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Community Arts Programs for Youth in Canada and the Maritimes: Assessment of Program Outreach
during the COVID-19 Pandemic Using Qualitative Case Studies

Final Report

June 2021

Presented to the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning

In fulfillment of a Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI) Grant number 4500004183 between
The MacPhee Centre for the Creative Arts and Dr. Amélie Lemieux

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Executive summary

This report presents an overview of program evaluations of Community arts programs across Canada and specifically the Maritimes to provide specialized insights into the state of online accessibility, availability, and outreach during the 2020-2021 year. These findings were produced during the COVID-19 pandemic year, from June 2020 to May 2021. The first section of the report offers emerging findings from one-on-one interviews, conducted online (via Teams), with eight youths (aged 12-17) enrolled in a program from the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. Qualitative thematic analysis points to concrete recommendations included at the end of this report in terms of youth engagement in Community arts programs. The volume of strategies collected for this review suggests that youth programs in Canada recognize issues important for youth social development and engagement in the arts in pandemic times.

Introduction

The MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning offers educational arts-oriented after school programs for youth in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada. This report is meant to inform program structure and policies to enable and nurture programs meant to engage all youth, either in virtual or in person settings. The report further speaks to recent research conducted in the United States (Wolf & Poulin, 2021) addressing the impact of COVID-19 on community-based arts education organizations. In the research, authors Wolf and Poulin point to the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized youths, which brings about many anxieties, including loss of income, deaths, and related distress. In particular, the authors maintain how “the Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous young people historically served by community-based arts education have been hit hardest by crumbling opportunities to learn, household illness and endangerment as essential workers, losses of family members, and evidence of their own, their siblings’, and peers’ daily vulnerability” (p. 2). A related study on a qualitative case study of three Community arts organizations in the US has found that the COVID-19 pandemic generated short- and long-term implications for youth development and wellbeing (Guerrero, 2021). In particular, short-term implications pointed to much needed attention to program design, such as increased online course offerings, digital studios activities, and broadcast networks. For long-term implications, Guerrero (2021) maintained that Community arts organizations need to continue documenting “their work and its compound impact in ways that attract partnerships and funding” (p. 8) with the aims of sustaining youth leadership and skills development for future employment in all industries. Our research report echoes and extends these considerations, not only for policy and practice, but also for research, policy, and stakeholder decision-making.

Our report addresses some of these considerations, building on current research and presenting evidence-based recommendations to Community arts organizations such as the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. In parallel with these findings, our report presents the final deliverable of the project funded by the [Change Action Lab Research Initiative](#) (CLARI, grant number 4500004183), and titled “MacPhee

Centre For Creative Learning Program Assessment”. The research report presents the findings of two phases of inquiry into how Community arts centres have adapted to COVID-19 restrictions: 1) A systematic review of Community arts programs for youth within Canada and the Maritimes (New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), and 2) An analysis of qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2021 with participants of the MacPhee Centre programs.

The **first phase** focusing on document review was guided by the use of an augmented framework combining the online domains of Community arts programs for youth, paired with occasional annual reports, where available online and/or provided otherwise. These broad domains include websites, as well as social media presence on Instagram and other platforms. This approach allows consistent examination of documents that acknowledges fast moving COVID-19 responses and program offerings before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors are necessary for establishing a baseline of program effectiveness and response pre-pandemic and during. The research team’s analysis also addresses specific issues of interest raised in research meetings and at the draft report stage. These include the question of social media use to communicate program offerings at the Community arts program locations. The analysis includes points to prioritize, with particular attention to stakeholders’ recommended areas for inclusion.

The **second phase** of this study included qualitative semi-structured interviews with eight (8) youths that have attended or are currently enrolled in Community arts programs offered by the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. For this second phase, the **research questions were**: 1) How has youth engagement in creative programming at the MacPhee Centre changed during the past year given the COVID-19 pandemic?, and 2) What steps can be taken by the Centre to improve their programming to better suit participants’ needs under these conditions? The inductive thematic analysis stemming from the interviews provides specialized insights into youths’ experiences with the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning during the pandemic. The MacPhee Centre conducted its activities in person prior to COVID-19 in a physical space in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, enabling participants to collaborate easily with one another and use physical materials in their making; under COVID-19 conditions, most programs have shifted to online settings, some have been cancelled, others still operate but at a limited capacity. The report concludes with concrete recommendations for implementation for Community arts programming.

