



MONTAGUE YOUTH PROGRAMMING NEEDS ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2025

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BACKGROUND

In order to assess the interest and needs for youth programming in Montague, Boys and Girls Club of Charlottetown (BGCC) engaged consultant Sari LaBelle in this needs assessment mandate. Initial discussions about this mandate began between the BGCC Executive Director and Sari LaBelle in the spring of 2025. Once funding was secured for this process, work began in September 2025. Because of the BGCC's history in the community, one of the key areas of inquiry explored through this study was the community's receptivity to having BGCC re-enter the community in a new capacity of service, following the unexpected closure of the BGCC's ELCC in the community a number of years ago. Since the ELCC closure, the BGCC owned asset in Montague has been vacant. Because the Montague Rotary Club was a major contributor to the acquisition of the BGCC building in Montague, a special effort was made to include the Rotary Club in this stakeholder feedback process.

METHODOLOGY

Completion of this needs assessment employed 4 forms of data gathering:

- research into the community needs and demographics of the Three Rivers and Montague region
- development and circulation of a community wide survey
- individual interviews with key community stakeholders
- hosting of 3 student focus groups (spanning youth aged 11-17 yrs.)

In total, 43 adults and 126 youth were engaged through this study. This included Montague residents and residents living outside of Montague in more rural areas of the Three Rivers region, school counsellors, teachers, and administrators, town counsellors and staff, as well as local community, government, and business stakeholders. A total of 30 invitations were sent to community stakeholders for individual interviews. And information about this needs assessment and the community wide survey was posted around Montague in participating local businesses and three participating schools in the region (Montague Regional High School, Southern Kings Consolidated School, and Montague Consolidated School). Please see Appendix A for the list of questions included in the survey, interviews, and focus groups.

A few additional notes:

- 80% of survey respondents reported living in Montague
- 98% of feedback received from youth themselves was gleaned through the youth focus groups

REGIONAL PROFILE

With the reinvention of the Three Rivers region in 2018, which brought a number of smaller communities together, Three Rivers has become one of PEI's largest and most vibrant municipalities. The Town of Three Rivers spans across 431.47 km² and is home to a population of 7,883. According to 2021 Census data, youth aged 12-18 represent an estimated 7-8 % of residents, or approximately 590 young people, pointing to a meaningful and concentrated youth population requiring access to developmentally appropriate recreation, learning and social opportunities. While the community is vibrant, socioeconomic need is high: approximately 19 % of children aged 0-17 in Three Rivers live below the after-tax low-income measure, which is higher than the provincial average (approximately 15.6 % in PEI) and slightly above the national rate (around 17.2 %)—signifying affordability remains a critical barrier to participation for many families. The local school network further underscores the youth programming opportunity: Montague Intermediate School reports around 281 students in 2024 (Grades 7-9) and Montague Consolidated School has 455 students (K-6) according to the September 2024 enrolment figures, while Southern Kings Consolidated School serves 205 students (K-9) from Peters Road and surrounding areas. Together with Montague Regional High School (approximately 461 students in Grades 10-12), these institutions form vital hubs for outreach, volunteer recruitment and after-school programming.

Three Rivers has also become increasingly diverse, with a growing number of immigrant and newcomer families and a small but rising racialized population, reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive programming and accessible supports for youth from a range of backgrounds. Local education and recreation infrastructure — including the Cavendish Farms Wellness Centre and the Three Rivers Sportsplex — serve as central hubs for youth engagement, physical activity and community connection. The region is further supported by the T3 Transit rural service connecting Georgetown, Montague and Charlottetown, with a low-fare bus option that enhances youth mobility and reduces transportation barriers. Taken together, the demographic profile, economic realities and available community assets in Three Rivers highlight a clear opportunity to expand inclusive, affordable and accessible youth programming tailored to local needs — with particular attention to transportation supports, cultural inclusion, school-facility partnerships and low-barrier access.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

To follow is a summary of key findings from the community wide survey, interviews, and focus groups.

1. INTEREST & NEED FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMING

An overwhelming 100% of respondents from the community survey, interviews, and focus groups reported that more youth programming was needed in the Montague afterschool and during the summer. However, only 20% of respondents reported that making programs available on weekends was important. Additionally, 80% of respondents stated that having programs available in the summer would be of interest.

