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### **Abstract**

This report is based on an advanced practicum placement which was completed with YouthREX's New Opportunities for Student Engagement Program. This program is designed to create learning opportunities about research and social change for young people through a strengths-based approach, which supports youth in building relationships and preparations for post-secondary education. The program teaches young people the power of research using hands-on experiential learning. Ultimately this program focuses on empowering youth to become advocates in their community for the betterment of their community. In completing this placement, I set out to acquire skills and knowledge about group work with youth. Within this report, how to implement group work with youth is expanded on through knowledge gleaned from the literature as well as on my experience of this placement. I also desired to further develop my clinical skills by critically reflecting upon the implementation of group work during my practicum. Finally, through this placement, I observed youth learn and grow as they developed projects designed to address the social issues faced by their community.

## Résumé

Ce rapport est basé sur un stage spécialisé qui a été complété avec le programme YouthREX's New Opportunities for Student Engagement. Ce programme a été conçu afin de créer des opportunités d'apprentissage au sujet de la recherche ainsi que du changement social pour les jeunes à travers une approche orientée sur les forces. D'autre part, ce programme visait à fournir du support aux étudiants quant à construire des relations significatives ainsi qu'à la préparation des études postsecondaires. Le programme a appris aux jeunes le pouvoir de la recherche par l'apprentissage pratique et vécue. En fin de compte, le programme a appris aux jeunes à devenir des agents de changement afin d'améliorer leurs communautés. En complétant ce stage spécialisé, j'ai voulu acquérir des habiletés et des connaissances sur la recherche et l'intervention de groupe avec les jeunes. Dans ce rapport, l'intervention de groupe est élaborée selon les concepts dans la littérature et de mes heures en stage. J'ai aussi voulu développer mes habiletés cliniques par la réflexion critique durant mon stage. Finalement, j'ai observé les jeunes en apprentissage, alors qu'ils ont développant des projets de recherche au sujet des problèmes sociaux vécus par les membres de leurs communautés.

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## Introduction

For my practicum placement I worked with Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange, YouthREX. I was interested in completing my placement hours with YouthREX due to the experience and interest I have in working with children and youth. YouthREX is an initiative which was launched by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services in 2014. It is YouthREX's mission to ensure research and evaluation is accessible to the youth sector by way of knowledge mobilization, capacity building and evaluation leadership. YouthREX focuses on grassroots organizations in supporting them to make informed decisions regarding youth programming to improve youth wellbeing (<http://youthrex.com/>). This final report explores my opportunity to observe and learn strategies of engaging and supporting youth in a meaningful manner.

As a clinician at the Child and Family Centre, I work with children and youth ranging from the ages of four to eighteen. I see parents bringing their children in for services with the hope that services can be provided to address the concerns they have about their children. In general, there is little awareness of the environmental factors that contribute to the struggles faced by a child. If a child presents with anxiety, they are viewed as having a lack of confidence and so the focus is to increase the child's confidence. If a child struggles to regulate their emotions, they are viewed as having anger problems and so the focus is to help the child be less reactive. If a child does not have friends, they are viewed as not having good social skills and so the focus is on teaching the child appropriate social skills. I do not suggest that there is no need for children and youth to have access to mental health services nor is it my intention to minimize the issues faced by children and youth. I do, however, see a great deal of focus being placed on the external manifestations of the problem versus the inner cause of the behaviour. The child or youth's inner difficulties can stem from environmental causes. There is little emphasis placed on

what is occurring around the child to contribute to these difficulties, and, as a result, little emphasis is placed on how we can work towards addressing these external factors.

In my practice I attempt to see the situation not only through the eyes of my client, who is the child, but also through an ecological systems lens. In doing so, it is evident that there are social issues beyond the individual child that are contributing negatively to the well-being of the child. As a result, it is troubling to me that children and youth are made to feel or believe that they are the problem and that they need to be “fixed.” For example, Brakenhoff and Slesnick (2015) observed that children of substance abusers are more apt to present with negative behaviors like aggression, attention deficit disorders, anxiety and depression. With this knowledge it is clear that one cannot solely focus on behaviors of these children and youth if the objective is to implement effective treatment and change.

Indeed, many children come in fearful that there is something wrong with them. Many times I have had a child or youth before me who has told me the reason they are accessing services is because of their “behavior” or their “anger” issues. When a child or youth is expressing what they feel or believe is “wrong” with them, and when asked about their strengths, they cannot identify what is “right” with them, it identifies, to me, a lack of positive youth development. In fact it shows a negative self-view internalized by the child.

With the focus placed on the child, there is little attention paid to the social issues which exist in the community where the child resides. Issues such as poverty, domestic violence, bullying, harassment, and stigmatization contribute to the child’s functioning and well-being or the lack thereof. For example, the issue of child trafficking is discussed by Rigby and Whyte (2015). Risk factors such as children without caregivers, poverty and poor education are highlighted as some of the contributors to child trafficking. In order to be effective and to inform

intervention with these youth, an ecological approach to both assess and plan is deemed paramount (Rigby & Whyte, 2015).

The other reason I was drawn to this placement for my practicum is that I am passionate about working towards promoting positive youth development. To support, engage, and empower youth to be agents of change and to allow them to feel a sense of pride and connection, in my view, paves the road to healthier communities. I believe there is immense value in educating youth on the social issues in their community. Youth can bring a fresh perspective to addressing social issues specifically with respect to those issues that have an impact on them. Through mentorship and education, youth can assume leadership roles to influence change and strengthen their community. Through my placement I was afforded the opportunity to support and encourage youth to be leaders and agents of change in their community.

In this Advanced Practicum Thesis document, I will begin with a literature review. Chapter One will consist of a brief analysis of current and relevant literature on group work with children and youth as well as on youth participation and civic engagement. In the literature review I will provide information about implementing group work with children and youth. I will look at why this modality is beneficial and effective when working with young persons. Further I will describe how the academic literature says that group work with children and youth should be implemented. Not only will group work as a modality of intervention be discussed in Chapter One but studies in which group work with children and youth was implemented will be examined. Aspects which will be focused on when examining these studies is how they complied with the way group work should be implemented and what the outcomes of the group work intervention were.

In Chapter One the concept of youth participation and civic engagement will be explained. Specifically, the focus will be on why youth participation and civic engagement is encouraged and why it is not as per the literature. Both the advantages and disadvantages of youth participation and civic engagement will be highlighted. Studies which focus on youth led programs will be reviewed in the second part of the first chapter. To conclude the first chapter, I will identify the objective of my practicum placement. The chapter will discuss why the goals aspired to with youth civic engagement are best worked towards through a group work modality. I will synthesis the benefits of group work with youth and youth participation and civic engagement as both are of utmost relevance to the NOISE program.

The second chapter of this paper will be focused on describing my placement. For my practicum placement, I worked with Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange, YouthREX. More specifically, I worked with the New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement (NOISE) program. The chapter will begin with the focus on YouthREX because the NOISE program was implemented under the auspices of YouthREX. I will discuss the origin of and provide a description of YouthREX. Following this, the focus will be placed on the northeastern hub of YouthREX, this being the hub through which I completed the placement phase of my practicum, and on the NOISE program that I co-facilitated. . Specifically, I will introduce the objective and rationale of the NOISE. program. Information presented about the NOISE program in this chapter will be on such areas as location, staffing, recruiting of participants, and the content of the group sessions on a week-by-week basis. Further, I will share how my placement supported me in achieving my learning objectives and my experience of supervision. This second chapter will be concluded with my thoughts about the NOISE. program as it was

implemented by YouthREX's northeastern hub. I will touch on the youths' social research topics, research questions, and final projects.

The third chapter will focus on how the literature reviewed aligns with the NOISE program. I will begin this chapter with a recap of the objective and rationale of the NOISE program. The chapter will review the method of implementation recommended by the literature and establish how the NOISE program fared in compliance with the recommendations. Areas which I will focus on when examining the NOISE program and how it aligns with the literature are the recruiting process, the significance of group cohesion, the code of conduct, the end phase of group work, and the method of implementation, specifically looking at linear paths and circuitous detours. To conclude Chapter Three, I will discuss the studies reviewed in Chapter One to serve as examples to illustrate the recommended methods of implementing group work. I will then use examples to illustrate how the NOISE program complied with the recommended methods as identified in the literature. The chapter will conclude with a review of the NOISE program implemented in 2016 in the City of Sudbury. This review is with the intention of determining how closely I think the NOISE program launched in Sudbury aligns with the literature as well as identifying areas for improvement.

In the final chapter and the conclusion of this document, I will share my experience of co-facilitating the NOISE group program. I will identify the learning objectives I set out for myself in my proposal for this practicum placement. The significance of achieving these learning objectives and whether or not I was able to achieve these objectives will be explained. I will then present the limitations faced by the NOISE program in its implementation. Next I will highlight the implications of the NOISE program on social work practice. I will then identify

key areas to be mindful of when implementing group work with youth. To conclude, I will share how this experience has impacted me in my clinical practice.

## Chapter 1 - Literature Review

Much literature and research focused on group work with adolescents as well as youth participation and civic engagement has been conducted and published. A brief analysis of current and relevant literature on both group work and civic engagement with adolescents will be presented in this literature review. I will begin by providing a comprehensive sequential understanding of group work with adolescents. Specifically, I will provide an understanding of why group work is a modality of intervention that has been implemented when working with children and youth. The content and the process defining how group work is or should be implemented as per the literature will be discussed. Additionally, I will outline the implementation of group work as an evidence-based practice. It is necessary to understand group work through this lens, as it is the basis on which many social workers deliver services.

It is acknowledged that group work has great value as we see group work being implemented for all ages and for various purposes. Group work is utilized in the classroom throughout the education process. In the community, groups are brought together for such purposes as sporting events, for recreational events, and therapy. The benefits of group work specific to children and youth will be described in this literature review.

Studies in which group work with children and youth have been applied will be presented. Specifically, I will describe the purpose of the study and the way in which the modality was implemented. There will be an emphasis on how the studies reflect the way group work is often implemented by social workers via a social group work methodology. I will conclude discussions regarding each study by providing a summary of the outcomes observed. With an understanding of group work with adolescents, the examples shared of how group work has been utilized, and the benefits and the outcomes achieved through the use of group work, the

concept of youth participation and civic engagement supported through this modality can be better appreciated.

Then, I will provide an account of what youth participation and civic engagement is as well as why research suggests it should and should not be promoted. Following an account of these contradicting perspectives of youth participation and civic engagement, how these factors should be addressed will be identified. There are various approaches which have been taken to increase youth participation and civic engagement. I will provide an account of some of the approaches which have been identified in the literature.

The benefits of empowering youth and supporting them to be leaders in strengthening their communities is evident within the literature. These benefits are to the youth as well as the community. The literature provides us with an understanding of what youth participation and civic engagement means and ways in which it can be achieved. Further it highlights a number of benefits to youth and to the communities in which they reside. With this information, I will review some of the research studies published on youth-led programs, research and evaluation. This review will focus on ascertaining whether this information, when moved from theory to action is possible, and if it is beneficial.

To conclude this chapter, I will share the objective of my practicum placement, the NOISE program. I will synthesize the benefits of group work with youth and youth participation and civic engagement as both have an important role in the NOISE program. From this analysis, I will discuss why the goals aspired to with youth civic engagement are best worked towards through a group work modality and identify how effective I view a program such as NOISE will be in achieving its objectives.

## **Group Work with Adolescents**

Prior to understanding the concept of group work, it is important to understand the meaning of the term group, specifically a social work group. William Schwartz defined a social work group in 1971 as “a collection of people who need each other in order to work on certain common tasks, in an agency hospitable to those tasks” (Furman, Bender, & Rowan, 2016, p. 3). Further in 1997, John Anderson (Furman et al., 2016) identified groups as a methodology for the empowerment of participants focusing on individual growth and an improvement of quality of life. The group serves as a mutual aid to members working on common problems (Furman et al., 2016).

Group work was first defined by the Wilber Newsletter in 1935 as a dual vision (Malekoff, 2014). In 1986, this dual vision was referred to as “near things of individual need and far things of social reform” by William Schwartz (Malekoff, 2014, p. 42). Group work is an educational process which is inclusive of two key components. The first component of group work is that it focuses on the “development and social adjustment of an individual through voluntary group association” and the second is the “use of this association as a means of furthering other socially desirable ends.” As a result, it is evident that the implementation of group work is with the view to influence both individual growth and social results. Intervention can only be coined group work if both these components are present (Malekoff, 2014, p. 42).

To fully appreciate why group work is a beneficial modality of intervention with adolescents, some understanding of brain development is required. When we consider the teenaged brain, we see that the brain has limited capacity for executive functioning due to the stage of development of the prefrontal cortex. According to Haen and Weil (2010), the prefrontal cortex does not fully develop until an individual has reached in or about their mid-

twenties. The amygdala, the primitive region of the brain, matures at a much quicker speed. With the primitive region of the brain developed and the executive functioning of the brain being limited, it becomes apparent as to why adolescents, more so than adults and children, tend to be attracted to risk-taking behaviors. Further it becomes clear as to why teenagers are as impulsive as they are, and why they more are reactive and less reflective of their feelings (Haen & Weil, 2010). The underdeveloped prefrontal cortex impedes the teenager's ability to understand the consequences of their actions. Jensen and Nutt, in their 2015 book *The Teenage Brain*, discuss a brain scanning experiment conducted at Dartmouth College. This experiment identified that teenagers use a limited region of the brain and take longer than adults do to respond to questions regarding whether activities such as swimming with sharks or jumping off a roof are good or bad ideas (Jensen & Nutt, 2015).

Adolescence is a stage of life during which young people desire to explore and be independent. It is during this time that it is actually important for young people to experiment because doing so helps them to establish their autonomy. The difficulty rests with the fact that, as mentioned previously, there is limited executive functioning of the brain during adolescence (Jensen & Nutt, 2015). Malekoff (2014) identified that at this stage of brain development there is a draw towards social connections. During this stage, making connections with peers and caregivers is of great importance. Through participating in group work, adolescents experience a process where there is positive peer interaction. Group work ensures a safe venue for all participants and allows youth to explore and experiment. Through the process of group work there is a coming together of generations who can reach out to each other and come to a common ground (Malekoff, 2014). In children and youth groups, when there is careful consideration placed on the selection of participants, youth cannot only meet new people, but can meet new

people with who share similar experiences. When the experiences of a youth are normalized and affirmed, it serves to further reinforce a sense of belonging and connections (Coholic, 2010).

### **Method of Implementation**

When implementing group work as a form of intervention, a number of considerations need to be taken into account. Prior to group sessions taking place there is a need to select participants. In the process of selecting participants, facilitators must be thorough because who is in the group will have an impact of how well the group functions as a unit. Further, in group sessions, to promote a healthy and safe environment there is a need for group cohesion. Group cohesion is not only impacted by the content of the group sessions but also the individual participants. How successful the group is in achieving its objective is dependent on the participants selected as well as on both the content and the process of service delivery. These are not one and the same and will be further explained in this section. Throughout and/or during the final session of the group, an evaluation is required (Malekoff, 2014; Rosenwald, Smith, Bagnoli, Riccelli, Yan, Salcedo, & Seeland, 2013; Harris, Brazeau, Clarkson, Brownlee, & Rawana, 2012). In this section I will discuss the selection of participants, the value of non-deliberative forms of engagement to promote group cohesion, the content and process by which group work should be administered, and group work from an evidence-based perspective.