Methodology

Taking place between June 25, 2020, and December 20, 2020, phase 1 of the project (literature review and program analysis) involved an environmental scan and document search using Google search engine to identify community hubs and related youth arts programs (e.g., camps, community centres, art centres, and online programs) offered by non-profit organizations and available in both French- or English-speaking regions of Canada. A list of Community arts centres for youth provided by the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning was also reviewed to identify programs not appearing in Google searches. Focused searches were carried out to identify community art programs within Canada in areas that did not arise in the initial search (e.g., “creative learning programs”, “youth programs”). Where necessary, team

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networks and contacts were leveraged to help understand the status of community art programs within corresponding jurisdictions. In addition, focused Google searches identified other relevant programs, outcomes, and frameworks produced by youth art organizations, afterschool programs, and associations focused on creative learning outlets for adolescents. After accounting for inclusion, duplicates, and title irrelevancies, a final sample of 26 youth programs surfaced. Documents were organized into separate worksheets by levels and sources in a Microsoft Excel database available upon request.

To review the individual programs similar in scope, we refined search terms and focused on the following:

- “overarching”, including all programs regardless of jurisdiction/province/region that are focused on creative learning for youth and include more than one topic area;
- “targeted”, including all programs that are issue/topic specific and may or may not have programs focused on creative learning.

Both program categories were reviewed in relation to the framework. Appendix A lists all organizations and programs. A full description of this review’s method is presented in Appendix B.

During phase 2, we conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with eight participants (N=8; seven one-on-one semi-structured interviews and one participant-filled questionnaire corresponding to the canvas questions) of the MacPhee Centre programming. These interviews were conducted virtually, on Microsoft Teams, and audio-visual recordings were transcribed for qualitative analysis. The interviews were within the range of 10 to 15 minutes long, and comprised a set of questions which were presented, orally, to the participants. The interview transcripts were analyzed through qualitative methods using inductive thematic qualitative analysis to identify patterns of themes in the interview data.

Findings

Community arts programs for youth in Canada

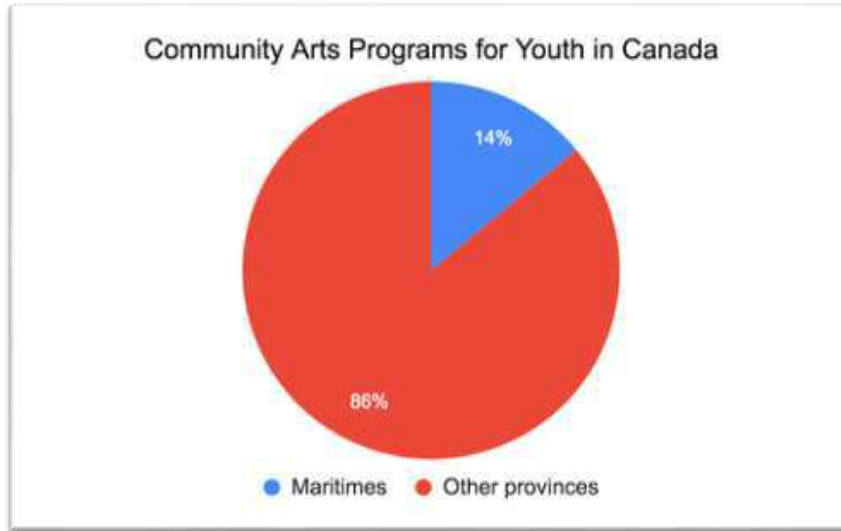


Figure 1. Community Arts Programs for Youth across Canada

Figure 1 presents the percentage of Community arts programs for youth identified across the Maritimes and other Canadian provinces. A total of 185 programs were reviewed, with 86% of those programs being in provinces other than the Maritimes (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia). 159 programs, or 86% of the total number of programs, were offered in other Canadian provinces. Thus, 26 programs (or 14%) of the total surveyed Community arts programs for youth were identified in the Maritimes. One of the potential explanations for this distribution of programs might be attributed to provincial allocation for the arts in 2019-2020. During this period, M\$16.5 was allocated to the Maritimes, which represents 6% of the total allocated funding for the arts in the Maritimes. In comparison, M\$ 254 were allocated to the rest of Canada, representing 94% of total allocated funding (Canada Council for the Arts, 2021).

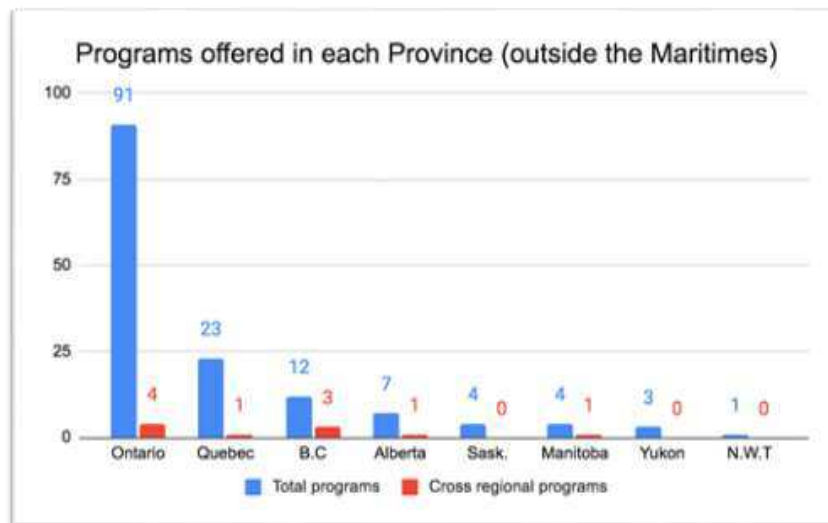


Figure 2. Programs Offered in each Province (outside the Maritimes)