When asked about the best times to hold afterschool programs, a slightly higher proportion of respondents cited 2:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. (80%) versus 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. (60%). When asked why there was a higher interest in programming between 2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m., respondents cited the following reasons:

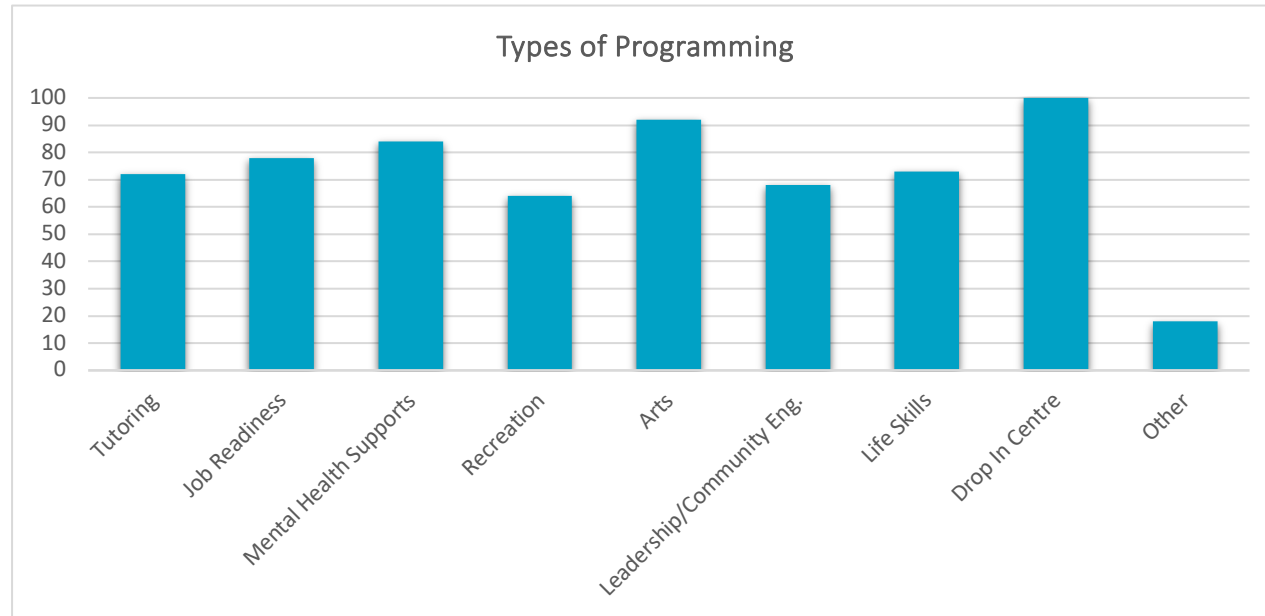
- Lack of “youth only” places to “hangout” after school
- Inability of parents or caregivers to drive youth to programs after 6 p.m.
- Engagement in other extracurricular activities (ie. competitive sports, dance, or music lessons)

“We desperately need BGC in Three Rivers. The BGC will need to work to regain the trust of their members and supporters, after its sudden closure. However, I believe it can be done.” – Survey Respondent

“An afterschool program for young people similar to BGC in Charlottetown where a snack is provided and safe space to hang-out, do homework and provide leadership skills is really needed. Youth need a safe space in this community. There is nothing supporting them.” – Interviewee

“An ideal program would teach life skills to youth and engage them with the community, helping build a positive community regard for our youth. Younger youth would primarily engage in community projects, while older youth may have the opportunity to work among the community.” – Focus Group Participant

2. TYPES OF PROGRAMMING OF NEED & INTEREST



As indicated in the chart above, the type of programming that received the highest level of interest from respondents was having access to a supervised, drop-in centre where youth could ‘hangout’ afterschool. The second highest level of interest was for access to more arts programs.

Specific arts programs noted were:

- Access to a space where youth could play instruments and jam informally
- Drawing and painting
- Pottery
- Acting and musical theatre
- Poetry
- Film making/animation
- Fashion design

Access to programming that could provide mental health supports received the third highest level of interest, while access to job readiness programming, tutoring, and life skills programming (such as cooking) were very closely tied in the 4th level of interest. Access to recreational programs received the least level of interest primarily because respondents reported having access to an abundance of sports programming in and around the community. That said there was a keen level of interest during the focus groups to diversifying the recreational programming available in the community to include archery, fishing, skateboarding, skiing outings, and non-competitive soccer, hockey, and basketball.