Prior to selecting participants for a group, it is essential to know what the inclusion and/or exclusion factors are. Is there a demographic that the group might be interested in? Once the demographic is established, the targeted individuals must be attracted to participate. How to motivate interest in the group? For example, the Holistic Arts-Based Program focused on vulnerable children who were involved in the mental health or child welfare systems. The program provided information to these agencies in the community and these agencies then

referred children that they felt would benefit from such a program. Facilitators of the group were then able to meet with the child and their guardian to assess interest in group work, obtain informed consent, and provide orientation to the program (Coholic & Eys, 2016). It is only logical that participant selection can only occur when there is a pool to select from.

When selecting potential participants, interviews should take place. These interviews should be inclusive of an assessment, screening, engagement, education, orientation and contracting. Through these steps the facilitator can bring together a group of participants based on their concerns, strengths, needs, and suitability. There is also the opportunity for the facilitator to engage the participant and initiate a working alliance. The facilitator should, during the interviewing stage, provide the participant with information regarding the value, function and purpose of the group. Once the information has been acquired and provided, the facilitator and the participant can contract expectations (Malekoff, 2014). With the selection of participants completed, group sessions can begin to take place. To create a safe environment, facilitators need to pay attention to creating group cohesion. Some of the group work literature discusses a valuable tool in working towards this goal is the use of non-deliberative forms of engagement (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016). Specifically, this is the process by which members of the group become active and involved in a meaningful way in the spontaneous activities implemented within group sessions.

Non-deliberative activities are holistic and spontaneous activities focused on developing relationships among the participants in an enjoyable manner (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016). Participants benefit as they develop a greater sense of self-awareness. Examples of non-deliberative activities are games such as “Aboriginal Folklore Name” or art activities such as “Favorite Pie” (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016). The game

“Aboriginal Folklore Name” requires participants to reveal themselves through symbols, metaphors, or animals. The objective of this game is for participants to share of themselves with the group and to increase their own self-awareness. The art activity “Favorite Pie” requires participants to draw a pie and separate it into sections. Each section is to be identified with the things that are important to the participant, such as their friends, family, or activities they enjoy. The objective of the “Favorite Pie” art activity is for the participants to increase their comfort with engaging while interacting with the group, encourage them to share important things about themselves in the group, and to be respectful and accepting of what other group members share. Through these types of activities, participants are provided the opportunity to engage in experiential learning (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016).

Facilitators must also be mindful that members might be self-reliant and opt to not engage or participate when non-deliberative activities are facilitated, and that that is their right or way of asserting their autonomy or power (Weller, Huang, & Cherubin, 2015). How the group functions directly impacts all the group members. With this knowledge, facilitators must ensure there are strategies implemented to ensure the overall well-being of the group. Individuals facilitating a group must be flexible and have the skills to adjust the curriculum in accordance to the needs of the group (Weller et al., 2015). The content of group work refers to the manner in which it works to achieve its goals. An example of content in a group setting could be a field trip or guest speakers (Malekoff, 2014). When adhering to content alone, facilitators will emphasize structure. Some group workers may feel a shift from structure or the content as planned is chaotic and out of control. It is here that ideally content and process should be implemented simultaneously in group sessions (Malekoff, 2016).

Process in group sessions can take a linear approach or can be approached by way of circuitous detours. Linear paths from a content-focused perspective may present as being more structured or controlled; however, circuitous detours provide more in terms of learning, individual expression, and teaching opportunities. By being patient and reflective, the facilitator can assess when to redirect to the linear approach or support the process as it unfolds, allowing circuitous detours (Malekoff, 2016).

Adolescents given control over their group will engage more circularly than linearly. There is value in this as it allows for informal meandering conversations, which provide opportunities for adolescents to express themselves and perhaps express discrepancies in their thinking. In a creative manner, facilitators can approach these situations as teaching opportunities. In order for the purpose of the group to be adhered to, these circuitous detours cannot always be left to run their course. Facilitators need to decide when to allow dialogue to continue and when to interject and bring the group back to the content of the session (Malekoff, 2016).

Group endings for participants can be bittersweet. A wide array of feelings can surface at this stage of group intervention. Participants might feel a sense of loss or abandonment. The loss of close and trusting relationships created as a result of group cohesion might leave participants feeling fear and sadness (Furman et al., 2016). As Furman et al. (2016) stated, it is important to be aware that these feelings may affect behaviours exhibited by individuals in the group. For example, group members might begin to withdraw or reject the group norms which had been established at the onset. It is because of this feeling of loss that the conclusion of group sessions must effectively transition members out of group. The transitioning of group members out of the group is a process which should be initiated long before the final session occurs.

Group facilitators can assist the process by identifying their own emotions around the group sessions ending. Facilitators can take the opportunity to model the normalcy of the emotions and the significance of sharing these emotions (Furman et al., 2016).

When concluding group sessions, it is necessary to implement some form of evaluation. An evaluation can take place following each session or a single time at the conclusion of the final session. The evaluation is to assess the experiences of the participants and the impact of the group involvement on them. It is also a tool that can be utilized to make changes to improve future group work. Evaluations are also valuable to inform the facilitators as to whether the objective of the group was attained (Malekoff, 2016).

When facilitating groups with adolescents, social workers can ensure they are delivering from evidence-based practice. The content of group work to meet this criterion must weigh on the four cornerstones of evidence-based practice: research, clinical expertise, personal views, and client perspectives. In doing so, there are five stages identified in the literature which require compliance. These stages are to create questions which are reflective of a need for information, conduct research to answer the questions, analyze how valid and relevant the evidence answering the questions is, generate a type of intervention based on clinical expertise, and complete an evaluation of the methods and outcomes (Weller et al., 2015).

At the onset of a group intervention, a clear purpose must be identified. Flexibility and responding to the needs of the group members plays a significant role in the process but the objective of the group must not be forgotten. Ground rules and responsibilities should be established. These rules and expectations must be upheld by the group participants and modeled by the facilitators. Participants should develop personal goals. In order for sharing to take place and for participants to make progress with their respective goals, it is essential that cohesion is

initiated from the start of an intervention group. As well, there needs to be a defined purpose for the group to exist and the content to achieve this purpose must be established. However, as explained previously, content and process are not one in the same and must both be tended to by the facilitators of the group (Weller et al., 2015). At the final group meeting, members should be encouraged to openly discuss their experiences of the group. These findings should inform the implementation of any future groups (Weller et al., 2015).

### **Benefits of Group Work**

Group work with adolescents helps them think critically and make moral choices through meaningful group experiences. It is within a group setting that young people can engage in a dialectical process, allowing the participants to see issues from various points of view. By participating in group work, youth are afforded the opportunity for spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth (Malekoff, 2016). This modality of intervention with adolescents contributes to experiences which maximize development and growth physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially (Malekoff, 2014).

Curriculum and psychoeducational groups have been attracting attention because of their effectiveness, ease of use, and cost-efficiency (Gitterman & Knight, 2016). Because of these benefits, these types of group work are a common choice of intervention. Participants of such groups develop a new and different perspective of themselves and their situations. These different perspectives tend to be more accurate. Participants of group work are better able to understand situations, which in turn increase feelings of empowerment as well as their ability to cope. By engaging in a group setting with other participants who are dealing with similar struggles, there is potential to increase optimism, further motivating the participant. From discussions in the group, the individual can recognize that they are not alone; others experience

or have experienced similar struggles. Benefits experienced by participants in a psychoeducational group are attributed to the power of knowledge and interaction among group members (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

For example, a peer check-in group of students who were completing field placements identified many benefits of group work. Participants were afforded the opportunity to discuss and receive validation from their peers through this process. They recognized that they were not alone in their experiences. The opportunity to learn from one another through this group was afforded to the participants (Clemans, 2011).

### **Research in Group Work**

The following three studies are informative of group work and the outcomes experienced by children and youth because of their engagement in group work. The first study I will look at is that of a Holistic Arts-Based Program. The second focuses on non-deliberative activities in group work. The final study highlights an anger management group implemented through an evidence-based practice. In discussing these studies, the purpose of the study followed by a description will be provided. I will then highlight how each study adhered to the method of implementing group work, as described previously, in their implementation of group work. I will conclude each study with an account of the outcomes observed.

The Holistic Arts-Based Program was a 12-week program which treated approximately 100 young persons in 27 different groups. The purpose or objective of the group work was to teach and facilitate mindfulness skills to children, to improve participants' self-awareness and ability to express themselves, to develop self-compassion, and to develop their ability to empathize (Coholic, Oystriick, Posteraro, & Lougheed, 2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016).

Each two-hour session opened with a primer activity. These activities supported the participants to settle within the group. Following the primer activities, the participants engaged in art-based mindfulness activities. The art-based activity implemented at each session was designed to achieve the goal specific to that individual session. The participants were provided with snacks and then continued to engage in arts-based mindfulness activities. At the closing of each session, the participants were afforded the opportunity to share what they enjoyed and what they found to be challenging during the group.

There are multiple examples of how this study adhered to the method of implementing group work as discussed previously in this chapter. I will focus on two aspects in which compliance to the methodology was apparent. Specifically, these aspects are content combined with process and participant selection. In the selection process, the facilitators excluded young persons who were not involved in the child welfare or mental health systems. In selecting only children who have home life or mental health struggles, it is indicative that there is an understanding of the value in limiting the study to a group of young people who have had similar experiences. The facilitators understood that children who are involved in these systems have experiences that children who have not been involved in these systems could not fully appreciate or comprehend.

This study adhered to a social group work methodology in that the facilitators were flexible and patient. The circuitous detours were apparent when the participants were not engaged in the activity and were responded to by the facilitators patiently, compassionately, and with flexibility and humour. There was a nonjudgmental approach, which was evident in the manner that expectations were stated and children were supported to re-engage in the content of group. Among the outcomes of the holistic arts-based program reported by the participants as

well as their caregivers was an improvement in mood, self-awareness, coping skills, social skills, confidence, self-esteem, empathy, emotion regulation, and focus. The participants shared that they enjoyed the program. They highlighted the things they enjoyed which were the games, the creative activities, and the opportunity to develop friendships. The objective of this group was successfully met (Coholic et al., 2015; Coholic & Eys, 2016).

The Non-Deliberative Group Activities Programming is a study in which non-deliberative group activities were implemented over a 8 to 10-week program to youth between the ages of 14 and 17 years over the course of several years (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016). These group activities were implemented in multiple settings such as social skills training groups, schools, and counseling centers. The hypothesis was that by using non-deliberative activities in group work, adolescents can develop self-awareness, that these activities can facilitate the expression of emotions and problem solving. Six different non-deliberative activities were implemented in this study. Each activity identified was implemented with a set goal under the overall objective of the study to develop self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and self-expression.

The first activity was “Aboriginal Folklore Name” discussed previously in this chapter. The objective of this activity was to promote self-awareness and encourage sharing. Participants described themselves in the form of symbols or an animal. The second activity was “What Would You be if You Were an Animal,” which sought to increase self-awareness, identify positive qualities, and fortify identity. Each participant identified the animal they would be as well as the positive qualities possessed by that animal. The third activity was “The Stone of Strength.” The focus of this activity was to improve self-confidence and for participants to identify their strengths. Each participant was required to list their strengths on half a piece of

paper and things they hoped to learn on the other half. Following this, each person was given a stone on which they were required to create a symbol. The purpose of the stone was to remind the participants of their strengths. The fourth activity was “My Card,” the objective of which was to increase self-awareness and awareness of others, to improve self-esteem and self-efficacy, and to create group cohesion and problem solving skills. Group members wrote their names on a card and anonymously each member wrote something positive about the person named on the card. The comments were read out loud by the facilitator to the group and the group was tasked with guessing whose card it was. Once the name is guessed, that individual stated how what was read about them made them feel. The fifth activity was “Favorite Pie,” which was also mentioned earlier in this chapter. The aim of this activity was for the participants to grow comfortable sharing of themselves and being both respectful and accepting of what was shared by others in the group. The participants were required to draw a circle on a piece of paper, then divide the circle, their pie, into sections. Each section was representative of important people or things in the participant’s life. The final activity was “Guiding with Blindfold.” The objective of this activity was for the participants to increase trust and responsibility as well as provide insight into what it is to be dependent on someone else. Participants were paired randomly. Each person had a turn to be blindfolded while the other guided them for a period of 15 to 20 minutes.

This study adhered to one aspect of how group work should be implemented. It focused on non-deliberative forms of engagement. It is a study in which a list of non-deliberative activities that were implemented in group work were described. The purpose of non-deliberative activities is to create self-awareness and support group cohesion. It is a fun way in which participants can come to know one another. This study captured the value in using these activities perfectly. In the outcomes described of each activity, the participants were engaged,

there was a dialectic flow and a sharing of thoughts and feelings. Even in groups where the objective was not specifically to create self-awareness, participants benefited individually and as a group by having this awareness.

Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute (2016) observed that participants took time and thought through what was requested of them by each activity. For example, in the first activity “Aboriginal Folklore Name,” youth explained the way they selected the names they did in detail. Additionally, it was observed that other group members would add thoughts from their own perspectives, thus creating a natural flow of conversation. Youth showed an interest in themselves and they wanted to learn more about who they were. Self-confidence was enhanced through the sharing of positive perceptions among group members. The participants did become more self-aware and were further energized to learn about themselves. Self-expression and problem solving skills were observed through conversations among the participants (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016).

The Anger Management Group was a study implemented at an alternative high school (Weller et al., 2015). The group consisted of four males and two females from 15 to 18 years of age. The objective of the group was for the participants to learn how to use their anger to initiate change. There was a five-stage plan focused on how to deal with anger. Specifically, the plan included how to maintain emotional safety, to experience and cope with intense emotions, to understand anger, to be realistic about the anger experienced and utilize that understanding to accomplish goals.

At the onset of the initial session, discussions focused on the purpose of the group. Expectations, rules and responsibilities were identified with group member participation. Members also identified personal individual goals. During group intervention, psychoeducation

with respect to anger was provided to the participants. Group discussions were inclusive of anger as a tool to communicate and motivate, how anger is used in interactions with others, other means of expressing the same message and the concept of forgiveness and/or acceptance and the role it plays in dealing with anger. Youth were aided to identify triggers, as well as calming techniques. At the end of group intervention, participants were afforded the opportunity to share their experience of the group.

This anger management study focused on research, clinical experience, personal views, and client perspective in a fluid manner. There was a flexibility in utilizing the four cornerstones of evidence-based practice to promote a natural flow in the process. By adhering to the method of implementation from an evidence-based perspective, this study identified what the focus was and how it was going to be implemented within a group by posing questions such as how the school can be assisted, what the students at the school require, what has been helpful in the past, and what the school recommends should be done (Weller et al., 2015).

On two occasions, against the recommendations of school personnel, the facilitators of this study exercised their clinical experience and personal views in decision-making. Initially, the principal was not agreeable to the students completing a survey to assist in identifying the focus of group. It was stated that students tend to decline participating in social work services. The facilitators saw value in obtaining input from the students. Because of their experience, they felt that allowing students to be involved at the onset would stimulate interest to attend and participate in the group work.

In selecting participants, a youth with significant behavior problems was identified by school personnel. This youth would have benefitted from participating; however, it was thought that he would not be able to function appropriately in a group setting. Due to the potential

difficulties this youth would present in the group, it was deemed by school personnel that he best be excluded. However, weighing the situation based on experience, the facilitators opted to include this youth in the group.

In the delivery of these group sessions, facilitators were influenced primarily by client need and research. Facilitators were not only mindful of the curriculum, but they were also mindful of being flexible and responding to the needs of the individual members in the group. It was evident that this was emphasized as the participants were provided with the final decision on what each topic discussed would be in order to promote commitment and support group cohesion. Thus, the facilitators were mindful of process as well as content in the implementation of group work, adhering to best practices methodology.