Figure 2 presents the Community arts programs for youth offered across Canada, distributed by province, and excluding the Maritimes. This breakdown by province highlights the fact that Ontario is the province with the most Community arts programs for youth, which is also proportionate to the funding received by the province (Canada Council for the Arts, 2021). Ontario has a total of 91 Programs, four of which are offered across different regions. The province with the next highest number of programs is Québec with 23, including one that is a Canada-wide program. Ontario's numbers point to the richness and diversity in program offerings in Community arts for youth. The third highest number of programs are offered in British Columbia, with 12 programs and three of those being offered across regions. Alberta is next, with seven programs and one being offered across regions. This is followed by Saskatchewan with four programs, Manitoba with four programs and one being offered across regions. Finally, Yukon has three programs and the Northwest Territories has one Community arts program for Youth. 126 programs are offered by Ontario, Québec, and B.-C. combined.

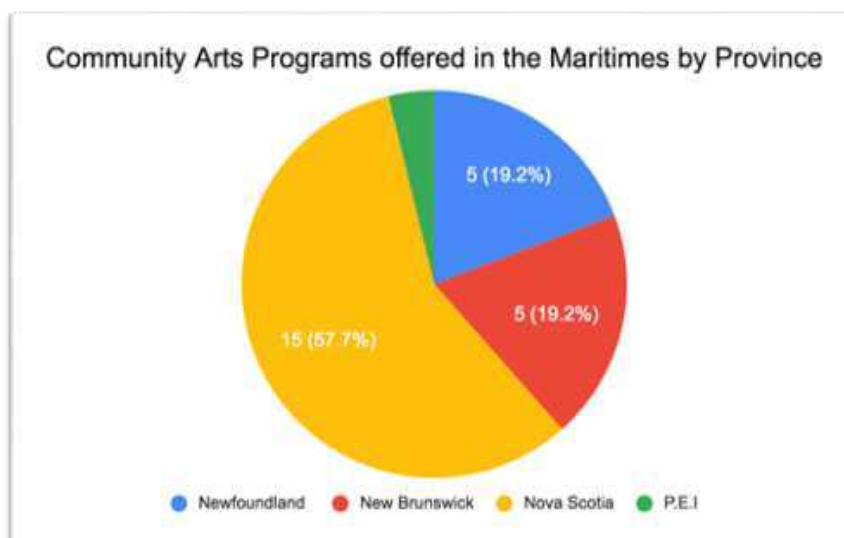


Figure 3. The Percentage of Community Arts Programs offered in the Maritimes by Province

Figure 3 presents the percentage of Community arts programs for youth offered in the Maritimes, by province. Out of 26 programs offered in the Maritimes, Nova Scotia offers 15 of them, corresponding to 57%. Both New Brunswick and Newfoundland & Labrador hold a share of 19% each, corresponding to 5 programs. Finally, Prince Edward Island offers one program, 4% of the total. This diagram points to the need to invest more, progressively and proportionally, across the Maritime provinces. Considering the comparable populations in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, this distribution seems to indicate that New Brunswick would benefit from more Community arts programming, considering the high number of programs offered in Nova Scotia proportional to its total population. However, this discrepancy likely arises from the division of New Brunswick's urban populations between Fredericton, St. John & Moncton, whereas Nova Scotia has the advantage of Halifax's centralized population & location. This difference in distribution of a province's urban population (centralized vs decentralized) could also

explain how Ontario has 53% (91 / 171, see figures 2-3) of the total number of Community arts programs in Canada despite having approximately 38% of its population (Statistics Canada, 2020).

This insight indicates that a larger number of programs are offered in provinces with centralized urban populations, due to a higher proportion of available resources (funding, staffing, other infrastructure) in comparison to decentralized or rural populations. It may be argued that further federal and provincial funding, research, and support should be put towards developing Community arts programs in areas with significantly decentralized urban populations. Considering this, organizations in central urban areas could consider expanding their outreach into less populated areas to help bridge this gap in access to community arts, or forming partnerships with rural organizations to support their development. They could also consider how this information could factor into decisions regarding the future of providing online Community arts programming.

