and the mental health counsellor, and provide recommendations to enhance the current approach being utilized. The recommendations aim to increase attendance and programming available to at-risk youth. The recommendations provide a list of best practices based on a systematic review of literature and information gathered through interviews with TLDSB staff.

Research Questions

- What approach is TLDSB utilizing to engage and encourage at-risk youth who are accessing programs through alternative education centres?
- What are seen as current barriers to enhanced attendance and engagement?
- Are there best practices or program exemplars we can reference in terms of next steps?

Methodology



Environmental Scan

- Analyzed external resources offered by community partners for youth as listed on the alternative education website.

Literature Review / Interviews

- Analyzed effective practices used within North America and identified barriers to the current approach.

Findings

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| Internal /External Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The internal service offered by all centres is a mental health counsellor who attends the centre for 1-2 days a week. • External services are provided by community partners, and at-risk youth can access these services with the help of the counsellor. However, some services have a waiting list. |
| Barriers to the Centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to the centres include at-risk youth personal issues, mental health, lack of internal and external services, and the social and physical environment of some of the centres. |
| Barriers to the Counsellor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to the mental health counsellor include amount of time dedicated to counselling, the programming utilized by the counsellor, accessibility, and the limitation of the role. |

Recommendations

- Form personal connections with students and consider an afternoon class session.
- Consider a partnership with Trent University or secondary schools.
- Implement a tier-one approach and programming focused on self-worth and encouragement and foster the formation of peer support groups.
- Host a community partner showcase.
- Increase the time dedicated to mental health counselling.
- Survey students and host events, such as a yoga program or breakfast club.