In terms of other types of programming cited by respondents that would be of interest, the following were noted:

- Gaming
- LGBTQ+ programming
- Access to semi-trucks, dirt bikes, and go-cart outings
- Philosophy discussion groups
- Robotics

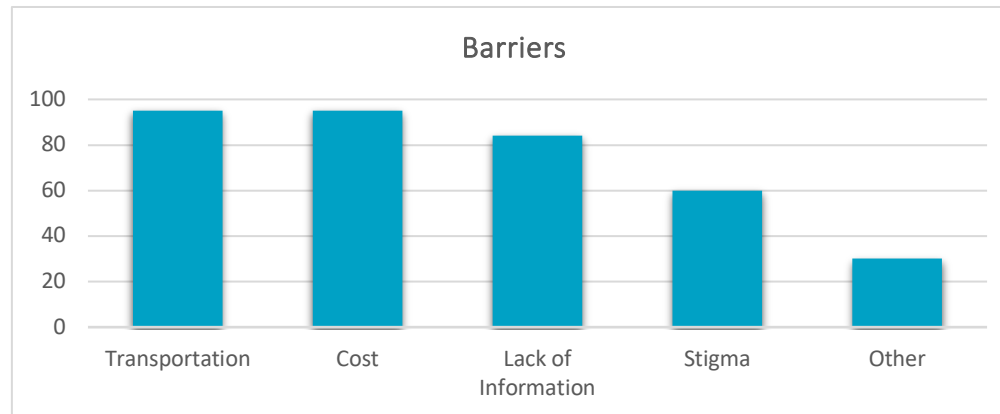
“It has to be interesting for us. Don’t give us more school work to do. Make it fun!” – Focus Group Participant

“Our community is very sports heavy. When I meet with young people they tell me they want more arts options, gaming options, and life skills building options They also tell me they was want to be part of the design and realisation of these programs.” – Interviewee

“ Right now there is nowhere in our community where youth can safely congregate without getting into trouble” – Interviewee

“ Creating a pathway for youth to get more involved in the community and see that there are life options in Montague after they graduate is really important. They are our future leaders and we need to encourage them to stay or come back to Montague and build their lives here. ” – Survey Respondent

3. BARRIERS TO ACCESSING PROGRAMS



As indicated in the above, and noted in the regional profile section, the two highest barriers to accessing programs in the community were cited as transportation and cost. As such ensuring programs developed by BGCC could be offered for free or at a very low cost, and ensuring youth have transportation to and from programming, will be key to securing participation. However, since the BGCC building is located within walking distance from Montague High and Montague Intermediate School, securing transport for those coming from and going back to more rural areas of Three Rivers will only be required if BGCC is looking to extend its programming to service youth living outside the immediate Montague area.

Lack of information about programming was also cited by more than 80% of respondents as a key barrier to accessing programming, so it will be important that BGCC work with community partners, schools, and the town to launch and publicize programming. These local partnership will also be critical in ensuring that BGCC reintroduction into the community is smooth and successful, as elaborated on later in this report.

Social stigma was cited by 60% of respondents as a barrier to access most specifically when it related to how the programming was perceived by others, who else was going to the programming (people from a person’s friend group or people who youth did not want to associate with). Other barriers noted by respondents were:

- Conflicting schedules
- Fear of bullying
- Personal mental health and confidence to attend programs alone

- Too much homework
- Family responsibilities (ie. looking after younger siblings)
- Part-time jobs
- Friend drama
- Lack of approval from parents or caregivers

“A number of our students have 45-minute bus rides or have caregivers that are unable to drive them to or from activities after school so they are left with no other options than screen time in their bedrooms.” – Focus Group Participant

“Social stigma is a big barrier for many youth. Ensuring that youth see this program as fun and not for “kids in need” will be important. – Survey Respondent

“Transportation and cost will be the main barriers to accessing programming. But if the program is offered for free and youth are going directly from school (ie. walking over), these barriers could be easily overcome.” – Interviewee

4. TYPES OF PROGRAMMING THAT ALREADY EXIST

As noted above, the primary programs that were cited as already existing in the community was access to competitive sports programming such as hockey, curling, volleyball, basketball, and soccer. However other activities that were noted were:

- Competitive dance
- Drawing and painting through Rebel Studios in Montague
- Horseback riding
- Private piano and guitar lessons
- Cadettes

- School band

Repeatedly throughout interviews, survey respondents, and focus group discussions it was noted that while youth are well served with respect to access to competitive sports programs, youth who do not have the means to afford these programs and youth who are not interested in sports are being left behind.