Maritime-based Community arts programs during COVID-19

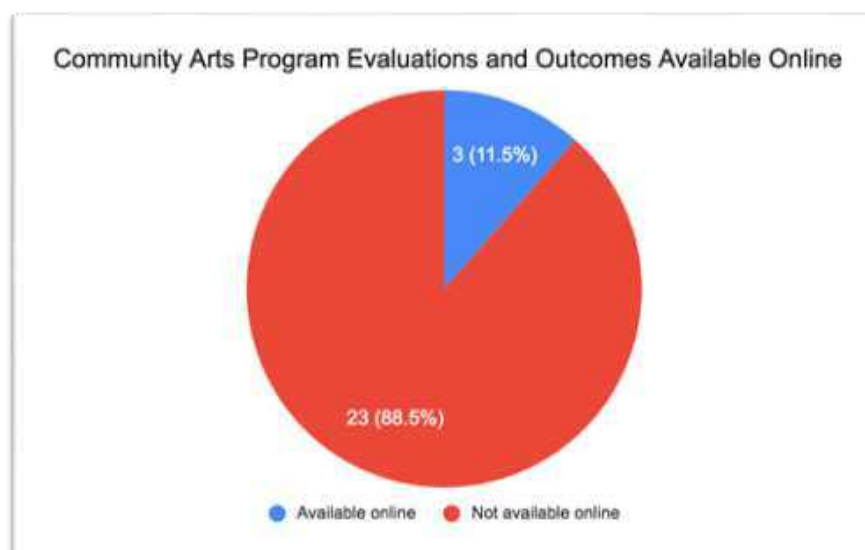


Figure 4. Percentage of Maritime-based Community Arts Program Evaluations and Outcomes Available Online during the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 4 presents the percentage of Maritime-based Community arts programs for youth that provided their program evaluations and outcomes online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 26 identified programs, only three of them (12%) provided program evaluations and outcomes on their online platforms within the past year (websites, social media platforms, etc). 88% of all Community arts programs for youth across the Maritimes did not offer any program evaluations or outcomes updates online during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020-December 2020). The research team was therefore limited to considering data from program evaluations and outcomes of pre-COVID programming for our inductive thematic qualitative analysis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important it is to create transparent channels of communication between organizations and the communities they serve, when meeting in person is impossible. Charitable nonprofits and Community arts centres should consider the advantages of making annual reports, program evaluations, and outcomes analyses available online for the public to view. Making this information accessible to the general public increases the transparency and accountability of the organization to the communities they serve, and gives a broader overview of the quality and overall impact of the programs run by the organization. Allowing the communities to see evidence of the impact of the organization serves to increase their trust in its ability to deliver the intended program outcomes. It also increases accountability with funders and other stakeholders, which can in turn lead to increased opportunities from new or existing funding bodies (Guerrero, 2021; Ortega-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Wolf & Poulin, 2021). Given that in 2019, over 80% of MacPhee Centre funding came from a combination of government grants and donations (MacPhee Annual Report, 2020), it may prove beneficial to consider publishing information on their program evaluations and outcomes publicly to increase trust within their community and stakeholders.

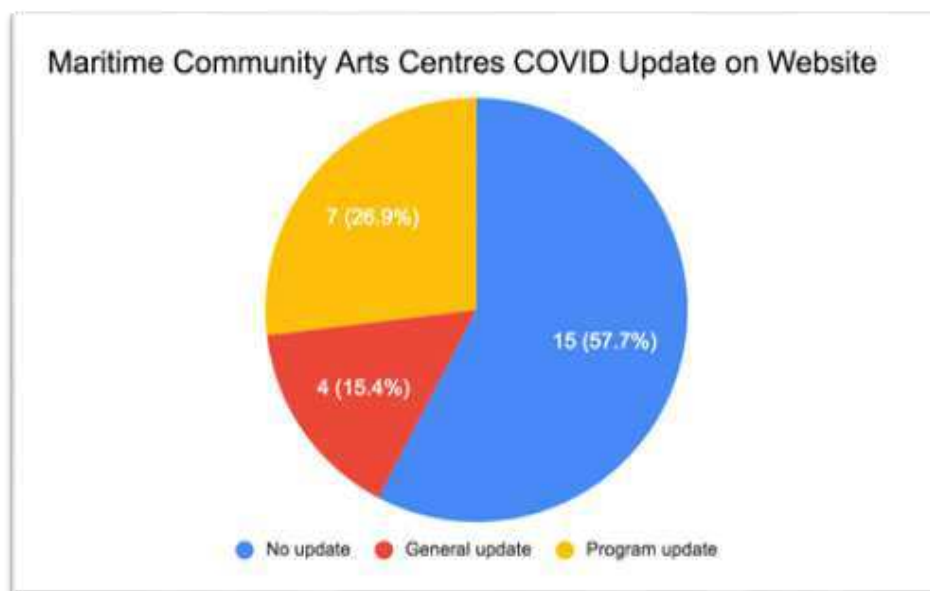


Figure 5. Percentage of Maritime Community Arts centres who have updated their website with information about changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 5 offers a graph showing the percentage of Maritime Community Arts centres (Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island) that updated their websites to communicate changes in programming during the COVID-19 pandemic from July to December 2020. During this period, out of 26 total programs, 15 Community arts centres did not post updates to their website (58%), and 11 posted websites updates (42%). Out of these 11 website updates, four of them (15%) provided general information about COVID-19 such as closing or reduced access to their facilities, staff moving to working from home, and so on. The remaining seven Community arts centres (27%) updated their websites with information about how the organization’s programming would be

adapted to accommodate for limitations imposed by COVID-19, such as online program delivery and take home kits, as common examples.