The outcome observed by the participants was an improved ability to manage their anger. They found they were better able to solve problems and that it was helpful to rely on the group. Benefits expressed by the participants were understanding anger as a tool and the learned calming techniques. Members were interested in continuing their participation in group even once the group work had ended. The workers experienced the value in implementing a group using the four cornerstones of evidence-based practice. Workers indicated that remaining flexible in the use of the four cornerstones was valuable as it allowed for the assessment of client need and the ability to be responsive to that need. The objective as identified in this study proved to have been successfully met (Weller et al., 2015).

### **Youth Participation and Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement refers to action with the goal to generate social change (<http://www.actforyouth.net/>). Although there are some barriers which limit the extent to which

a young person can participate in a civic manner, that does not mean there is no way in which they can participate. Young people are capable of participation in a meaningful way through grassroots initiatives; for example, they can advocate on a range of issues through the use of campaigns and social media (<http://www.actforyouth.net/>).

The most compelling rationale for youth participation and civic engagement is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all children under 18 years of age have the right “to express.... views freely in all matters affecting the child” (Blanchet-Cohen, Manolson, & Shaw, 2014; Charbonneau, Cheadle, Orbe, Frey, and Gaolach, 2014). From the ecological systems perspective, the connection of the child to the community and the impact of the community on the child are not debatable. Not only do youth have the right, as identified above, they also have the potential to play an influential role as stakeholders of their community as they develop. Unfortunately, even though the connection between youth and their communities is recognized theoretically, youth continue to be undermined rather than empowered to contribute to their community in practice (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2014; Charbonneau et al., 2014).

In the previous paragraph, I presented the idea that adolescents and youth are competent in assuming leadership roles in order to impact social change and the betterment of their community. However, some researchers have argued that it is inappropriate to place youth in leadership roles. They draw on ideas concerning the restructuring of the brain which occurs during adolescence, hormones, and the view that youth are highly self-conscious and have a strong desire to belong, which they identify as reasons to restrict youth from leadership roles. The concern identified is whether decisions made by youth will be influenced by these factors (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2014).

Although cognitively adolescents are still developing, it does not suggest that they are incapable of verbalizing their needs and thoughts on how to enhance their well-being. Youth are and should be recognized as being experts on their well-being. It is paramount that when working with youth, that the youth's development be realized, but in a manner which does not prohibit or limit their engagement. That is, in a manner that does not rob them of their rights (www.actforyouth.net).

### **Method of Implementation**

Community programs that focus on servicing youth are developed and implemented with the goal to contribute to the wellbeing of children and youth, and in doing so, the community. When considering youth who engage in risk-taking behavior, behaviors which lead to principal causes of morbidity and mortality, the objective of these programs is to decrease such behaviors (www.actforyouth.net). Through the process of research and evaluation, it is important to ascertain what changes are required to better the outcome of these programs and meet the identified objectives. Although the role of research and evaluation is predominantly filled by adults, it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that youth are capable, valuable, and effective in leadership roles when different approaches to empower and support youth to assume these roles have been implemented. (Bulanda, Szarzynski, Siler, & McCrea, 2013).

For example, in the power sharing model, all the participants, youth and adults alike, work together without the norm of a hierarchical framework. The voices of all involved are treated as having an equal degree of importance. This model functions on the premise that all participants, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, religion or race, possess knowledge. Learning is acknowledged as coming from “doing” (Charbonneau et al., 2014; Liang, Spencer, West, & Rappaport, 2013). Thus, all those involved are tasked to participate in a

meaningful way. Through power sharing, youth are apt to recognize the valuable role they play in bringing positive change to their community. Focusing on the issues which are of interest and have a direct impact on the youth helps to engage youth as well as maintain engagement. This approach allows for the goals of a program to be meaningful and relevant to youth. Additionally, through power sharing, youth experience an increased sense of connection to the program and consequently the community (Charbonneau et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2013).

The concept of youth-adult partnership is one which allows for youth and adults to work together. In this relationship, learning is reciprocal (Liang et al., 2013). Within this approach, there is the ability for both the adult and youth to play a part in the decision-making and the effecting of change in various programs within the community. The connection of the youth with the community and the empowerment of the youth to play a more involved role in their personal development and the betterment of their community is the objective of this approach (Liang et al., 2013).

Developing skills in youth and increasing youth participation can be approached much like employment. Essentially the youth undergo an interview for their position, receive financial compensation for their work, and are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Opportunities for teambuilding and leadership are provided to these youths through their position (Bulanda et al., 2013).

### **Benefits of Youth Civic Engagement**

There are countless benefits to youth-led programs and research. The literature outlines some of these benefits. The literature also stresses that there is a need to ensure that the

approach and the method taken to support, educate and prepare these youth for leadership roles be sound. The youth and the community will only achieve these benefits if there is opportunity for these youths to learn and lead. With the participation of youth in these roles they are empowered to become resources for themselves as well as for others in their community. Civic engagement of youth positions them to render greater benefit from those programs, which are designed for this precise purpose (Charbonneau et al., 2014).

Civic engagement provides to youth the skills to critically reflect on their role within the community. It increases their awareness of social issues and teaches them ways in which they can effectively confront these issues (<http://www.actforyouth.net/>). Playing a positive role in programs creates resiliency in youth. As a result of having control over the decisions made which impact them, young people become more connected. This supports them to make decisions which are healthier and that contribute to their overall well-being (Sahay, Rempel, & Lodge, 2014).

Evidence shows that youth participation results in the increase of self-efficacy in youth. As a result, these youths tend to be less apt to engage in risk-taking behavior and much more likely to engage in civic activities. It seems logical that an increased sense of self value and a greater connection with the community would encourage better and healthier decisions to be made by youth (Garcia, Minkler, Cardenas, Grills, & Porter, 2014).

A sense of empowerment is experienced by youth who have had opportunities to be involved in youth-led initiatives. In a study conducted by Blanchet-Cohen et al.(2014), statements made by youth who took part in the decision making of community development grants were extremely positive. They identified feeling confidence, a recognition that they could “live and have fun,” finding their voice, the acquiring of transferrable skills, and becoming aware

of the need to be considerate of the views held by other people. Within the communities, these youths were able to present new ideas and give the community a sense of new energy.

Additionally, it was recognized that having youth involved in civic engagement was not a risk but rather it was advantageous to all those involved (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2014).

There have been a number of studies conducted on youth-led programs and civic engagement. Within this review, I will focus on three studies in which the value of youth participation and civic engagement is further highlighted. The positive outcomes of these studies contribute to the benefits mentioned thus far of youth-led programs, civic engagement, and leadership in research and evaluation.

### **Research in Civic Engagement of Youth**

The following three studies focused on different youth civic engagement forms. I will start with a youth-led program in a middle school, which targeted bullying, aggression, sexual harassment, and dating aggression. The second study focuses on a program in which partnerships were established between youth and adults following a more youth-led initiative targeting physical health, specifically healthy eating and exercising. The final study is one in which youth are tasked with completing the evaluation of a program with their peers. The objective of this study was to compare youth evaluating youth programs and adults evaluating youth programs.

An evaluation of a youth-led program for preventing bullying, sexual harassment, and dating aggression in middle schools was compared to a board mandated usual practice program (Schnoll, Simkins-Strong, Pepler, MacPherson, Weiser, Moran, & Jiang, 2015). The youth who led the program were educated on the topic as to ensure they were able to deliver the program competently to their peers. The results found that both these approaches, youth-led and the

board mandated usual practice, showed significant improvement among the participants. Those students who were in receipt of the youth-led program showed a reduced level of anxiety and higher degree of maintaining school connectedness. What was identified as being contributing factors to these positive outcomes was that youth-led programs were seen as being better at modifying social norms and adult-led programs were identified as being effective in presenting factual knowledge. Peer-led prevention programs have rendered positive outcomes in a number of health domains (Schnoll et al., 2015).

The FEEST Program took shape as a result of the awareness that there was a need to improve the health of young people (Charbonneau et al., 2014). It was projected that the lifespan of youth was being impacted by eating habits and food systems. The FEEST Program recognized the value in having youth lead this program. It was viewed that by being directly involved, these youths would gain much more from their experience. This program brought together young people to prepare, share, and consume healthy meals. There was an educational component in which youth learned about growing food. Youth within this program participated in and led all aspects. Activities were inclusive of creating menus, preparing meals, cleanup, and engaging in creative activities to promote health. Factors which were identified to contribute to the success of this program were the use of youth-adult partnerships, clear roles and expectations, youth-driven programming, learning and paid internships (Charbonneau et al., 2014).

In the final example, in order to assess the most effective and informative way in which an evaluation of a youth program could be completed, an evaluation was conducted by both adults and youth with participants. The youth evaluators were provided with training prior to administering the evaluation. Upon the completion of this study, it was discovered that youth

were less shy or nervous with their peers conducting the evaluation. The level of comfort for the individual was greater due to the ability to relate and connect with their peers. Youth felt that with adults they needed to present as being more educated. As a result, the responses they provided to the adult evaluators were not as authentic. Youth identified feeling more pressured to meet the expectations of adults compared to meeting the expectations of their peers (Bulanda, et al., 2013).

### **Conclusion**

NOISE stands for New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement. The objective of the NOISE program is to bring together youth to increase their academic engagement, enhance civic engagement, and nurture psychosocial well-being (<http://youthrex.com/>). The program advocates that education empowers youth by better situating them to defend against unjust and oppressive conditions. The NOISE program recognizes that youth have the ability and the right to participate in the transformation of their community. By creating learning opportunities for young people through a strengths-based approach, movement towards community connections and life-long success is possible. The NOISE program supports youth to build relationships and prepare for post-secondary education. Rather than focusing on the negative, youth are supported and encouraged to work towards the issues that matter to them. As well, this program encourages young people to see and be aware of their part of the big picture.

The literature regarding group work with youth and youth participation and civic engagement presented several benefits. Youth participation and civic engagement supports, educates, and prepares youth for leadership roles. The vision of the NOISE program, as previously mentioned, is to prepare youth for post-secondary education and provide them with learning opportunities. Further, civic engagement works towards increasing awareness of social

issues and teaches ways in which to effectively confront these issues. The NOISE Program strives to support youth in becoming more aware of their community and the issues in the community that impact them. Effective ways to encourage youth to defend against and confront unjust conditions will be discussed in the group sessions implemented by the NOISE Program. The NOISE Program embraces a strengths-based approach. The literature identifies that a benefit to civic engagement is developing skills to critically reflect on individual roles within the community. From this perspective, youth come to see the impact they have, and can have, on the issues that mean the most to them within their community.

In understanding the value of group work with youth, brain development was explained early in the chapter. The concept of youth engaging in risk-taking behaviors being linked to brain development was touched upon. When considering brain development and risk taking behaviors, the value of civic engagement is clear. Given the opportunity, youth are less apt to engage in risk-taking behavior and much more likely to engage in civic activities. Civic engagement allows youth to have control over the decisions that impact them. If civic engagement is implemented in the form of group work, then the youth have the benefit of connecting with their peers in addition to their community.

Group work can maximize development and growth physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially in young persons. Because the NOISE program is focused on nurturing the psychosocial well-being of youth, it is apparent that facilitating this program through group work intervention would be most effective. Youth can focus on impacting change on their community as is the vision of the NOISE program through group work, which supports youth to think critically and affords them the opportunity to engage in a dialectical process. This process allows the participants to see issues from various points of view. Youth working

together to improve their communities learn from each other in group work. They come to see their passions are shared by others. They can experience the process together and be validated by each other as they focus on a mutual goal.

## **Chapter 2 – Placement Description and Learning Goals**

For my advanced practicum placement, I worked with Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange: YouthREX, northeast region. More specifically, I worked with the New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement program (NOISE). This program is offered in the community under the auspices of YouthREX. I will begin this chapter with a focus on YouthREX. First, I will discuss the origin of YouthREX. Then I will provide a description of YouthREX. Specifically, I will provide YouthREX's mission statement as well as explain the method in which the organization works towards its mission. Next, I will present information regarding the province wide locations and the way in which YouthREX is staffed. I will share information about the northeastern hub of YouthREX where I completed my advanced practicum.

Following the information about YouthREX, I will focus on NOISE, a program originated through York University's social work program. I will provide a description of NOISE, including its objective and rationale. Next, I will present information regarding the location where the weekly group sessions took place and will explain why this location was selected. Further I will present the difficulties with utilizing this location. I will then discuss how the program was staffed followed by a brief description of my placement supervisor. Further I will share how my placement supported me in achieving my learning objectives and my experience of supervision. I will then share information regarding the way the recruitment of participants was conducted. On a session by session basis, I will describe how the content of the NOISE Program was implemented during my placement.

This chapter will be concluded with my thoughts about the NOISE Program as it was implemented by YouthREX's northeastern hub. My thoughts based on the participation of the

participants will be presented in a concise manner. Specifically, I will touch on the social research topics the youth selected, what their research questions were, and the final projects produced. I will analyze how the NOISE Program aligned with the literature published on youth civic engagement and group work in the following chapter.

In 2012, Ontario launched its Youth Action Plan (<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/topics/youthandthelaw/youthactionplan/yap.pdf>). This plan recognized that no child should be placed at a disadvantage due to their religion, skin color, and place of residence or socioeconomic status. Because it is evident that the future of the province depends on our youth, it is paramount that support and opportunity is provided to all young people in order for all of us to thrive. Within Ontario's Youth Action Plan, goals such as addressing gaps in service, developing strategies to consider structural barriers in youth services, and the integrating of services to increase opportunities and outcomes for youth are identified. Ontario's Youth Action Plan takes into account the reality that to achieve its objectives, collaboration with partners and local leadership is vital (Hoskins & Meilleur, 2012).

Out of Ontario's Youth Action Plan, YouthREX was launched by the Minister of Children and Youth Services in 2014. YouthREX plays a pivotal role in the effort to address the need for local leadership and collaboration. It is acknowledged that gaps in service, structural barriers, and services vary from region to region. Five YouthREX Hubs were established in Ontario. Each of these hubs was located within universities across the province (<http://youthrex.com/>). The mission of YouthREX is "to make research evidence and evaluation accessible and relevant to Ontario's youth sector through knowledge mobilization, capacity building, and evaluation leadership" (<http://youthrex.com/>). In working towards its mission, YouthREX is informed by two frameworks, which are "Stepping Up Framework" and "Positive

Youth Development Framework” (<http://www.actforyouth.net/>). Stepping Up is a framework that was developed by Ontario’s Youth Action Plan. It is an evidence-based strategic framework that consists of seven themes: health and wellness, strong supported friends and families, education training and apprenticeships, employment and entrepreneurship, diversity, social inclusion and safety, civic engagement and youth leadership, and coordinated youth-friendly communities. This framework was developed with the objective of improving the well-being of Ontario youth. The Positive Youth Development Framework is a framework that focuses on assets rather than on problems and, as such, it proves to be a strength-based approach. It emphasizes the establishing of pathways to assets within communities (<http://youthrex.com/>).

Knowledge mobilization efforts by way of creating opportunities for youth service providers to meet and engage in the sharing of experiences and knowledge have been facilitated by YouthREX. These opportunities result in a more collaborative approach to working with youth which will only benefit the community. In working towards capacity building, YouthREX provides training opportunities. With the focus of making training accessible, training is provided by way of workshops as well as free webinars. Program evaluation services are provided to grassroots youth sector organizations with the goal of tracking, measuring and sharing the impact of their work (<http://youthrex.com/>). YouthREX is committed to making these supports and opportunities accessible as there is no monetary fee attached and meetings and training are scheduled at different venues throughout the province.