5. MOST PRESSING NEEDS & CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH

When asked about the most pressing needs and challenges faced by youth in the Montague area, the following were cited most often by respondents:

- Lack of activities and social engagement beyond competitive sports
- Increased poverty and food insecurity
- Access to mental health supports
- Peer pressure and friend drama
- No place to hang-out indoors without getting in trouble for loitering
- Increased substance use
- Lack of transportation beyond school busses and parents/caregivers

“Give them the power to choose and organize what they are most interested in. Build the programme with youth themselves leading.” – Survey Respondent

“There’s nothing going on here. For anything interesting we have to go to the City. But how can we get to the City by ourselves?” – Focus Group Participant

“Peer pressure, friend drama, and our mental health are the biggest issues we have. And thinking about what we’re going to do when we finish school, that’s a big one. – Focus Group Participant

“There is a new wave of ethnic diversity in our community and providing a place for these kids from different backgrounds to build relationships – beyond the peer pressure experienced in schools, would be wonderful.” – Interviewee

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Rebuilding Trust

While it is clear from the findings noted above that growing youth specific after school programming is needed and would be welcomed by Montague residents, it should be noted that approximately 20% of survey respondents and interviewees reported that because BGCC had a history of closing programming abruptly in the past in Montague, rebuilding trust within the community may take time and sustained effort. Individuals that had been present in the community during the closure of the former BGCC Early Learning & Child Care Centre reported being very unclear why the ELCC closed so suddenly, leaving a large number of parents without caregiving options.

For this reason, as noted below in the Next Steps Suggestions, it is suggested that BGCC share the highlights of the information gleaned from this needs assessment with key stakeholders (schools, the town, the Rotary Club, etc.), along with the BGCC's plans for programming in the short and long term, in order to the engage key community stakeholders to act as ambassadors for spreading the word about the programming and engaging youth in it.

Age-Specific Cohorts

Because the age range is so vast for youth programming (12-18 yrs), it was suggested by the majority of youth respondents that programs be offered to specific age cohorts such as: 12 – 14 years of age and 15 -18 years of age. However, there was not a definitive answer from youth about the “right” age segmentation so there may be some trial error involved in coming-up with the correct cohorting model.

Early Learning & Child Care in Montague

Repeatedly through-out this study respondents reported a significant lack of early learning and child care opportunities in the community. Because the BGCC had a history in the community of offering this type of programming interviewees and survey respondents repeatedly inquired why BGCC was not considering addressing this need in the community, it will be important for BGCC to be prepared to provide a clear rationale to inquiring community members about why this type of programming is not being considered by BGCC at this time. As part of this needs assessment a Q & A document regarding the closure of the former ELCC was prepared. This document could be used as a guide to field community questions regarding the BGCC's history in the community should these inquiries occur as the BGCC re-enters the community.

Access to Local Funding & Partnership Building

As noted above, because of the unexpected closure of the BGCC ELCC in Montague it will be important for BGCC to re-establish trust with local funders and businesses before seeking funding options in the community. That said, a number of businesses and community partners were cited as potential candidates to establish volunteer relationships with, establish joint programming partnerships with, and/or help spread the word about BGCC programming in the community. See Appendix C for the list of potential volunteers and/or partners mentioned during interviews.

Use of Community Assets & BGCC Brand

Although the results of this study indicate a high interest and public support for opening BGCC youth programming in Montague, the BGCC may decide not to pursue this path. If this is the Board's decision, it is strongly recommended that the BGCC's sign on the owned community asset be removed and the asset be rented-out or sold as soon as possible. A vacant building represents both a missed opportunity and a growing liability for BGCC—especially in a small community where resources, services, and space are limited. Maintaining an unused asset drains organizational capacity, diverts funds away from mission-critical work, and signals inactivity and disinterest in a community in desperate need of additional programs and services. It also is a constant reminder to the community of the BGCCs sudden closure of a once vital and depended upon community asset (the former ELCC).

Alternatively, that same building has the potential to become a vibrant hub for programs, partnerships, and community impact for BGCC programming or another needed community service. By using the building for programming, the organization can create accessible, local opportunities that strengthen community engagement, meet unmet needs, and reinforce the BGCC's presence or support of the community, even if the programming is delivered by another organization. Activating the space, especially for BGCC programming, would increase BGCC visibility beyond Charlottetown, enhance trust, and help attract funders, volunteers, and partners – at a time when the vitality and stability of rural communities on PEI is top of mind.

POTENTIAL PROGRAM MODELS & STAGES

Based on the information gleaned through this study, it is clear that developing youth specific programming in Montague is needed, desired, and could be very successful. As such, to follow are some ideas about the way potential programs could be structured and reintroduced into the community.