Figure 5 speaks to the technological limitations faced by Community arts organizations regarding public outreach. Our review of Maritime Community arts organizations showed that a greater proportion of organizations with national presences updated their website with COVID-19 information than those with local presences, indicating that a difference in funding or staffing availability are possibly responsible for this discrepancy.

Community arts organizations use more than one online platform to communicate with their communities, and often have social media presences in addition to their websites to increase public access to up-to-date information. Of the 11 Community arts centres that updated their website, 8 of them also updated their Instagram profiles with COVID-19 information. Of the 15 centres that did not update their website, eight of them updated their Instagram profiles with COVID-19 information. Of the 10 organizations that provided no defined updates via either their website or Instagram, three communicated with the public instead through either Twitter or Facebook. These numbers indicate that Instagram is an important platform for communicating with the public, especially with youth; a recent study by Thomas et al. (2020) found that Instagram is an effective tool for community outreach among youth aged 13 to 19. This correlates with statistics from the Media Technology Monitor Canada, which reports that 67% of Canadian youth aged 12-17 use Instagram on a daily basis. This is in comparison to 53% of youth aged 8-15 who use YouTube, and 42% of youth aged 12-17 who use TikTok regularly in Canada. It is notable that almost none of the Maritime Community arts organizations that were analyzed had active presences on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, suggesting that the MacPhee Centre is a leader in social media engagement amongst such organizations. The research team was unfortunately unable to gain an insight into the success rates of each social media platform by youth-focused Community arts organizations to access their target audience, and recommends further research into the optimum use of each platform to increase overall community outreach.

Thematic Analysis of Community Arts Program Evaluations across the Maritimes

The original intent of this analysis was to evaluate the programming of Maritime Community arts programs before the COVID-19 pandemic, how they adapted to the new restrictions, and what type of programming they offered after a year into the pandemic. The research team hoped to gain insight into how program effectiveness changed over time, new strategies that may have been employed, and new demographics that may have been reached. However, this analysis was severely limited by the public availability of information, as evidenced by the lack of website and social media updates analyzed in Figure 5. Twenty-six Maritime Community arts organizations were analyzed in this study, and only three published any type of data on program evaluation online: Thrive St John's, Unity Charity, and LOVE Nova Scotia. In this context, the research team considered a "program evaluation" to be any documented data available on the organization's website that represented post-program participant feedback or

defined outcomes reached. The research team identified three overarching themes in regards to program evaluations across the Maritimes:

1. Program success
2. Student confidence and relationships
3. Student employability

The available evaluations included reports presenting participant post-program survey results. Again, the research team was limited by the amount of available information online. Each report focused on very specific outcomes, such as program success rates, students' ability to increase their confidence and personal relationships, or their employability after completing the program. Unity Charity and LOVE Nova Scotia's evaluations were published prior to 2020, and Thrive St John's evaluation was published in March 2020 but uses data collected prior to the onset of the pandemic. Therefore, none of these evaluations take into account the effects of COVID on participants' experiences. Thrive St John's evaluation provides the best example of a comprehensive evaluation that shows participants' changing perceptions of outcomes and impacts during a program term.

The three following programs were examined:

1. *Thrive - St. John's* conducted interviews with 60 of their current program participants at the beginning of 2020 to consult them and provide a confidential forum to provide feedback, as well as reflect on their own personal wellbeing and development in Thrive programming (Thrive Evaluation Reporting, 2020). Thrive defined their five intended outcomes, and designed their interview questions to allow the youth to reflect on their progress toward meeting these outcomes (Thrive Evaluation Reporting, p. 4). As an example, one of the defined outcomes is that participants are equipped with social and life skills: in this section, 71% of participants report improved social skills, 78% report feeling better about themselves or more confident, and only 41% report that they have begun working or volunteering (Thrive Evaluation Reporting, p. 7). From this, the public is easily able to tell that Thrive may consider increasing resources toward supporting participants in seeking volunteer work or employment. Unfortunately, Thrive does not break down their percentages by program, which could give insight into which programs are most successful in allowing participants to become more social; however, they do break them down according to survey answer (agree, disagree, etc.), and provide participant quotes grouped according to program. The level of detail in the data presented in this report is exceptional: they report each participants' length of time engaging in programming (p. 4-5), and incorporate which specific programs each youth attended into their analysis. They present sections on youth's outcomes progress, perceived overall impact of Thrive programming, and specific feedback on what is and is not working well; it reports its data in percentages and participant quotes, creating a comprehensive overview of their findings. Our only suggestion for improvement might be to include a short section at the end indicating what Thrive perceives as actionable items for the organization to increase participants' progress toward the

outcomes.