YouthREX’s central base is located at York University in Toronto. Additional hubs have been established in Carleton University in Ottawa, Western University in London, Laurentian University in Sudbury, and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay (<http://youthrex.com/>). YouthREX is comprised of a provincial advisory board as well as a youth advisory council. The

provincial advisory board is comprised of individuals who have research and professional practice experience and lived experience with the issues highlighted in the strategic framework to assist Ontario's youth to succeed, "Stepping Up." The youth advisory council is inclusive of youth who range from the ages of 16 to 25 years old as well as of individuals who have experience with the youth service sector (<http://youthrex.com/>).

It is through the northeastern regional hub of YouthREX that I completed my placement hours for this M.S.W. Advanced Practicum. The catchment area for the northeastern hub is Timiskaming, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Muskoka, Greater Sudbury, Algoma, Manitoulin, and Cochrane, and it is based at Laurentian University in Sudbury. The School of Social Work hosts the hub at Laurentian University (<http://youthrex.com/>).

The NOISE. Program is one of the many initiatives implemented by YouthREX. The School of Social Work at York University in Toronto was the first to launch the NOISE. Program in the Jane/Finch area in Toronto. Youth in the area were brought together to take part in this program with the goals being to increase their academic engagement, enhance civic engagement, and nurture psychosocial well-being. The program viewed that education empowers youth by better situating them to defend against unjust and oppressive conditions. The NOISE. Program recognizes that youth have the ability and the right to participate in the transformation of their community.

By creating learning opportunities for young people through a strengths-based approach, movement towards community connections and life-long success is possible. The NOISE. Program supports youth to build relationships and prepare for post-secondary education. This program teaches young people the power of research. Through hands-on experiential learning, youth acquire knowledge about how to develop research questions, collect data, share the

findings from the data, and make recommendations based on their research. Youth can take part as advocates in their community for the betterment of their community. By focusing on the issues that they are passionate about, they can make a difference.

Although the northeastern hub is situated at the Laurentian University campus, this is not where the NOISE Program was facilitated. Rather, the actual sessions of the program took place at the Sudbury Theatre Centre. The Sudbury Theatre Centre is located in the downtown core of Sudbury, ON a short walk from the Sudbury Transit terminal so participants were able to bus to the location, making the location accessible to the participants. Parking was available on site for the facilitators and parents. In the Sudbury Theatre Centre, participants had access to a cloak room where they put their jackets and other belongings. They had access to a room with tables and chairs making it comfortable to sit and produce the work required. They had access to a dining area in which there was a sitting area, a refrigerator and a microwave. They had access to washrooms. The facility was sound for the program to function and accessible to those participating in the program. The sole concern identified by the participants over the course of the program was that there was no access to the internet. In order to be more productive during sessions, internet access was necessary. Participants worked independently outside of group sessions to complete the work for which they required the internet.

There were four primary facilitators of the NOISE Program. There were two B.S.W students along with myself. We were supervised by the northeastern hub manager, Ms. Vivian Oystrick. Ms. Oystrick has 15 years of work experience in the child welfare sector. She was a case manager and a supervisor with the Children's Aid Society of the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin. She has experience working with youth as part of a research team with arts-based mindfulness intervention groups. Her work experiences as well as her passion for enhancing

resilience and improving the outcomes for vulnerable youth deemed her a placement supervisor from whom I believed I would be successful in achieving the learning objectives of my placement.

The learning objectives I identified in my practicum proposal were to (1) acquire and demonstrate an in-depth understanding of research, (2) acquire and demonstrate competence in the dissemination and transference of findings, (3) acquire and demonstrate an understanding of evaluation, (4) acquire and demonstrate skills in supporting youth to impact change in their community, and (5) acquire and demonstrate the ability to engage youth in the delivery of the program. I was able to achieve these objectives in part by researching the session topics prior to the session taking place and by facilitating group sessions.

This NOISE Program was the first to take place in Sudbury and as such the program had yet to be developed. Specifically, the activities, teachings, and the curriculum needed to be planned out. My role over the course of this placement was to assist with the development of the program, research the topics on which each session focused, facilitate the group sessions, and plan activities that aligned with the focus of the session. I also assisted with the recruiting of participants. For the final group session, I assisted with the coordinating and planning of the celebration.

Supervision took place throughout my placement. Prior to each group session I would meet with Ms. Oystriek, where I shared the information I acquired through researching the session topics as well as ideas for activities to facilitate learning for the participants. We would plan and debrief ideas in preparation for the group work. This process was helpful and supported my learning as Ms. Oystriek afforded me the opportunity to share my ideas and provided me

with feedback. In addition to the supervision meetings, my supervisor made herself available to me via the telephone whenever I needed direction. It was a positive learning experience.

Recruiting individuals to participate in the program was the next step. This process proved to be challenging. The NOISE Program was advertised in the community by way of flyers, posters, presentations, and reaching out to schools and agencies that serve youth. The program was initially targeting youth from a specific area in Sudbury. There were very few individuals who expressed an interest to attend which resulted in the need to expand the geographic target area. At this time the program was promoted through a radio interview as well as a Facebook page. The response from youth in the community was still limited. The result was that all participants who revealed an interest in the program were accepted to participate. A total of 13 youth formed the group at the onset. These 13 youths included eight male and five female participants. From the 13 youth, five did not continue to attend. Of the five youth who discontinued attendance, two did so due to obtaining part-time employment, two were not ready to effectively participate in a group, and one did not return beyond the initial couple of sessions. Of the eight remaining participants, there were four male and four female participants who remained part of the group to completion. These youth were all in grade eight and nine and all resided in Greater Sudbury. These participants were motivated in part to attend the NOISE Program because they could accumulate high school volunteer hours and because they were given an honorarium for attendance and participation. They were recruited primarily through the Sudbury Child and Family Centre, Children's Aid Society of the Districts of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and the SPOT Program (Supporting Positive Opportunities with Teens) through Better Beginnings Better Futures Sudbury. Although it was the honorarium and school volunteer hours that initially interested these participants, from their enthusiasm, it seemed that through the

group sessions and from working on their group projects, they were developing relationships and a greater interest in their respective social issue topics.

NOISE. was facilitated for 13 weeks in 3-hour sessions from 4:30p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The YouthREX hub located at York University, where the first NOISE. Program launched, provided the themes for the group sessions. Using the themes as a guide, a curriculum which adhered to the needs of the northeastern jurisdiction was developed. The activities and the teachings were planned out prior to each session to accommodate the frequency and duration of the group sessions, which was also different than when the program was implemented by York University. The group's discussions were focused on Sudbury's local realities, which differ from those in the Jane and Finch Area.

The differences in context between the Jane and Finch area and Greater Sudbury are plentiful and broad. For the purpose of this discussion, I will comment on those differences which are most applicable. I will first consider population, population density, and the geographic size of both of these jurisdictions. In the Jane and Finch area, based on the 2006 census, the population was recorded at 80,150, whereas in Greater Sudbury the population was 158,259. The population density was 3817 people per square kilometer in the Jane and Finch area and 47.1 people per square kilometer in Greater Sudbury. Further, the Jane and Finch area is a compact 21 square kilometers whereas the area of Greater Sudbury is 3411 square kilometers (<https://www1.toronto.ca>, [www.regionalbusiness.ca](http://www.regionalbusiness.ca)). These differences are significant when addressing social issues because there is a need to be mindful of accessibility to community assets. Consideration with respect to bus stops and public transportation is needed. Unlike the Jane and Finch area, Greater Sudbury does not have a subway station every 6 kilometers (<https://www1.toronto.ca>). Another very important difference to consider is that in the Jane and

Finch area the visible minorities make up 70.6% of the population unlike the 4% in Greater Sudbury (<https://www1.toronto.ca>, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca> ). This difference is significant because it has an impact on culture, specifically on the values and beliefs held by those who reside in the area. The things deemed significant based on the perception of an another's beliefs and values differ, and as such the social issues which are deemed significant to address will be impacted. In the following section, an outline of the program's weekly agenda as developed is presented. Note that some icebreaker activities are repeated at the request of the participants. There were sessions that the participants were encouraged to select the activity they wanted, which resulted in a couple of the activities being repeated.

#### Group Session 1

Objective: For youth to explore the definition of leadership and the various applications of leadership roles and styles.

Icebreaker Activity: "Name Crossword." In this activity participants wrote their name on a piece of paper. This paper was passed around to each participant to add their name using one letter from another participant's name. The finished product looked much like a crossword puzzle of the participants' names.

Community Agreement and Code of Conduct: Collaboratively, the group created the code of conduct for group sessions. The intention of creating a code of conduct was to outline with the participants how they wished to see the group function and to allow the group members to take ownership and responsibility over their group. Further, a code of conduct helps to create a safe and comfortable environment for the participants to share and discuss their respective points of view (Furman et al., 2016).

Identity Sheets for Youth Binders: Youth were provided with individual NOISE binders. They were encouraged to decorate an identity sheet and include the things in which they are interested. The identity sheet was placed in the front of their respective binders. The participants who were interested in sharing presented their identity sheets to the group.

Break for Dinner: Dinner was provided to the youths.

Leadership Workshop: Styles of leadership were discussed with the group. Participants were provided with pictures of familiar leaders such as Gandhi and Justin Trudeau. A discussion followed, sharing what kinds of leaders those individuals were/are, specifically focusing on stereotypes of leadership and ways in which youth can identify themselves as leaders.

Leadership Activity: The different leadership styles were posted around the room and youth were asked to take their place at the style which most applied to them. This action increased the knowledge of the participants that they are all leaders.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using "Rose/Thorn." Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

## Group Session 2

Objective: For youth to define and understand the power of research in order to initiate change in their community.

Icebreaker Activity: "Zip-Zap-Zoop." In this game, one player pointed to a player to one side of them and said "zip." That player turned to the next player in the circle, pointed to them and said "zip.". The receiving player could say "zap" to the person pointing at them. When this occurred

the player must change direction. The person who received the "zip" may yell "zoop" and point at someone anywhere in the circle. That player then would restart the "zip" going in the direction of their choice.

Knowledge is Power: A guest speaker attended the group session and spoke to the group about the concept of knowledge being related to power in decision-making and transformative change. The objective of the guest speaker was for the participants to begin to understand the power, purpose, and value that research has to create change in their community.

### Break for Dinner

Stereotypes Workshop: Youth were provided with pictures of individuals and asked to identify some of the stereotypes that came to mind. The discussion focused on being aware of our stereotypes when conducting research. The goal of the workshop was for the participants to learn about stereotypes and how research can help debunk stereotypes.

Stereotypes Activity: A participant lies down on a piece of paper and was traced. Post-it notes were provided to each participant on which they wrote the stereotypes they believed to be held by people about youth. These post-it notes were placed on half of the outline. Youth then wrote what they believed to be true of youth. These truths were posted on the other half of the outline.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using "Rose/Thorn." Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 3

Objective: For youth to understand the interdependency of people and places within their community and to identify key issues and key assets which support the community.

Icebreaker activity: “\$1000.00 Challenge.” For this game, participants were provided with ten \$100 fake bills. Each participant challenged different group members to “rock paper scissors” or a “coin flip.” The winner got the sum of fake money that was agreed upon prior to the game. The participant with the most fake money at the end won the game.

Bursting Stereotypes Activity: Each participant was given a balloon on which they wrote a stereotype held of youth by the community. They then identified the stereotype written on their respective balloons and popped the balloon, symbolically bursting the stereotype.

Identifying Issues and Assets in Our Community Workshop: Participants were separated into two groups. Each group was provided with a case study in which a community and roles of the participants were described. The two groups competed by way of presenting arguments as to why they felt their community should receive funding to improve their community. This activity required the youth to understand the interdependency of places and people in the community. They identified both the issues that concerned them and the assets that supported them in order to attain the learning objective of understanding the purpose and value of research within the community.

#### Break for Dinner

Asset/Needs Mapping: Participants were provided with a paper on which there was an outline of a body. Based on the needs and assets of their community, the participants were asked to identify their interest (on the head of the outline), their passion (on the heart of the outline), what

they enjoyed doing (on the hands of the outline) and their future goals (on the feet of the outline). Around the outline youth identified what they liked and/or disliked about their community as well as how much their community supports them. This activity was shared with the group once completed. The object of this activity was to help divide the group based on their interest to address particular issues in their community.

Home Assignment: Youth were asked to return to the next group session with evidence that supported the need for a specific project in their community. Evidence could be in the form of posters, flyers, newspaper articles, statistics or feedback from community members.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

#### Group Session 4

Objective: For youth to explore and work with research questions and define a research question related to a specific topic.

Icebreaker Activity: “Mafia.” In this game there were six roles - a narrator, two members of the mafia, two members of the police, and a doctor. The remaining people were townspeople. The narrator needed to prepare the right number of playing cards to set up the game. There were specific cards that represent the roles. The narrator shuffled these cards and each person randomly selected a card. Without revealing his or her identity they assumed the role for the round. The narrator announced the person who was eliminated, unless the doctor correctly selected the person who was targeted by the Mafia. The person who was eliminated quietly left the circle. The townspeople, along with the Mafia and Police pretending to be townspeople, then

nominated and voted on people who they suspected were Mafia. Each person nominated attempted to plead their case. The person who received a majority vote was eliminated. After someone was voted out, the pattern started again.

Deciding on Research Topics and Groups: Participants were asked to present their homework from the previous session, a research topic of their choice. They provided the evidence they found to support a need for research specific to their chosen topic. The activity's objective was to encourage the participants to explore and ask critical questions. Based on the topics selected by the participants for their research projects, they were divided into groups.

#### Break for Dinner

Deciding on Research Questions Workshop: Youth were supported through the process of how to decide on research questions. The objective was for youth to explore and work with different research questions and to come up with a research question related to their chosen topic. Youth learned how to connect research questions to goal setting.

Goal Setting Workshop: Youth learned how to set mid- and short-term measurable goals.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 5

Objective: For youth to learn basic research methods and understand the benefits and detriments of using these different methods.

Icebreaker Activity: “Post It.” For this game, each participant was given a post-it note with the name of a famous character to stick on their forehead. The objective was for the person to identify the name on their forehead by asking closed-ended questions to the other participants, who answered with a yes or no.

Art as a Research Method: A guest speaker discussed using art as a form of gathering information. Youth learned both the benefits and detriments of using art as a tool in research. The goal was to further the understanding youth had of research and evaluation and how to collect data in creative ways.

#### Break for Dinner

Research Methods Workshop: Stations were set up for the youth to visit for 10 minute intervals. These stations allowed the youth to experiment with some common ways to do research and collect data. Advantages and disadvantages of these common ways were discussed at the respective stations. The objective of this workshop was for youth to learn research methods and the benefits and detriments of using these methods.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 6

Objective: For youth to learn common research methods and understand the benefits and detriments of using these methods and to learn the ethics involved in research.

Icebreaker Activity: “The Marshmallow-Spaghetti Challenge.” This activity involved teams of four participants. These teams competed to create the highest free-standing structure with spaghetti noodles and one marshmallow.

Group Work: Revisited research questions from previous sessions and mapped out project ideas as presented by the participants.

### Break for Dinner

Ethics in Research Workshop: Participants were separated into groups and provided with scenarios to act out. The audience was tasked to stop the play at any time and modify the play so that the content was ethical. This workshop was designed to emphasize the importance, value, and purpose of ethical research.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

## Group Session 7

Objective: For youth to identify methods of collecting data for their research topic.

Icebreaker activity: “\$1000.00 Challenge.” For this game, participants were provided with ten \$100 fake bills. Each participant challenged different group members to “rock paper scissors” or a “coin flip.” The winner got the sum of fake money that was agreed upon prior to the game. The participant with the most fake money at the end won the game.

Public Speaking Workshop: A guest speaker discussed with the group strategies and exercises to feel confident and capable of presenting to an audience.