1. STAGE 1: DROP-IN CENTRE & MONTAGUE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The simplest, potentially quickest model of programming would be to re-open the BGCC Montague location as a drop-in centre, available for youth to gather in a safe, supervised, environment from after school to 6:30 pm on selected days of the week. Because the BGCC building is located within walking distance from Montague High and Montague Intermediate School, transportation to the BGCC centre should not be an issue. Although participation may be limited to youth living in the immediate Montague area, with an estimated 100-150 youth located in Montague (according to Census 2021 data), this first stage of programming will serve as an excellent platform to rebuild a service record in the community. In addition, once the centre is open, BGCC personnel could work with school administrators, teachers, and youth themselves, to identify students interested in accessing the centre that may require transportation supports, addressing this need as it arises.

In terms of what could be offered at the drop-in centre, feedback from youth and adults engaged in the study indicated a desire to have youth involved in the design of the programming. For this reason, it is suggested that BGC personnel work with school administrators and teachers to identify a core group of youth interested in helping to design what is offered in the drop-in centre and engage their fellow youth in the programming once the centre is opened. Opening a space that is designed by and for local youth themselves will maximize local ownership and engagement in the re-opened community asset. As indicated in the potential partnerships table, a number of local respondents indicated interest in being involved in the program design and offering.

While it was not within the scope of this study to conduct a full cost analysis and program design, from initial conversations with the BGCC Executive Director, estimated costs to update the BGCC building to make it operational as a drop-in centre would likely fall within the 10-20k range and staffing and program costs would likely fall within the 150-175k/year range. Given the fact that potential funders have been identified to support 75% of the renovation costs and 80-100% of the program costs, the risk of launching this first stage of programming would be minimal for the organization.

In terms of setting participation goals, based on similar programming in similar communities, setting a goal of serving between 15-30 youth in year 1 would be an appropriate goal, this would represent a 15% - 20% rate of participation which would be considered a strong level of participation for most rural communities in Atlantic Canada. However, given the enthusiasm of respondents for increased youth programming in the community, it would not be unrealistic to expect a greater rate of participation with both schools and the town engaged in driving referrals.

2. STAGE 2: ADDITIONAL STRUCTURED PROGRAMMING & EXPANSION OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Once the drop-in centre has been launched and active, a second stage of BGCC programming could add-on a complement of structured programs (speaker series, arts or technology classes, tutoring, mental health supports, cooking classes, life skills classes, etc.) offered at the BGCC

Montague centre and/or locations around Montague that BGCC establishes service partnerships with on a weekly or monthly. Again, it is suggested that that youth themselves be involved in the design and realization of this programming.

In addition, in order to expand youth engagement beyond Montague borders, BGCC could work with school partners outside of Montague to explore the potential of developing and launching BGCC staffed after-school programming at Southern Kings Consolidated School and/or Montague Consolidated School. This expansion of programming may require addressing the barrier of transportation faced by some students who are reliant on school bus transportation to return home afterschool. As such, Transportation East was identified as a potential organization who may be in a position to partner with BGCC to provide these targeted supports.

And finally, a third option for program expansion could be modelled after the civic engagement program offered by the Stratford Youth Centre. Although this is a municipally owned and supported youth centre, the model of youth membership being tied to volunteer hours assisting with town events and community projects, is an excellent model to promote leadership and skill building within the youth population while at the same time supporting community wellbeing and vitality. See the section below for further information about the Stratford Youth Centre.

In terms of indicators that would warrant expansion into stage two of programming, regular patronage of youth to the drop-in centre would be the first performance indicator. A second indicator would be the interest that local community partners would have in supporting and potentially delivering structure programming at the centre. Finally, a third indicator would be the level of expressed interest from youth outside of Montague to participate in the programming.

3. MODEL OF INTEREST: STRATFORD YOUTH CENTRE

As noted above, a model of interest that surfaced during the interview and survey process of this study was the Stratford Youth Centre. This model, established in 1999 and owned and operated by the town, was founded to provide safe, supervised, inclusive recreation while promoting leadership, volunteerism, and civic engagement. To follow is a summary of its programming and core objectives:

Core Objectives:

- Provides a safe, welcoming after-school environment for Stratford youth.
- Increases youth involvement in the community, town events, and volunteer service
- Supports personal development, social connection, and healthy peer relationships.
- Offers opportunities that build job-readiness, confidence, and responsibility.