2. Based on their 2017-2018 evaluation and annual report, *Unity Charity* conducted a survey with (800 people, unfortunately their demographics are unknown.) showing that over 70% of the 800 student population surveyed improved their mental health and resilience. *Unity Charity* “collected and analyzed data from over 800 surveys”, unfortunately it is unclear if these surveys stem from the *Unity Day* across Canada or is a snapshot of all programs and workshops offered throughout the year (*Unity 2017 - 18 Evaluation*, p. 17). The *Unity Charity* also states that they reached 40+ thousand students across Canada during *Unity Day* but only reached 3+ thousand students “through *Unity Day* workshops” (*Unity 2017 - 18 Evaluation*, p. 17). There seems to be a discrepancy. However, it is possible that they mean they reached 3+ thousand students in Ontario alone that one day. In addition, over 90% of *Unity’s* Artists and Staff have reported to be a part of a visible minority community, and 65% report to be new generation Artists. Unfortunately, there is no exact number of how many people were employed by *Unity* or how many people were considered artists. Thus, the breakdown of the above percentages is difficult to evaluate. Further, they stated in their annual report that youth developed on average seven close relationships over the year (2017 - 2018). According to *Unity Charity*, “the programs succeeded in building a sense of belonging with youth from diverse backgrounds and all various walks of life by fostering positive relationship building (*Unity 2017 - 18 Evaluation*, p. 11). A huge part of youth programs is learning how to foster positive relationships with peers and others, and the fact that students claimed to have made seven close relationships over the span of one year is a great achievement.
3. In 2020, *LOVE Nova Scotia* composed a report that was based on survey results to discuss success in academic performance and relationship wellness. Unfortunately, there is no information on how many students took programs or workshops at *LOVE Nova Scotia*, or how many students completed the survey, which the report is based on. The report, which was composed by *LOVE Nova Scotia*, notes that 60% of individuals who completed the survey, agreed that the programs at *LOVE* helped them succeed in school. However, there is no definition attached to what said success in school looks like or what it encompasses. As well, the report did not go into detail to describe what *LOVE Nova Scotia* did in order to foster success in schools. Further, the report claims that 80% of students surveyed agreed that *LOVE Nova Scotia* helped them recognize an unhealthy relationship. Again, no examples were provided to explain how participants learned to identify unhealthy relationships during their participation at *LOVE Nova Scotia*. Instead of being a true report on *LOVE Nova Scotia’s* program evaluations and outcome success, this report appears to be more of a promotional document about the *LOVE Nova Scotia* community and the programs offered. The report did not provide the research team with a clear picture of program effectiveness or outcome success. The fourth program, *HeartWood - Halifax*, provided only an Annual Report, with no information on program efficiency. The report only detailed programs offered & finances, which is not an indicator for program efficiency or fits within the three identified themes for this research project.

The three overarching themes identified in the above analysis (program success, student confidence and relationships, and student employability) closely align with the values expressed in the MacPhee Centre organizational pillars:

1. Knowledge: understanding that enrollment and participation in school matters
2. Action: learning to be self-motivated with creative confidence and entrepreneurship
3. Awareness: gaining self-esteem and social skills in order to achieve one's full potential
4. Collaboration: enabling a sense of community and desire for positive participation in society

Thrive, Unity Charity, and LOVE Nova Scotia all focus on the important role their participants play in their respective communities. They focus on providing a positive, supportive space to marginalized youth, and encourage them to pursue further education, to seek gainful employment in order to contribute positively to these communities, and to build new relationships along with improving their existing ones to increase their sense of connection and belonging. All of these organizations share similar goals for their participants, though they employ different methods to help them get there. The Halifax chapter of Unity Charity reports “strong partnerships” with both LOVE Nova Scotia and the MacPhee Centre in its 2018-2019 annual report, indicating that these organizations are already aware of their overlap in values and are familiar with one another's work (Unity Charity annual report 2019). All of these organizations seek to enact real positive change in their communities by empowering youth: it would be beneficial to all of them to publish comprehensive data from program evaluations to measure their impact on their communities so far, to increase their transparency with the public, and to inform future strategic decisions.

The research team was given access to several MacPhee Centre reports that indicated participant feedback and outcomes which were comparable to the program evaluations for Thrive, Unity Charity, and LOVE Nova Scotia. These reports included the 2020 Letter of Introduction, the 2020 Annual Report, the 2019 Impact Report, and the 2018 Case for Support. These documents contain annual totals, percentages obtained from participant surveys, and participant quotes describing their experiences at the Centre. The percentages reported in the MacPhee documents are perhaps less detailed than those presented in the other program evaluations (i.e., “94% would return” in the 2019 Annual Report). As a whole, these documents provide an interesting overview of the work that the Centre does, but they do not give a realistic measure of participant feedback and outcomes reached.