#### Break for Dinner

Data Collection: Participants worked together to reach an agreement on which data collection methods best suited their research topics. Participants needed to identify methods of collecting data and to continue to explore and answer critical questions.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy

### Group Session 8

Objective: For youth to learn about competing demands for funding and how sharing resources can maximize inputs and outputs.

Icebreaker Activity: “Egg Hunt.” Participants took part in an Easter Egg Hunt. They were challenged to share their resources (chocolate eggs).

Data Collection Workshop: Participants completed their baseline and target statements for their respective project goals and outcomes. This workshop focused on increasing the participants' understanding of the relationship between research and evaluation.

#### Break for Dinner

Data Collection Workshop (continued): Participants completed their baseline and target statements for their respective project goals and outcomes. This workshop focused on increasing the participants' understanding of the relationship between research and evaluation.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 9

Objective: For youth to continue to work on their respective research projects.

Icebreaker Activity: “Heads Up.” Individuals were selected to come to the front of the room. The facilitator called, "Heads down"; the participants not selected put their heads down, closed their eyes, and put up their thumb. The individuals selected circulated through the room and secretly pressed down one thumb each and then returned to the front of the room. The facilitator then called, "Heads up." The participants raised their heads and those whose thumbs were pressed stood up. Each named the person they thought pressed their thumb. If they were correct, they switched places with the person they guessed correctly. The game then started again.

Independent Group Work: Participants worked on their social research projects in the sub groups created by way of project topics.

### Break for Dinner

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 10

Objective: For youth to understand the concepts of change versus charity and the impact of low expectations placed on youth in the community.

Charity vs. Change: Youth discerned the difference between charity and change. They applied these concepts to the problems in their community to achieve the objective of understanding the principals of transformative change.

The Violence of Low Expectations: Youth learned that having low expectations of youth in the community can impact the success of the community and how this was so.

### Break for Dinner

Icebreaker Activity: “Mafia.” In this game there were six roles - a narrator, two members of the mafia, two members of the police, and a doctor. The remaining people were townspeople. The narrator needed to prepare the right number of playing cards to set up the game. There were specific cards that represent the roles. The narrator shuffled these cards and each person randomly selected a card. Without revealing his or her identity they assumed the role for the round. The narrator announced the person who was eliminated, unless the doctor correctly selected the person who was targeted by the Mafia. The person who was eliminated quietly left the circle. The townspeople, along with the Mafia and Police pretending to be townspeople, then nominated and voted on people who they suspected were Mafia. Each person nominated attempted to plead their case. The person who received a majority vote was eliminated. After someone was voted out, the pattern started again.

Project Work: Youth were given time to work in their respective subgroups on their social action projects.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

## Group Session 11

Objective: For youth to learn how to generate findings from research data, to explore ways to change their findings into recommendations, and to prioritize their recommendations.

Icebreaker Activity: “Heads Up.” Individuals were selected to come to the front of the room. The facilitator called, “Heads down”; the participants not selected put their heads down, closed their eyes, and put up their thumb. The individuals selected circulated through the room and secretly pressed down one thumb each and then returned to the front of the room. The facilitator then called, “Heads up.” The participants raised their heads and those whose thumbs were pressed stood up. Each named the person they thought pressed their thumb. If they were correct, they switched places with the person they guessed correctly. The game then started again.

Project Work: Youth were given time to work in their respective subgroups on their social action projects.

### Break for Dinner

Project Work: Youth were given time to work in their respective subgroups on their social action projects.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

## Group Session 12

Objective: For youth to learn about the different ways in which they can present their social research projects.

Icebreaker Activity: “Mafia.” In this game there were six roles - a narrator, two members of the mafia, two members of the police, and a doctor. The remaining people were townspeople. The narrator needed to prepare the right number of playing cards to set up the game. There were specific cards that represent the roles. The narrator shuffled these cards and each person randomly selected a card. Without revealing his or her identity they assumed the role for the round. The narrator announced the person who was eliminated, unless the doctor correctly selected the person who was targeted by the Mafia. The person who was eliminated quietly left the circle. The townspeople, along with the Mafia and Police pretending to be townspeople, then nominated and voted on people who they suspected were Mafia. Each person nominated attempted to plead their case. The person who received a majority vote was eliminated. After someone was voted out, the pattern started again.

Presenting Research Findings Workshop: Youth considered the different ways in which they could share their research findings as well as their recommendations. They considered how these ways of presenting their findings and recommendations would fit within the larger social action landscape.

Story Boards: Youth created story boards to present the findings of their research.

Break for Dinner

Videography Workshop: A guest speaker taught youth how to use videography to present the findings of their research projects.

Closing: At the closing of the group session, feedback was obtained using “Rose/Thorn.” Each participant shared their experience of the session with the rose being what they enjoyed and the thorn being what they felt could have been done differently or what they did not enjoy.

### Group Session 13

Objective: For youth to present their social projects and to celebrate their accomplishments.

Parents and siblings were invited to attend this final session.

Tour: Youth were given a tour of the Laurentian University campus.

Survey: Participants completed post-program surveys.

#### Break for Dinner

Presentations: Youth presented their social research projects in their groups.

Closing: Celebrated with cake. Participants were presented with certificates of completion.

### **Youths' Research Topics**

The eight youth who completed the program formed three subgroups based on their social research topic. The topics on which the research projects focused were (1) children's mental health, (2) youth activities, and (3) youth art connection.

The group that focused on children's mental health consisted of three youth who were concerned about how many of their peers were struggling with mental health challenges. Together they developed and presented a video that was designed to improve the awareness of mental health services available to youth in our region. A summary of the NOISE program and the video can be accessed via this link: <http://youthrex.com/northeastern-hub-noise-program-recap-2/>. The youths conducted surveys identifying their interest in wanting to find out more about the awareness of mental health resources and preferred social media for youth in Sudbury. Among the questions asked were how comfortable youth felt talking about mental health issues,

their awareness of the resources available, and youths' opinions regarding the best way to reach youth and educate them about available mental health resources.

The group that focused on youth activities consisted of three youth who were concerned about the number and quality of extracurricular sport and social activities available to youths in Sudbury. They presented their research findings. These findings will inform the development of an app that will inform youth of services and events in their community. They conducted surveys identifying a desire to find out more about parks, recreational facilities, and activities for youth in Sudbury. Among the questions asked on this survey were whether or not youth were participating in recreational activities and where in the city they resided. In their sample, they found that 84/98 youth resided within Greater Sudbury and that 55/98 were actively involved in community based activities for youth.

The group that focused on youth art connection consisted of two youth who were passionate about art and wanted to increase awareness among youth of the art programs available in the community. These two youth presented information about existing art programs for youth. They conducted surveys identifying a desire to better understand youths' interest and the demand for youth art programs. Among the questions asked on the survey was whether youth would attend an art program if one was available, how many youth had access to art supplies, and whether or not youth are currently attending art based programs. They concluded that 117/125 youth enjoyed art, while 77/125 were involved in an art based program. Out of the 125 surveys completed, 98 people stated they would attend an art program if one was available and 108 stated that they had access to art supplies.

Youth were engaged throughout the group sessions. They presented as enjoying the icebreaker games as well as the learning workshops. The youth completed a great deal of work

independently and on their own time, which showed a true passion for their respective social research topics. In conclusion, the NOISE Program set out to teach youth the power of research, how to develop research questions, collect data, share the findings of their research and make recommendations. From my observations, the program was successful in achieving its aims. At the completion of the program, the youth used the knowledge acquired to complete research projects. The youth presented their projects at the final group session sharing their results with the broader community, including their families.

### **Chapter 3 - Discussion**

With the literature reviewed in Chapter One and the NOISE Program described in Chapter Two, this chapter will focus on how the literature reviewed aligns with the NOISE Program. Specifically, Chapter One outlines the way in which group work is recommended to be implemented with adolescents. In this chapter, I will review the method of implementation recommended and establish how the NOISE Program fared in alignment with the recommendations. Further, the literature reviewed in Chapter One was inclusive of many studies in which youth participated in groups. These studies described the implementation of various group work programs. I will use the youth participation and civic engagement programs identified earlier to illustrate the recommended methods of implementing group work. I will then use examples to illustrate how the NOISE Program followed the recommended methods as per the literature.

I will begin this chapter with a review of the objective and rationale of the NOISE Program. Areas which I will focus on when examining the NOISE Program and how it aligns with the literature are the recruiting process, the significance of group cohesion, the physical space where the group sessions are being held, the code of conduct, and the method of implementation, specifically looking at linear paths and circuitous detours. I will examine strategies outlined in the literature as it relates to how group work intervention should end and then reflect on whether the way the NOISE Program ended adhered to these strategies. To conclude, I will focus on the NOISE Program implemented in 2016 in the City of Sudbury. In doing so, it is my intention to share my thoughts on how closely the NOISE Program launched in Sudbury was aligned with the literature, and where I thought there was room for improvement.

The NOISE Program is one of the many initiatives implemented by YouthREX. The objective of the NOISE Program is to bring together youth in the local area to increase their academic engagement, enhance their civic engagement, and nurture their psychosocial well-being. The NOISE Program advocates that education empowers youth by better situating them to defend against unjust and oppressive conditions. It recognizes that youth have the ability and the right to participate in the transformation of their community and therefore provides youth with an opportunity to work towards this change.

The NOISE Program supports youth to build relationships and prepare for post-secondary education. It also aims to teach young people the power of research. Through hands-on experiential learning, youth acquire knowledge about how to develop research questions, collect data, share the findings from the data, and make recommendations based on their research. Youth can take part as advocates in their community for the betterment of their community. By focusing on the issues that they are passionate about, youth can make a difference. The NOISE Program assists youth to do so by empowering them and educating them.

When implementing group work, an important step is the recruitment of group participants. This process involves great care and consideration as each participant will impact the group as well as the individual members of the group. The literature proposes a few steps which need to be taken in the recruitment phase. The aspects of the recruitment phase that I will focus on are the ways of acquiring applicants or referrals, pre-group contact, interviewing, open or closed groups, gender, age, and size of a group.

There first needs to be an awareness that there is a group in which to become involved. Once the information regarding a group is available to potential participants, the invitation to

join needs to be extended. Potential participants can be asked to volunteer, self-refer, or be referred if they are interested in joining the group (Weller et al., 2015).

Referrals can also occur as discussed by researchers involved with the Holistic Art-Based Program. Participants of this program were referred from the child welfare system as well as the children's mental health system. They were referred using referral forms, which required basic information such as contact information, date of birth and any concerns that the referring party felt necessary to share about the potential group participant. Since the community where this program operated is not a diverse community, it was not necessary to request information regarding ethnicity or demographics (Coholic et al., 2015). In other communities implementing group work, information regarding ethnicity and/or demography might be important to request in the referral or application forms. This information could impact on the degree of group cohesivity that develops over the life of the group.

Participants of the NOISE Program were referred by others and also self-referred. Some of the participants were encouraged by service providers in the community to participate in the program but ultimately did so by their own choice. Other participants obtained the information through the various methods that the NOISE Program advertised or promoted itself within the community. Those who were interested completed an application form in which questions covered contact information and requested information regarding the youths' interests and strengths.

Malekoff (2014) introduced the concept of pre-group contact. He defined pre-group contact as "securing appropriate members for the group that is being planned and preparing for their participation in the group" (p.91). It is suggested by Malekoff (2014) that when implementing groups for young persons, it is essential to involve parents in the pre-group contact

phase. The significance of having parental involvement is to ensure the questions of the parents are answered. Parents or caregivers bringing their children in for group sessions will have questions, such as why the group is beneficial to their child, what the purpose of the group is, and what their children are doing in group sessions (Malekoff, 2014). Furthermore, parental involvement can have an impact on the child's attendance. If the parent or caregiver does not have the information needed to determine the value of the group to their child, they may opt to not support or encourage attendance. At this pre-group stage, it is important to work on establishing strong and positive relationships with the potential participants and their caregivers. The strong relationships built at this initial phase of recruitment will contribute to a more successful group in which the needs of the group members are met (Weller et al., 2015).

The NOISE Program did adhere to the pre-group contact step of the recruitment phase. To recruit participants, the NOISE Program conducted presentations at the Supporting Positive Opportunity with Teens Program, and on both the Canadian Television Network and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in which an orientation of the program was provided. At the time of these presentations, some youth showed an interest in participating in the program. The facilitators of the program contacted the parents or caregivers of the youth who showed an interest and provided information about the program as well as answered any questions the parents or caregivers had. The facilitators also extended an invitation to the parents or caregivers to attend the first group meeting. This invitation was with the intent to answer any further questions, to allow the parents or caregivers to meet the facilitators, and to provide them with a welcome package inclusive of consent forms, which required signing. At this first group session, parents were also invited to share in coffee and snacks with the group.

Once potential group members have been identified, the process of interviewing and preparing them for group work should occur. The process of interviewing involves assessing to evaluate the needs and strengths of the individual, screening for the suitability of the potential group member, engaging and providing information regarding the group, and contracting (Malekoff, 2014). Interviewing is essential when recruiting and selecting group members as it provides an understanding as to who is being selected and why that individual is being selected to participate in the group. This understanding can only be obtained when consideration is placed on the needs of the individual and the purpose of the group (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014). To implement a successful group, focus should be placed on aspects such as need, purpose, structure, content, and pre-group contact when selecting participants (Weller et al., 2015).

For instance, group work administered at an alternative high school conducted interviews that were semi-structured and lasted approximately half an hour. Youth, in this study, identified their reason for wanting to be a part of group work as well as reported on their mental health. Ultimately those selected to participate were selected based on their motivation, needs, and the input of staff personnel (Weller et al., 2015). Similarly, the Holistic Arts-Based Study received referrals from the children's mental health system as well as the child welfare system. Upon receipt of the referrals, the facilitators provided an orientation of the program to the child and the family (Coholic & Eyes, 2016).

Although the NOISE Program did obtain information regarding the potential group members, there were no interviews conducted. This step, I would submit, would have been an important step to take prior to the implementation of the NOISE Program. However, due to time constraints and a short window to recruit youth to the program before it had to begin, this step

was omitted. The purpose of the interview would have been to obtain as much information about the youth as possible, so a strengths-based approach could be taken with each of the participants. With the interviews not taking place, the strengths drawn upon in the implementation of the group were those that surfaced during the group process. It is my belief that these young people possessed talents and skills that were probably unknown to the group facilitators. I come to this belief because there is a great deal more to an individual than what is captured in the span of a couple of hours once a week, which was the duration of time that we as facilitators observed the youth who participated in the program, and also the reality that we did not have the opportunity to know the youth in an in-depth manner before the program began. In an ideal situation, the knowledge of these talents and skills could have been drawn upon not only to ensure a strengths-based approach but also to further youth engagement, increase self-esteem, and increase self-confidence. The reality with the implementation of NOISE in Sudbury was that the timelines were very tight and the facilitators did not have time to interview the youth and their parents or guardians before they had to begin the program due to funding constraints.

When recruiting participants for group work, the decision as to whether the group is an open or closed group needs to be made. An open group is one in which individuals can choose to join whenever they wish whereas a closed group does not allow for new members to join after the participants have been selected or after a couple of sessions have already taken place (Furman et al., 2016).

The NOISE Program implemented a closed group. Once the initial sessions took place, there was not the ability for new members to join. The rationale being that the NOISE Program was designed in a way that, from week to week, there was new content being taught that built on previous content and learning. Furthermore, tasks to work towards the final project were being

completed by the participants on a weekly basis. Those missing the first part of the program would not be well-positioned to complete the final project, because they would have missed too much of the material taught and would have not progressed in their respective projects.