Programs and Services:

- Drop-In Space

- Open typically Monday–Thursday, 3:00–8:00 pm (varying seasonally).
- Supervised environment with access to recreation equipment, games, social space, and youth-oriented programming

Youth Volunteer Program:

- Youth earn volunteer hours through structured and informal opportunities
- Recording of hours supports job applications, scholarships, and school requirements.
- Many members assist at town events (festivals, community clean-ups, civic activities)

Special Events & Activities

- Theme nights, workshops, seasonal celebrations, sports/recreation events
- Leadership activities and community initiatives
- Annual Youth Volunteer Awards recognizing outstanding youth contribution

Membership

- No fee to join
- Membership typically requires youth to complete volunteer hours (e.g., 20 hours per six months according to public listings)
- Parent/guardian registration on file if required for some programs

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS & RECOMMENDATIONS

To follow are a few recommendations related to the successful re-integration into the Montague community and implementation of youth specific programming.

1. As noted above, it is recommended that as a first step in the path to re-integration into the community, BGCC share a summary of findings from this study and its initial program intentions (should the organization decide to move forward with programming) with key community stakeholders such as the schools, the town, and the Rotary Club. In addition, BGCC could consider hosting a general community forum to share its plans with a wider stakeholder group, if staffing and timing permits.
2. As also noted above, once the BGCC has decided to move forward, it is recommended that the Executive Director begin the process of securing funds for both the renovations and program costs of the first stage of programming. Based on initial conversations with the ED, four major prospects have been identified to support the program with a high probability of funding success:

- Renovation funds: PEI Rural Growth Initiative (up to 75% of costs)
 - Program funds:
 - Medavie Foundation (potential of \$100K/year for two years, starting in 2026)
 - PEI Alliance for Mental Wellbeing (potential of \$90K/year for three years, starting in 2027),
 - Province of PEI (potential of \$50k, starting in 2027).
3. However, before engaging in any of the steps outlined above, the BGCC Board of Directors must make a decision about where this initiative fits within its strategic priorities. Although there is clearly a high level of interest and potential support available for reintroducing programming in the Montague community, deciding to move forward with this initiative will require an investment of significant time, energy, and resources from BGCC and result in potentially having to say no to other program expansions in other communities of interest, including Charlottetown. For this reason, it is recommended that the Board set aside time within the next 30 -60 days to discern where this initiative fits within its priority projects and whether the opportunities outlined in this study outweigh the risks it has identified in moving forward.
4. Finally, if the BGCC does decide to move forward with launching youth programming in Montague, a suggested target date for opening programming would be September 2026. This would provide the organization with ample time to secure funding, complete renovations, and engage the community in the program’s launch.

FINAL NOTE

As final note I would like to share my gratitude in being a part of this important needs assessment process. Although engagement of stakeholders was slow at the outset of the mandate, once key convenors were engaged, I believe the community response received was strong. Should the BGCC Board of Directors or staff require any further information regarding the information gleaned through this process, or the stakeholders engaged in this mandate, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time. In addition, if the BGCC requires assistance in putting in implementing any of the recommendations outlined or designing programs in alignment with the stakeholder feedback received, I would be pleased to assist in any way I can.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY, INTERVIEW, AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Survey & Interview Questions

1. What community do you currently reside in?
2. What do you see as the most pressing needs or challenges for youth aged 12–18 in your community?
3. What programs or services currently exist for youth aged 12–18 in your community?
4. Do you believe there is a need for additional after-school or summer programming for youth? Why or why not?
5. What types of programs or supports do you believe would be most beneficial for youth in the community?
6. What days and times would be most convenient or most needed for youth programming?
7. What barriers prevent youth from accessing programs that we should consider?
8. If you could design the “ideal” youth program for the community, what would it include?
9. Would you or someone you know be interested in working with, supporting, or volunteering with youth programs in your community? If yes, how?
10. What individuals, businesses or groups are active supporters of youth in the community?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to share with BGC Charlottetown to inform this needs assessment?
12. Are you interested in being contacted by BGC Charlottetown? If so, please leave your name, email, and/or phone number below.

Focus Group Questions

1. What are the biggest challenges kids your age face in your community?
2. What out-of-school or summer programs do you and your friends attend right now? is there anything that could make these programs better?
3. Is there anything that makes it hard for you and your friends to attend out-of-school activities?
4. Are there any skills training, activities, and youth services you wish you had access to that are not offered in your community right now?
5. If you could design the ideal out-of-school program for kids your age, what would it look like?

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INVITED INTERVIEWEES

APPENDIX C: LIST OF POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS & PARTNERS