The Thrive Evaluation Report could serve as a model for how the MacPhee Centre might explore presenting evaluation data to the public. The Centre may consider its organizational pillars as its intended outcomes for participants, and move forward with designing its approach to data collection with the goal of tracking participant progress toward meeting these outcomes.

The thematic analysis of these evaluations revealed how challenging it is for an outside party to get a full impression of the effectiveness of these programs. All of these organizations are already reporting some amount of program evaluation data, but these numbers are limited in their ability to describe the true

impact of the programming on youth participants and their communities. The targeted outcomes are so broad, and so complex to measure, that reporting values such as an annual total of participants is often one of the most basic ways that organizations can hope to represent them. There must be some balance between publishing the volume of raw data obtained through program evaluations, and reducing them to a single percentage value presented in other reports. It is therefore suggested that future program evaluations be designed with the intent to analyze, compile, and publicly share the information gathered after analysis.

This exploration into publicly available program evaluations left many unanswered questions about program participant feedback and measuring targeted outcomes, and it raised even more about how these variables, along with many other aspects of Community arts programming, changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The below analysis of the interviews conducted with MacPhee Centre youth is presented to provide insights into some of these gaps in understanding.

Thematic Analysis of MacPhee Centre Semi-Structured Participant Interviews

Because of the conditions of conducting research during the global pandemic, interviews were conducted online from March 12th to March 19th by Ms. Beaton. A semi-structured interview canvas was developed by both Ms. Beaton and Dr. Lemieux in February 2021, and was shared with and reviewed by MacPhee Centre directors and leaders. Part of this approach was geared towards ethical practice, in that the leaders were aware of the questions that would be asked and the participants would feel comfortable answering the questions. Interviews were conducted entirely online with eight youths, and these youths were recruited by the MacPhee Centre leads. Each interview lasted, on average, 25 minutes. Interviews were recorded on Microsoft Teams and transferred to Stream. Interview transcription was automated by Stream and corrected and edited by Ms. Beaton in March-April 2021.

Ms. Beaton proceeded to analyse the interview transcripts of all participants using traditional qualitative methods in April-May 2021. From this analysis, the following themes emerged:

1. COVID adaptations & the shift to virtual program delivery
2. Reinvestment of skills in future endeavours
3. Communication about programming during COVID
4. Suggested specific areas for program improvement
5. Creating a sense of belonging within the Centre's community

From the themes and participant quotes, Ms. Beaton summarized key findings and recommendations into the following descriptive sections.

1. COVID-19 adaptations and the shift to virtual program delivery

Adolescents made observations about the changes made at the Centre in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt comfortable with the sanitation measures put in place during the regular programming events at the Centre, and all participants felt that the measures were easy to follow. One noted that “we sanitize when we enter the building. It's not that much of a problem. We also have to social distance. But other than that, there weren't really many changes that I noticed”. All participants agreed that the measures were reasonable and that they felt safe at the Centre with them in place. Many participants commented on how much they appreciated and enjoyed the at-home kits that were provided by the Centre early on in the pandemic. However, the majority of participant feedback about programming during COVID-19 was about the delivery of programs in the online environment.

Overall, most expressed that the online space lacked the crucial social component provided by the physical Centre space, but all brought up a variety of advantages and disadvantages specific to each program. Photography was one of the programs that one participant noted as working well in the online space – they “really liked the photography over zoom because we talked about technique and editing, and then we got photo prompts to bring back for the next week”. Another participant commented that they enjoyed the songwriting program virtually because they felt it was an advantage that they could access all of the instruments that they had with them at home, which they found helpful to their creative process. One participant found that the ukulele program was difficult to translate into the virtual space, due to the lag making it difficult to play music together as a group in any capacity. The painting program was similarly difficult to deliver online, because variations in camera quality meant that facilitators couldn't always “actually see the detail” in participants' paintings to provide the most effective feedback on their work.

Some of the disadvantages to online programming were related to changes in group dynamics – participants of both the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) and Dungeons and Dragons (DnD) programs remarked that it was “harder to communicate and interact” in the online space. In DnD, a participant commented that it was difficult for players to achieve a “flow in the dynamics between characters” and team members. In the GSA, the issue was more about the way individual participants were able to interact in the group: one participant commented that “in real life everyone has the opportunity to talk over each other. That doesn't really happen on Zoom because if you speak everyone is going to hear you. So if you try to interrupt, it doesn't work”.

One notable trend that emerged within this theme was a *shift* in the average program participants' experience level with the Centre during the online programming – one participant noted that “we got a lot of new youth that we wouldn't usually get because they are too far away or the timing didn't work for them”. More than one participant with long histories with the Centre commented that they attended a lower volume of programming than usual because they were tired and overwhelmed with school, were putting more time and effort into their jobs, or simply had trouble engaging with the online environment. One participant commented, “I have trouble engaging myself when something's not physically in front of me”.