The gender and age of potential participants also needs to be considered. For the purposes of this discussion, adolescents are considered to be youth from the ages of 10 to 19 years old. These are the ages of youth for which the NOISE Program recruited. Factors to consider prior to determining whether to implement a co-ed group or not is the type of group being implemented, and an understanding of the differences between genders. Diversity in group intervention can be positive in that diversity contributes to a variety of perspectives, thus impacting the quality of discussions. However, when implementing a group focused on a specific gender such as a group for sexually abused men or a group for female rape victims, it goes without question that both genders should not be included (Wickham, Pelech, & Basso, 2009). Not being inclusive of both genders in such group sessions will contribute to the comfort and likelihood of sharing more intimate information. Even in groups targeting only male or only female participants, the likelihood of having diversity among the participants is high. Such differences among the participants as race, experiences, intelligence, and emotional maturity will be apparent. According to some authors, these differences will contribute to the efficacy of group intervention (Wickham et al., 2009). In NOISE., all genders were included as the program was educational in focus as opposed to a therapy group. Thus, the youth were not required or expected to share information that was of a deeply personal nature as would be expected in a therapeutic group.

The other factor that needs to be considered in deciding if a group should be implemented as co-ed is the need for facilitators to be aware of the differences between genders. Firstly, we

can look at the differences between the male and female brain. Some believe that the primary difference between the male and female brain is that the male brain has more connections within the hemispheres whereas the female brain proves to have more connections between hemispheres. This difference highlights that in the female brain there is better communication between the right and left hemisphere and as such this could contribute to a more enhanced ability to switch from task to task (Jensen & Nutt, 2015). Adolescent girls generally possess better language abilities than their male counterparts. Another difference to note is that in the female brain the amygdala develops sooner than in boys by approximately 18 months. Similar in both adolescent girls and boys are the swings in emotional behavior. Both genders are impacted by hormones which they have not yet learned to control. Both genders react very instinctively due to the emotional and intellectual parts of the brain still developing (Jensen & Nutt, 2015).

A study which investigated gender and age differences in academic motivation and classroom behaviors in adolescents was conducted with one of the goals being to examine differences in academic motivation and classroom behavior between boys and girls (Bugler, McGeown, and St. Clair-Thompson, 2016). Of the 855 participants of this study, 440 were male while 415 were female. These students ranged from ages 11 to 16 years and were selected from five different secondary schools. These students completed a student motivation and engagement scale that measured adaptive cognition, adaptive behavior, maladaptive cognition and maladaptive behavior. Results of the study indicated that the female students reported higher levels of adaptive cognition, self-belief and learning focus; adaptive behavior, planning and task management; and maladaptive cognition, anxiety and failure avoidance. Teachers reported that the boys in the classroom had poorer behavior, cognitive issues, and inattention. Although female students were identified in this study as being more positively motivated, they

were also identified as experiencing higher levels of anxiety. This article identified that a number of studies suggest that girls are more apt to experience internalizing disorders such as depression, anxiety or eating disorders. Male students were identified as having increased aggression. Further, males were identified as being academically motivated by achievement. Both genders engage in disruptive behaviors in early secondary school (Bugler et al., 2016).

The NOISE Program was not a program geared to any specific gender. The group sessions focused on teaching adolescents about research and empowering them to be advocates in their community. The NOISE.N.O.I.S.E Program focused on youth civic engagement, which is to the benefit of both male and female youth. Therefore, the type of group implemented by YouthREX was inclusive of both genders. The differences between the genders were known to the group facilitators but since NOISE. was a program focused more on teaching concepts, gender was not deemed a factor that would impede the progress of the group and learning in the group. However, as pointed out above, within the group sessions, it was observed that a female participant struggled with anxiety while a male participant presented in an aggressive manner. In response to the male who presented aggressively and in order to approach the participants based on their needs, this youth was not permitted to continue participation in the group sessions. The female participant was encouraged and supported based on her strengths and became less and less anxious as we progressed through the weekly sessions. Although there is literature on gender differences, it is understood that assumptions cannot be drawn and generalizations cannot be made. Through the manner in which the youth interacted with each other and with facilitators, an understanding of who each of these young people were became clear. The facilitator approached the youth based on their individual needs and worked towards building on their individual strengths.

In summary, it was not difficult to work with this co-ed group of adolescents. The potentially reactive nature of adolescents did not prove to be a challenge when working with these youth. They were socially appropriate and thoughtful of each other. If there were instances in which they needed redirecting, it was done with little to no difficulty. The fact that the youth were under no stress to discuss highly personal issues discussed in the group sessions made it safer for the youth to share openly.

Another important consideration when selecting group participants is how many participants in total will form the group. Group size is determined based on the type of group being implemented as well as the age of the participants. It is recommended that when working with pre-adolescents, three to four participants be selected, and when working with adolescents, six to ten participants be selected. A smaller group size will allot time for the individual members to actively take part, however, a larger group will allow for there to be the sharing of multiple perspectives (Furman et al., 2016).

There are times when we do not have the luxury of selecting from a number of individuals who will take part in the group. Because of the Christmas holiday season, recruiting within a small community, and only a 2-week period to complete the recruitment phase, recruiting for the NOISE Program proved to be challenging. The NOISE Program was advertised in the community by way of flyers, posters, presentations, and reaching out to schools and agencies that serve youth. The program was then promoted through a radio interview and Facebook. Still not enough youth expressed interest to attend. This resulted in the need to expand the geographic location from the downtown core from where the participants were initially supposed to be selected. The program was also initially targeting youth from grades

nine to twelve. Due to the low number of youth who expressed an interest to take part in the program, youth in grade eight were accepted.

Additionally, all participants who revealed an interest to partake in the program were accepted to participate. All the participants resided in Greater Sudbury. They were recruited primarily through the Sudbury Child and Family Centre, Children's Aid Society of the District of Sudbury and Manitoulin, and the SPOT Program (Supporting Positive Opportunities with Teens) through Better Beginnings Sudbury.

A total of 13 youth formed the group at the onset. These 13 youths included eight male and five female participants. From the 13 youth, five did not continue to attend. Of the five youth who discontinued attendance, two did so due to obtaining part time employment, two were not group ready, and one did not return beyond the initial couple of sessions. Of the eight participants that remained, there were four males and four females and they remained part of the group to completion. Ideally, when selecting participants to participate in a group it is paramount to pay attention to the individual personalities and experiences of the potential group members (Furman et al., 2016). The consideration of personalities and experiences in the recruitment phase of group work is significant because it will be a contributing factor to the development of a cohesive group.

Group cohesion is paramount to the implementation of effective group work. The way in which the physical space is arranged can either contribute or take away from the development of a cohesive group (Furman et al., 2016). If the physical space is set up with chairs in rows, a climate of one-way interaction is created, taking away from the possibility of a collaborative exchange. Rows contribute to a sense of, or a feeling of, being in a lecture hall. If the physical space is set up with the chairs in a circle, it is conveyed to the participants that their individual

involvement is valued and expected, a sense or feeling of being in a discussion group (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

When implementing the NOISE Program, the physical space was situated at the Sudbury Theatre Centre. The room was one in which there was a stage, a bar, small round tables and chairs. During the first session, youth found a table and seated themselves. Initially, the youth were either seated alone because they did not know anyone else in the group or they were seated with someone they already knew. For the next group session and those to follow, the facilitators ensured the room was set up prior to the youth arriving. Typically, the set up was with the tables pulled together and chairs placed around the tables. To contribute to group cohesion, when the activities were being facilitated, the youth were seated in a circle without a table in the middle or were moving about the room as required by the activity. When teaching the material designated for the group session, the youth were seated together with the tables adjoined. Towards the end of the group sessions, the youth were separated into sub-groups based on the topic they selected for their final project so they could work in these small groups.

In a cohesive group, the members or participants will experience a sense of belonging and connection (Rosenwald et al., 2013). Group cohesion promotes optimal group functioning, because in a group that is cohesive the members become more invested. They can see the things they have in common with other group members (Furman et al., 2016). If group members can recognize what about themselves they have in common with other participants, the likelihood of them sharing without concern of being judged, and understanding and supporting one another increases (Rosenwald, et al., 2013). The commonalities among the members can contribute to creating a safe space in which the individual participants will be more willing to take risks, thus resulting in genuine and meaningful learning to transpire (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

For example, experiences and personalities were effectively considered by the Holistic Arts-Based Study. The young persons who took part in this program all had similar challenges. They were involved in the child welfare system and/or the mental health system. The participants shared similar experiences, such as unstable places of residence, poor academic performance, and lack of confidence. Most of these participants experienced abuse (Coholic et al., 2015; Coholic & Eyes, 2016). Important to note is that when individuals share similar struggles and challenges they are better situated to offer suggestions, support, and reassurance to each other. Once aware that they are not alone in their respective predicament, they can better absorb the meaning of what is being taught or discussed (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

The NOISE Program attempted to consider personalities and experiences of the participants in that the goal was to recruit youth who resided in a specific area and youth who were high school aged. Unfortunately, as identified earlier, the difficulty in recruiting a large group of youth in a limited time frame resulted in the participants being both high school and elementary school students. Further, the youth were not all from a specific area of the community, which resulted in the participants having diverse experiences and personalities. However, the youths' diversities did not appear to negatively impact the group processes. For example, throughout the group work process, there were no issues or concerns with respect to conflict among the participants. Once the individual youths were divided into their subgroups for their respective projects, it was clear that they were focused on each other's strengths. In fact even when in their subgroups, the youth did not concern themselves with who put more work into completing their project.

The diversity of participants in the NOISE Program actually strengthened the group. Because there were individuals who were more skilled and interested in photography, others

more artistic, and others better versed in computer programs, the youth were able to show their skills and talents as well as teach each other. The participants were able to learn from each other and were empowered to teach because their strengths were acknowledged. In addition, the diversity among the participants contributed to the various interests that formed the social issues topics selected for the final projects. Youth identified issues based on their experiences and knowledge, which resulted in the youths' increased awareness of the social issues in their community.

Group cohesion should be at the forefront in the minds of the facilitators if the hope is to implement an effective group. As such, the process to develop group cohesion should be initiated at the onset of group work. At the first group session, the establishing of a code of conduct or group norms, which will be discussed further in this chapter, may begin a link to establishing group cohesion. At the initial stage of group work, discussions which allow for individuals to not only introduce themselves to each other but to share about themselves provides them with the opportunity to learn what they have in common with the other participants. Once group members recognize what they have in common with the other individuals of the group, group discussions can have a greater impact on the individual members (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

At the initial stages of group work being implemented, it is understandable that the members will experience hesitation and discomfort to express and share openly in session. The implementation of structured icebreakers, games and activities will support the individual members to become more comfortable and increase communication. These structured activities can be fewer over the course of group sessions as group members will grow to know one another and become more apt to let their guard down and share their thoughts and feelings (Furman et

al., 2016). Even those participants who might be leery about engaging in the activities being facilitated in the group session will, by viewing other participants engaging and enjoying themselves, be motivated to overcome their hesitation and participate. By participating in activities, trust, belonging, and connection can be experienced by the group members. The benefits of activities in group sessions prove to be the involvement of engaged and interactive participants, an uplifting atmosphere, and the breaking down of barriers (Rosenwald, et al., 2013). Specifically with adolescents, the impact of implementing activities in group work is proven to promote a sense of competence, a sense of belonging, self-discovery, and creativity (Rosenwald, et al., 2013).

Studies in which the modality of group work was implemented illustrate various activities that were conducive to the development of group cohesion. The Holistic Arts-Based Program implemented activities referred to as “primer activities” (Coholic et al., 2015, p.4). The purpose of implementing these primer activities was for participants to get to know one another. This study identified the facilitation of an activity in which participants were provided with clothespins to decorate in a way that reflected who they are. These pins were attached to a cord that symbolized a connection among the group members (Coholic et al., 2015). This program recognized the value of implementing creative methods that contribute to youth engagement and the building of rapport. The activities implemented grew more and more complex as group work progressed and group cohesion developed (Coholic & Eyes, 2016).

The modality of group work with adolescents offers them the opportunity to be among peers who understand them and meet their need to fit in or belong. Fitting in and belonging is of great importance to adolescents as per the literature on brain development and child development. Unique to this population is an elevated sensitivity to social acceptance. There is

a shift from socializing or connecting with family to connecting with peers. With the increased time spent with peers rather than that spent with family, the desire to be accepted by peers is also increased (Schriber & Guyer, 2016; Telzer, Fuligni, Lieberman, Miernicki , & Galvan, 2015).

Important to note is that during this stage of brain development, there is also an increase in risk-taking behaviors. With an increase in risk-taking behaviors and an increased need to be socially accepted, there is a major impact on engaging in risk-taking behaviors in the presence of peers (Schriber & Guyer, 2016; Telzer et al., 2015). However, adolescents who experience healthy connections to others as well as to their community prove to have increased self-esteem and overall well-being. These youth reported to have a lower level of depressive factors, suicidal ideation and social anxiety (Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone, & King, 2017). By participating in group work, adolescents experience a process where there is positive peer interaction. Group work ensures a venue that is safe for all participants (Malekoff, 2014).

Creative methods to develop a cohesive group will contribute to the youth feeling as though they belong and are understood. The article authored by Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene and Matuleviciute (2016), discussed earlier, identified many activities designed to meet this exact goal. The result of these activities was that the individuals shared positive perceptions, validated each other's positive qualities, and had fun (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2015).

The NOISE Program implemented activities at the onset of each group session. The activities were reflective of the content being taught in the respective group session and as such served two purposes. First, the activity proved to be a fun way for the youth to learn the material being taught, and second, the activity provided a chance for the youth to get to know each other,

have fun, and laugh together. More specifically, the second purpose of the activities was to develop group cohesion.

After teaching the group participants about research ethics, the facilitators of the NOISE Program implemented an activity in which the youth acted out skits. Youth were provided with a scenario in which research ethics were either complied with or were not complied with. As they progressed through their act, they were stopped by their peers if a scenario did not adhere to research ethics and the peers expressed how the scenario needed to be amended to ensure compliance. If the scenario did comply with research ethics, the group acting out the scenario continued to the end. In this activity, youth were taught about research ethics in a memorable way. In addition, the participants had fun as they got into groups, dressed up and acted out the scenarios, thus contributing to group cohesion.

A study focusing on check-ins in the classroom describes a very effective approach to developing a cohesive group within the classroom milieu (Clemans, 2011). The check-in process was a process implemented during the first class of the program. . The check-in process allotted time to the students to share experiences, questions, struggles they faced, and to share ideas or provide support to each other during the first 20-25 minutes of the class. The check-in process was implemented to provide the opportunity for the students to share and have a voice, to listen, to support and to provide guidance to and with each other, thus creating a safe nonjudgmental environment in the classroom among the students. The process highlights to the students the fact that their peers' experiences are like their own, thus supporting the development of a mutual aid group (Clemans, 2011). In a mutual aid group, individuals work on common concerns or challenges. The ability to be part of a group in which others have similar experiences to your own is empowering and validating. The individuals of the group come to

recognize that they are not alone and can be supported by and can support others (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

By the middle phase of the group process, the article authored by Clemans (2011), which focused on check-ins, identified the closeness that became apparent among the students. The students grew more cohesive and individuals became more comfortable taking risks. The students' reflections of the check-ins aligned with the purpose of the implementation of check-ins. The manner in which students expressed their experiences of the check-in process was that it was important to them; it allowed them to express frustrations or share positive experiences. It provided them with the opportunity to learn from each other. The purpose of the check-ins was to provide the students with opportunities to learn and problem solve as well as to recognize the commonalities they shared, thus instilling the sense of not being alone (Clemans, 2011).

The NOISE Program did conduct a version of check-ins with the group participants. These check-ins were held at the end of each group session and were focused solely on their experience of that group session. The youth were asked to identify one thing they enjoyed and one thing they did not enjoy in the session that had just taken place. The check-in process served a couple of different purposes. It allowed for the facilitators to understand what was effective in the group session and where there was a need for improvement. In addition, it allowed for the youth to be heard and to contribute their ideas of what they wanted more and/or less of in the group sessions.

Although the NOISE Program was inclusive of participants with very different personalities and experiences, the individuals of the group successfully developed positive relationships with each other. The group was one that could be defined as a cohesive group. Within the group sessions, the participants shared openly and took risks. This cohesion was

evident when one of the participants who was extremely quiet and presented as somewhat fearful to speak at the onset was heard outside of the meeting room laughing and talking. Another youth shared struggles he was experiencing in his personal life. Outside of the group sessions, the participants exchanged contact information and kept in touch via social media. At the end of the NOISE Program, the participants identified enjoying the group sessions. They developed friendships and expressed that, although the program was ending, they would continue to keep in touch with one another.

As touched on previously, another important step is the development of a code of conduct. A code of conduct is akin to group rules or group norms. Specifically, a code of conduct is an agreed upon set of expectations outlining how the group is to function (Furman et al., 2016). There are many benefits to having a code of conduct developed and implemented when conducting group work. These benefits will be discussed as will when the code of conduct should be developed, by whom the code should be developed, examples of what can be included, and how to approach a breach of the code of conduct.

The development and the implementation of the code of conduct should occur at the onset of implementing group work (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014). In addition to establishing the code of conduct at the onset, it must be noted that it can be negotiated throughout the implementation of the group sessions (Malekoff, 2014; Coholic, 2010). The value in negotiating the code of conduct throughout the life of the group is that it can contribute to improve social functioning of the group members based on their experiences (Malekoff, 2014). One approach in the development of the code of conduct is to allow the participants to record the rules on a paper that is large enough for all to view (Coholic, 2010).

The implementation of group norms or a code of conduct is identified as a step taken at the initial stage of group work in each of the studies reviewed in Chapter One. For example, Clemans (2011) presented a study focusing on check-ins within a classroom setting, and identified the check-in process as being introduced as a norm on the first day of class. Specifically, what actions are and are not acceptable were discussed openly with the students on the first day, then at the onset of each class to follow (Clemans, 2011).

The need to pay great attention to the setting of expectations at the initial phase of group implementation is also discussed by Clemans (2011) as it is the time to “set the stage” for what will transpire through the life of group work intervention. It is at this stage that work towards implementing a group which is positive and productive for those involved occurs, by identifying the expectations which form the code of conduct. The check-ins within the classroom setting identified expectations, such as respecting one another as well as the learning process and confidentiality. With these expectations, mutual trust can be developed among the students (Clemans, 2011).

The NOISE Program developed its code of conduct at the onset of the first group session. The expectations were written on a large flip chart. It was identified and explained to the participants that additional expectations could be added as we progressed through the group sessions. The written expectations were posted not only for the first group session but also for each session to follow throughout the life of the group. Sporadically throughout the group sessions, it was asked of the participants if they felt anything further should be amended or added to the code of conduct.

When establishing a code of conduct for the group sessions, there is value in encouraging members to participate. Their participation in this step allows them to take ownership of their

group. If the rules are meaningful to the members and suggested by the members, they are more likely to hold each other accountable to them (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014). The participants should be encouraged to phrase the rules in a positive manner (Coholic, 2010). Further, it is beneficial that examples for the rules be presented, which helps the participants understand what the agreed upon rules mean (Coholic, 2010).

In the process of developing a code of conduct for the NOISE Program, the facilitators ensured group participation, allowing the participants to convey those expectations that they wanted to see identified. The expectations identified by the participants echoed their individual needs, ensuring their comfort in participating in the group. When verbalizing the rules that would create the code of conduct, each of the participants of the NOISE Program was fully engaged and sharing of their thoughts. The participants were encouraged to frame their ideas in a positive manner. Specifically, rather than using “no interrupting,” the expectation was expressed and written as “listen when others are speaking” or “wait your turn to share.” As each expectation was suggested, time was taken to discuss it. This discussion took place with the intent of ensuring that the expectation was understood and agreed upon by all the participants before it became final.

When establishing group norms, it is necessary to be clear with the expectations. The reality is that even when being clear there might be some questions on the part of the group members as to what is or is not acceptable. To address this, it is not only important to identify when asked what is acceptable and what is not but it is also extremely important to model the desired behavior (Clemans, 2011). The modeling of desired behavior is evident in the FEEST study in that the youth and adults alike work together as equals. This format provided opportunity for the adults to model exactly what the expectations are (Charbonneau et al., 2014).

The code of conduct once finalized reflects such rules or expectations as to maintain confidentiality, to be respectful, to listen when others speak without interrupting (Furman et al., 2016). When considering these examples, it is clear how a code of conduct would create a safe place for the group participants to express themselves. If the participants experience the group as a safe place to express themselves, they are more likely to share about themselves. As a result, greater group cohesivity will develop from session to session. To the group members, knowing what is expected of them provides an understanding of not only how to participate but also what to expect of others when participating (Furman et al., 2016).

In the process of establishing the code of conduct, it is essential to identify the repercussions of not adhering to the code of conduct. It is also essential to be reasonable and just in responding to breaches of the code of conduct (Furman et al., 2016). In adolescent groups, it is evident to the participants as to whether the facilitator or leaders are fair in addressing breaches of the code of conduct or are more dictatorial. It is paramount that group leaders or facilitators be mindful of what is and what is not reasonable behavior and respond with fairness (Malekoff, 2014). For example, when implementing a group in which the members are adolescents, the facilitator or leader needs to differentiate between whether the participant is behaving as they are in order to assume control or if they are simply experiencing a sense of trust and closeness within the group (Malekoff, 2014). Even with this awareness, leaders or facilitators must effectively set limits within the group. These limits may be influenced by the needs of the group members, the expectations of parents and or caregivers as well as stakeholders (Malekoff, 2014).

The article by Weller et al.(2015), which focuses on anger management, identifies a situation in which a young person did not comply with the group norms. In response, the facilitators of this group study left it up to the young person's peers to determine how the breach

would be handled. The group in this study decided to not allow the youth to participate in one session with the understanding that he could return and be afforded a second chance. This approach proved to be effective as this participant complied with the expectations for the duration of the group sessions (Weller et al., 2015).

The NOISE Program experienced breaches of the code of conduct. For example, there were situations in which a participant would interrupt while another member of the group was speaking, or, rather than taking part in an activity, a youth would distract others who were trying to participate. When possible, a facilitator would ask to speak with the individual in breach privately. The breach and expectations were discussed in private with the individual youth. For the most part, this presented as being effective as the individual would return to the group and maintain compliance with the expectations listed in the code of conduct. However, this was not always the case. For instance, there was a need to ask an individual to discontinue his attendance in the group sessions. The individual was frequently in breach of the expectations and was not receptive to the facilitators when they spoke with him privately. More concerning was the interactions this individual had with the other participants. It was clear that the impact on the other participants was negative, as some of the youth's comments were sexist and racist. Due to the negative experience of most of the other participants, it became necessary to request the youth not attend. This situation was not anticipated by the facilitators of the NOISE Program. Because it was not expected and because it was clear that this youth wished to continue to attend, it was difficult for the facilitators to make the decision to remove the youth from attending group, but it was felt there was no other choice because the youth was not able to modify his challenging behaviours.

There are two approaches to delivering group work as described by Malekoff (2016). One approach is by way of a linear path whereas the other is a circuitous route. A linear path is one in which the material is presented in an orderly fashion. A circuitous route, also referred to as a detour, is one in which there is a shift from the orderly delivering of group work. When implementing group intervention, it is most effective when there is a blend of these two approaches (Malekoff, 2016). Malekoff (2016) identifies that for some facilitators, a circuitous detour approach may feel chaotic and lack clear direction. As a result, these facilitators may implement the group process using a very structured linear path approach (Malekoff, 2016).

A linear path is easy to follow as it stays true to the content and follows the outline. When control of the group is given to the participants, the functioning of the group tends to assume a circuitous route rather than a linear path (Malekoff, 2016). The issue with implementing a group using a linear path is that it limits the ability for the youth to take ownership of the group. On the other hand, without leadership, group work can trail away from the purpose of the group, thus rendering it ineffective; however, it is important for leaders or facilitators of a group to not assume complete control of the group and to empower the group members to take charge (Furman et al., 2016). The NOISE Program was developed to enhance youth civic engagement and to empower youth, and, as such, it was paramount for these young persons to assume ownership and control of their group. As a result, it becomes apparent that to implement the NOISE Program following a strict linear path would render it less effective.

Further a linear approach that is focused on the curriculum limits the processing or personalizing of the information being taught (Gitterman & Knight, 2016). When remaining as true to the curriculum as one does when implementing a linear path, less attention is paid to the disengagement of the youth. The youth disengaging is reflective of the facilitator not presenting

the content in a meaningful manner. The challenge for a facilitator is to be mindful not only of what is being taught but also the way it is being taught (Gitterman & Knight, 2016).

A circuitous detour is more challenging to follow. It requires patience and reflection (Malekoff, 2016). It is important for the facilitator to recognize that by taking an abstract idea that is being taught and allowing there to be discussion, the group members have an opportunity to learn collaboratively (Gitterman & Knight, 2016). These discussions may veer off topic in which case it is up to the facilitator to determine whether going off topic will contribute to learning the content being taught. Facilitators need to know when and how to redirect the conversation (Malekoff, 2016).

The NOISE Program was delivered using both a linear path and circuitous detours. There was a set outline for each group session. This outline was discussed, and the tasks were divided among the group facilitators prior to each session. There were sessions where the outline was followed; however, this was not always the case. For example, on several occasions, such as when the youth were working on their projects, it was evident that the youth were highly focused. The facilitators of the group would recognize how engaged the youth were in the activity at hand and would permit the activity to run its course. Other times discussions would go off topic, as was the case in the session that leadership styles were being discussed. The conversation veered onto political issues. On this occasion, the discussion was permitted to continue for a period prior to a facilitator drawing a parallel to the discussion and the topic being focused on, thus gently bringing the group back to the original conversation.

Throughout the process of group work, much attention is placed on the development of content that contributes to a cohesive group. If done effectively, the logical outcome is that group members will become attached to one another and relationships based on trust and

understanding will develop. It is necessary to understand the feelings experienced by the individuals in the group as the end of group work nears. Once an understanding of what the participants are experiencing is understood, careful thought must be put into how the group sessions will be brought to their conclusion.

If, in the process of the group sessions there was a lot of sharing and risk-taking, the ending phase will likely not be one that is being looked forward to. The participants may either feel a sense of loss, abandonment, sadness or bittersweetness. Important for group facilitators is to normalize the feelings being felt by the participants (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014). As the group sessions near the end, different behaviors might begin to surface. The participants may begin to withdraw, while others might begin to share more. Participants might begin showing up late for sessions, become disrespectful, or not be mindful of the expectations outlined in the code of conduct (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014).

The literature identifies strategies that should be implemented to make the transition out of the group effective. One strategy identified by Furman et al.(2016) is to ensure that the end of group is discussed with the participants long before it arrives. In fact, the end of the group sessions should be a significant theme at the onset of group implementation. Addressing the future early allows ample time for the participants to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the group ending. Open communication about the group ending should be encouraged. Time to process feelings during the life of the group is effective in managing feelings when the final session arrives (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014).

The NOISE Program identified the end date of group work at the onset. The youth were aware of when or in how many sessions the group would cease meeting. There was not much discussion regarding the end of the group throughout the group sessions; however, there was

conversation near the final session. Youth asked about the internship for which they were eligible to apply at the end of the NOISE Program. Those who were not interested in applying for the internship identified wanting to continue being involved in future NOISE Programs.

Participants should be encouraged to reflect on their time as a group and should be afforded the opportunity to share what the group meant to them. They should have an opportunity to express how being a part of this group impacted them (Malekoff, 2014). In addition, a final activity at the last session that engages the group is effective in the concluding of group work. The activity serves as a way to reaffirm the participants' sense of being part of the group prior to gently supporting a healthy separation from the group. One such activity is a farewell circle (Malekoff, 2014). In this activity, the participants form a circle, standing with their backs facing into the circle. The group participants are encouraged to think back to their experience of being part of the group. They are guided verbally by the facilitators, who ask them to recall the feelings they had at the onset of group intervention, the feelings they had as they grew to know one another, the feelings they had as they became closer to each other, and the feelings they had as they developed a sense of being a part of the group. Following each prompt, the group participants are asked to take a step forward. The participants are then asked to express themselves verbally, and, in the process, take steps back towards the center of the circle. The participants are then asked to take one final step into the circle before stepping away. As they step away, the facilitators identify that they are taking with them what they have learned and the relationships they have developed. The participants are then asked to face each other. If debriefing is required it can take place at this time (Malekoff, 2014).

Youth who participated in the NOISE Program shared their feelings about the group sessions at the end of each group. They identified their favorite part of the session and their least

favorite part. At the final session, youth participated in a farewell celebration. They presented the social issue projects that they had been working on to family and friends.

The end should be described as a new beginning for the individual members. Through the process of group work, the individual participants acquired knowledge and skills they might not previously have possessed, and as such they are leaving the group changed for the better (Furman et al., 2016). A study that was conducted at an alternative high school scheduled the final session in a way that would allow for the participants to express what they learned as well as what the impact the group had on them. The youth in this study were given “calming stones” as a safe and transitional object in order to provide support to the youth after the group intervention was concluded. These stones reinforced the topic of identifying a safe item that was identified in the beginning phase of this group intervention. These stones were items the youth could use to help calm them when they became angry (Weller et al., 2015).

The final session of the NOISE Program was the session in which a celebration was held. Youth invited their parents or caregivers. They presented their respective projects in their groups to their parents and caregivers. The celebration also included snacks and a cake.

In conclusion, it seems that the NOISE Program aligned with the literature quite closely. The area in which I feel more time could have been allotted was the interview and pre-group phase. I find myself questioning whether more time in this stage of the group work would have addressed the attrition rate, being 5 out of 13 youth. This is not a question that can be answered; however, it would be a factor to consider for future group work.

The NOISE Program was successful in developing cohesiveness among the group members. The facilitators of the NOISE Program were aware of the need and importance of

group cohesion if the hope was to implement a successful group. With this awareness much time was allotted to planning activities, seating arrangements, and implementation of the group session content in ways which would contribute to group cohesion.

At the onset of the group sessions, the NOISE Program outlined a code of conduct with the participation of the youth, with the intent to empower the youth and to encourage them to take ownership of their group. The NOISE Program also balanced both linear paths and circuitous detours to the implementation process. The program was aware that for the content to be meaningful there was a need for meaningful discussion to take place. Discussions were anticipated to go off topic and were gently redirected back on topic. The redirection was done seamlessly and did not interrupt discussions. Because of the gentle redirection, the youth who participated in the group were not discouraged to share. This light hand resulted in the discussions which took place, both on and off topic, to be effective in allowing the youth to be heard, to know what they had to say was important and to learn from each other.

## Conclusion

To accomplish partial requirements for the Laurentian University, Master of Social Work Program, I completed the Advanced Practicum (SWRK 6024) from January 2016 to April 2016. The practicum placement was completed with the NOISE Program, which was a program implemented under the auspice of YouthREX. My objective for completing this advanced practicum placement was to develop my social group work practice skills. Specifically, I wanted to learn and develop my skills to implement group work with adolescents. In this final chapter, I will share my experience co-facilitating the NOISE Program. I will then identify the learning objectives that I formed at the onset of this placement, explain what I learned, and why these objectives were important to achieve. The NOISE Program faced limitations in its implementation. I will identify and explain these limitations. Next I will share the implications of the NOISE Program to social work practice. I will conclude with an explanation of the impact this placement has had on the efficacy of my clinical work.

Over the course of this placement, my responsibilities were to engage the youth in providing learning opportunities to support their civic engagement and their psychosocial well-being. My role was inclusive of composing and delivering the curriculum with, and under the direction of, my placement supervisor. To ensure that I was delivering a comprehensible curriculum, I needed to maximize my own knowledge base on the topics that I taught in group sessions to the youth. As such, among my learning objectives was to learn the curriculum of the NOISE Program in order to better position me to support the youth in their learning.

In executing these responsibilities, I had the privilege of working with a supportive team. The Laurentian University social work students who volunteered their time as well as my placement supervisor made up a team of individuals who were dedicated to supporting these

youth throughout the group work process. The team participated in the activities implemented in each group session with the youth, which allowed for there to be an approach of “doing with” rather than “doing to,” which reflects a strengths-based perspective. I think this approach played a significant role in empowering the youth to claim the group as their own and to demonstrate their skills and talents. Further, the team that I had the honor to work with demonstrated patience and respect in their interactions with the youth. They took time to engage with the youth and were sincere and genuine in doing so. This care contributed to the building of positive relationships among all those involved in the implementation and participation of the group sessions. The positive relationships formed with the youth were apparent when the youth would arrive early and assist with the setup and/or just take time to share the events of their day.

The youth that I grew to know and had the privilege to work with were remarkable young people. They were focused and committed to the work they were doing. They were eager to share about themselves and in doing so their amazing personalities and sense of humor shone through. Throughout this process, by engaging the youth in activities and discussions which were focused on teaching research skills, the youth learned the power research has in changing and improving their community. They learned how they could influence change by working together to address issues that they were passionate about and that impacted them. These impressive young people generated ideas and discussions from which they developed extraordinary projects. The opportunity to work with these future leaders was truly a wonderful and rewarding experience for which I am grateful.

The participants as well as the team I worked with contributed to my learning throughout this placement. Each brought to my experience different perspectives and approaches as a result of which meaningful discussions took place. In reflecting on the accomplishments of the youth

and the individual growth I observed, I feel a sense of pride. This placement was a very positive experience and one that will certainly contribute to the efficacy of my role as a clinician to children and youth.

The learning objectives I identified at the onset of my advanced practicum placement each consist of acquiring and demonstrating skills and knowledge. The following are the objectives I created for myself and hoped to achieve as I worked through my practicum. The first objective I identified in my proposal was to acquire and demonstrate an in-depth understanding of research. Specifically, I sought to understand the influence research has on impacting change within the community, the formulation of different research questions, the benefits and detriments of basic research methods, methods of data collection, the generating of findings from research data, and developing and prioritizing of recommendations originating from research data.

The second objective I identified was to acquire and demonstrate competence in dissemination and transference of findings. I hoped to learn different methods of presenting data, methods of disseminating research findings, and methods of making recommendations for action within the community. The third objective I stated in my proposal was to acquire and demonstrate an understanding of evaluation. Specifically, I wanted to develop an understanding of how to use the logic model of program evaluation. The fourth objective I identified was to acquire and demonstrate skills in supporting youth to impact change in their community. I was focused on providing interactive teaching on research and evaluation, supporting youth participation and civic engagement, teaching leadership styles and roles, empowering youth to consider and discuss issues which are of concern to them, encouraging youth to research the assets within their community, and fostering a safe space for youth to work together in creative

ways. Finally, the fifth objective I had for myself for this placement was to acquire and demonstrate the ability to engage youth in the delivery of the program. I wanted to ensure I was creative and able to teach the material in a fun way, support critical discussions and thinking of the participants, and create a space that was inviting and enjoyable.

Through independent research, attending workshops and engaging in discussions with my placement supervisor, I was able to achieve the objectives I set out for myself. Among the knowledge I have acquired through this experience is an understanding of the power research has to make changes in the community and the role it can play to debunk stereotypes. Further, I have become knowledgeable of different leadership styles and roles. I learned how to develop research questions and more about research ethics. I was able to learn and teach the youth about the interdependency of people and places within the community. This knowledge informed an activity in which youth were supported to map out key issues and assets within the community. I learned methods of collecting data such as surveys, interviews and focus groups as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using these methods. Further, I came to learn how to translate data findings into recommendations.

These objectives were important to achieve because prior to this placement I had not had any experience in program evaluation and research or group work. It was necessary for me to acquire these objectives as they formed the content of the group sessions. I needed to ensure I had an indepth understanding to effectively and competently respond to questions about research and evaluation posed by the participants. Achieving these objectives rendered me better able to support the participants in completing their final projects. Further, an understanding of program evaluation and research and group work increased my confidence in my role as a co-facilitator of the NOISE Program.

Achieving these objectives resulted in increasing my capacity to teach youth about research and evaluation and effectively engage the youth in the learning process. The importance of teaching youth about research and evaluation is that it empowers them to see that they, even as youth, can effect change in their community and in their lives. Youth being empowered in this manner can result in healthier youth and communities (Charbonneau et al., 2014). The NOISE Program, through teaching research and evaluation, fosters youth leadership. Youth leadership was fostered throughout the group sessions but more so once the youth of the NOISE Program had acquired the knowledge on how to conduct research. When the youth began to work on their projects and in doing so took on the role of the leaders, while the facilitators of the group assumed a role in which they supported the youth as requested by the youth to complete their project. When youth have the opportunity to assume leadership roles in which they can influence decision-making, they can be significant resources to themselves as well as to others. Further, it is important to note that youth not only have the potential, but also have a right to assume meaningful roles in the community as stakeholders of the community (Charbonneau et al., 2014).

It is significant to recognize that by emphasizing youth as assets of their community and providing opportunities to youth to be leaders, we promote positive youth development (Liang et al., 2013). Among the areas of positive development outlined in the literature are social and civic competencies, self-esteem, resilience, job readiness skills as well as an increased reflectiveness (Bulanda et al., 2013; Sahayet al., 2014).

There was one objective that I set out in my proposal that I did not successfully achieve. This objective was to acquire and demonstrate knowledge of the Flour-Mill, Donovan, and downtown areas of the City of Sudbury. I was most interested in understanding the

interdependency of the people and places of this community and becoming familiar with the assets that support the people of this community. This objective was identified in my proposal because these were the areas from which youth were to be recruited to participate in the program. Given that the recruitment of participants was broadened beyond these areas, this objective was no longer one I thought was relevant to my placement. In order to support the youth through their projects, knowledge of the City of Greater Sudbury was more beneficial to acquire.

The NOISE Program implemented in 2016 in the City of Greater Sudbury faced challenges in the recruitment and implementation phases. Variables which I thought significantly contributed to these limitations included the time of year that recruiting for this program took place, the length of time afforded to complete the recruitment phase, the time of year the program was scheduled to be implemented, and the jurisdiction in which the program was to be implemented. The time frame for recruitment for this program was approximately 2-weeks. This 2-week period was over the holiday season. Recruiting in the month of December had a significant impact, in my opinion, on the expressions of interest received. Although it cannot be stated with certainty, it is possible that with more time to advertise and recruit, a greater number of youth expressing a desire to participate in the program might have been observed.

In addition, commencing the program in January, when high school students, who were the targeted population for recruitment, were studying for and amidst exams also impacted on the interest generated to participate in this program. If the program was scheduled to take place at a different time of the year there is the likelihood that there would have been more youth expressing an interest to attend. It is unknown and difficult to say for sure if this factor played a

role in the lower numbers of youth recruited, but it is a point of consideration when implementing future groups.

The limited number of youth recruited was not due to a lack of effort in the recruitment phase. The facilitators of the program advertised for the NOISE Program via the radio, flyers, social media, and by reaching out to schools as well as community agencies which work with youth. Further, the facilitators encouraged registered participants to share the information regarding the program with their peers. Still, the expression of interest received by youth was little.

I believe that this was not necessarily a lack of interest by youth to participate in the program, but more a lack of time allotted for the recruitment phase to reach many youth. Because there were few youths who expressed interest and with insufficient time to recruit, the decision to expand the geographic area from where the youth were recruited was made. Difficult to determine at this stage is if acquiring knowledge of the Flour-Mill, Donovan and downtown areas of the City of Sudbury prior to recruiting youth would have contributed to recruiting more youth from this community. Acquiring this knowledge pre-group may be a consideration for future group work.

It was anticipated that by expanding the geographic area and being inclusive of youth across the Greater Sudbury region, the number of participants would increase. This expansion resulted in the youth who participated in the program not all being residents of the Donovan, Flour Mill, and downtown areas. This change proved to be a limitation because this area of Sudbury is an area in which there is visible homelessness, a higher concentration of low-income population, and higher crime rates (<https://www.quora.com/>). Despite the fact that the youth were not all marginalized, they worked well together, and they were successful in completing

impressive final projects. All the participants, when the program concluded, identified that they enjoyed being part of the NOISE Program. Successfully completed youth led projects and the youth sharing that they enjoyed participating in the program is reason to declare the NOISE Program effective and a success.

Prior to completing this practicum placement, I did not have any experience in facilitating groups with youth nor did I have any experience with primary research and evaluation. As a result, there are many implications to social work practice in general that I have determined through my learning. The main implications that I will focus on are the need for social workers to use a strengths-based approach when working with adolescents, and the necessity of developing group cohesion when implementing group intervention.

The NOISE Program along with the literature on youth civic engagement reviewed in Chapter One brought me to the conclusion that youth should have opportunities in leadership roles and can effectively assume these responsibilities. They have a right to express their views as stakeholders in their community. Furthermore, from what I observed in my placement, youth have the energy and the ability to generate fresh perspectives given the opportunity. It seems to me that these young people were able to generate fresh perspectives because they did not have preexisting opinions as a result of education or experience working in the youth sector. Social workers working with youth need to do so using a strengths-based approach. With the use of a strengths-based approach, social workers can support youth to not only showcase their skills and talents, but also to build upon them. I believe that by using this approach, youth can experience a sense of confidence and pride in what they know, and experience an opportunity to learn more.

In order to implement a group intervention using a strength-based approach, social workers must form the group based on individual needs and wants rather than on diagnoses or problems as to ensure individuality is honored and to ensure individuals are not viewed as their diagnoses. Further, to implement a strength-based approach, the group should be structured to welcome the entirety of the individual, ensuring the focus is not solely on the aspects with which the individual struggles. It is also important to ensure the integration of verbal and non-verbal activities, thus giving each youth the opportunity to shine as per their individual comfort and ability; to form alliances with the other important people in the youth's life so to present to the youth a genuine interest in them inclusive of their lives outside of the group; and to allow the group members to assume control of the group in order that they may develop a sense of trust in their abilities (Makekoff, 2014).

The youth who attended the NOISE Program identified their interests and strengths in their respective applications when they expressed an interest to participate in the program. These strengths were not only acknowledged when facilitating the group but were also supported and encouraged. Based on what the youth enjoyed and identified as a strength, they were given tasks in group sessions. Their interests were identified when they shared the social issues they wanted to focus on for their final project, and they were supported and encouraged to build on these interests.

It is crucial for social workers to be mindful of developing group cohesion. From reviewing the literature and over the course of completing my practicum placement, I came to learn the importance of developing group cohesion. To identify a group as being cohesive goes far beyond having a group of individuals who get along. In a cohesive group, the individual participants develop a sense of belonging. They grow to trust and support one another and share

personal information. The sense of safety necessary in order to share personal information cannot be present in a group that is not cohesive. Further it needs to be a focus of the facilitators underlying the group content throughout each group session. In a cohesive group, the individual participants experience a safe and nonthreatening environment. They can express themselves and realize that which they have in common with the other group members, which contributes to normalizing their experiences as well as providing them with a sense of belonging. By sharing struggles that they have in common, there is also opportunity for the participants to provide comfort and understanding to each other (Clemans, 2011; Rosenwald et al., 2013).

Facilitators can and should contribute to developing group cohesivity through the formulation of group norms at the initial stage of group intervention. The group norms set boundaries and an understanding of what to expect and what is expected during group sessions. This information increases the sense of safety and predictability of the group sessions. However, beyond this, the way in which participants are expected to engage in group must be modeled by the facilitators (Furman et al., 2016; Malekoff, 2014). Further, facilitators need to uphold the group norms. In situations where a participant is not compliant with the group norms and is hindering the safety and predictability in the group, the facilitator must intervene. Upholding the group norms might take the form of a discussion with the individual who is not in compliance, or it might result in the individual being asked to discontinue their attendance in group sessions. Upholding standards will create further comfort and safety for the individuals as they will learn not only what is expected, but also how the expectation translates into practice when engaging in group work and that all the participants will be held accountable to the group norms.

From session to session, the implementation of non-deliberative group activities continues the development of group cohesion. These activities provide the participants with

opportunities to engage with each other in a fun manner. The activities implemented cannot only be fun and a way to encourage and maintain group cohesivity, but also to support learning based on the purpose of the group session (Vysniauskyte-Rimkiene & Matuleviciute, 2016). For instance, when participating in the NOISE Program, the participants were not expected or required to share their personal struggles. Although there was not a requirement nor an expectation to share personal information, in the group sessions implemented by the NOISE Program, the use of activities, modeling and establishing group norms created among the participants a safe space in which they were able to share. This sharing at times went beyond the curriculum of the program and into personal struggles. What was especially remarkable was that the group had become so close and cohesive that there was a sensitivity and respect expressed by the peers both verbally and non-verbally of those youth who did share personal struggles. The participants, because of the cohesivity developed, were not only able to come together to complete the objectives of the NOISE Program, but also to establish friendships which they were keen on maintaining following the final group session.

To conclude, I will highlight some of the things which are important to be mindful of when implementing group work with youth. I will also share how this placement has impacted me in my clinical role. When working with youth, a strength-based approach is paramount. By recognizing and building on a young person's strengths, the youth has the opportunity to feel proud and confident in their abilities. Youth are at a stage of development in which they long to belong. It is extremely important that facilitators focus on developing group cohesion in order to meet the youth's need to feel a sense of belonging. Facilitators need to ensure they are implementing a group in which there is safety and predictability. The implementation of group norms will have a significant impact on the implementation of a group in which there is safety

and security. Youth should be encouraged to “own” their group. Facilitators need to ensure they have created for the youth a sense of the group being “their group.” In addition, in the implementation of a group session, both approaches, circuitous detours and linear paths, need to be used. The linear path will provide structure to the implementation of group work, keeping things “on track,” and the circuitous detours will allow for there to be discussions and sharing of different perspectives even though at times those discussions will veer off topic. Finally, it is important to be mindful not to underestimate the tremendous abilities of young people.

Although these are highlighted areas to be mindful of when delivering group intervention, they are also areas which have had an impact on me in the efficacy of my current clinical role. Since this placement, I am more cognizant of ensuring that recommendations and interventions in my practice are from a strengths-based approach. Prior to this placement, I did not have knowledge of circuitous detours and linear paths as approaches to intervention. In my practice, as a result of this learning, I implement circuitous detours and linear paths in sessions. Rather than redirecting a youth back to the topic that is the focus of the session, I now allow the discussion to continue in whatever direction it goes for a period of time before refocusing. The biggest impact that this experience has had on me in my clinical role is that I now stress to the youth I work with that they are the leaders and in control of their therapy. It is reinforced to me that this control is meaningful to the youth as they respond with comments which indicate their surprise that they are in control and in charge rather than the adults being in control and in charge. I have observed how giving control to the youth contributes to the degree of their engagement in the process of treatment. This placement has taught me the impressive skills and abilities young people possess and the need to support them by building upon these capacities.

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