2. *Reinvestment of skills in future endeavours*

When asked about how they anticipated their experiences at the Centre might help them in the future, all youth responded positively, listing a wide range of benefits that they felt they had gained as a result of their time at the Centre. Many participants spoke of how the Centre allowed them to feel comfortable exploring new things and occasionally failing at them, and that they felt being exposed to a wide range of skills, programs and facilitators meant that they had a greater overall understanding of careers in the arts. Several participants expressed their goals to pursue a particular career as a result of their experiences with the Centre, suggesting that the Centre allows youth with an interest in a career in the arts to try out different things until they find one that seems to fit them. One commented on what a positive experience it was for them to learn from working artists, because it made a career in the arts seem “more possible than (they) think it is” – if they can see the work that the artist produces, and the steps that they take to produce it, then it seems much more reasonable to believe that they can do it too.

Two distinct subthemes within this section emerged throughout analysis: skills that participants related to specific career goals, and skills they related to their general personal and career development. One participant who expressed that they intended to pursue a career in radio broadcasting due to their passion for “advocating for things” and “public speaking” felt that they had built skills in “speaking to people and organizing people” throughout their time at the Centre. They commented that DnD specifically had helped them develop skills in teamwork, relating to others socially, and problem solving, and that they anticipated these skills to be of great worth in their future career. Another participant who engaged with the DnD program indicated that they would like to become a videogame designer, and that they also felt they had developed skills in teamwork and problem solving through the program, along with skills in quick math throughout gameplay and creativity in both character and story creation. As a dungeon master of some campaigns, they also felt that their experiences making landscape maps of worlds and learning the art of good storytelling would be extremely useful to them in the field of video game design. Another participant, who stated that they “couldn’t draw” before beginning programming at the Centre, was inspired by an SFX makeup class that they took and now has the career goal of becoming an SFX makeup artist – or a graphic designer, something that they considered more “realistic”. They cited the growth in confidence in their abilities that they gained throughout their time at the Centre as the reason that they felt comfortable declaring the pursuit of a career in the arts.

Many participants expressed indecision at the exact career that they would pursue in the future, but asserted that the skills that they gained at the Centre were widely transferable in their personal and career development. They have learned skills that will help them in the general workforce, like learning to improve under the guidance of a mentor. One participant of the guitar program gave the example of learning to noodle: “Maybe you notice, OK, noodling is something I want to improve on. Your facilitator is like sure, let’s do it. And then you guys can work together to work on that”. Two participants noted that they have learned to combine multiple art forms (drawing, painting, etc.) into an independent style, using benchmarks communicated to them by their facilitators that are similar to benchmarks used in art schools: this means that youth of Centre programs like this who pursue studies at arts-oriented

universities are already familiar with the process that they can expect to experience there, and those who do not have received valuable experience in developing an original artistic-inclined style. Another participant pointed out that they could use the skills they had gained in their drawing class to turn a profit off their art if they so wished: “I can go hey, does anyone want to commission me? Then they go yes please, and then I do the commission, and then boom, \$50!”. These skills in self advocacy, originality, and entrepreneurship will serve all participants well in their respective futures, regardless of their chosen careers.

Other participants spoke about how they hoped to make use of their Centre experiences in their futures outside of their working life. One noted that having an artistic hobby is not only personally fulfilling but makes it easier to connect with others, and that this could help with networking: “Just sort of learning an instrument might bring up a topic for conversation in the future. Maybe it would help with strengthening communication, possibly ‘cause you could have a point of common topics.” Another expressed that they were excited to use the skills they had learned in costume design to make and mend their own clothes: “I’ve learned how to sew. And now if I ever need to mend something in my day-to-day life, I know how to”. Finally, one youth succinctly expressed how they felt that the varied experiences they have had over their time at the Centre have made them extremely adaptable:

“Being exposed to these different environments and skill sets has made me more fluid and more open to learning new things and experiences. If not for the MacPhee Centre, I may not be as comfortable with let's say, certain job opportunities that I've never been involved in before. Being with the Centre since I was 14 and like from there on, always doing like something different. I feel very comfortable with exploring that and I think that has a large effect on possible careers.”

3. Communication about programming during COVID

All of the youth that we interviewed were regular participants of Centre programming, and as such indicated that they were mostly notified by word of mouth, from fellow participants, facilitators, or other Centre based relationships about new programming. Some interviewees noted that they and facilitators would also tell the people around them (peers, classmates, etc.) about new programming. This pattern of communication indicates that most new participants of Centre programming will be connected with someone who is already active at the Centre. This suggests that a strong sense of community is a foundational aspect of the promotion of available programs, and this dimension should be taken into consideration when planning outreach. Due to the lack of new participants amongst our pool of interviewees, we were unable to gain insight into how more recent participants, particularly those who joined during COVID, first heard about the Centre’s programs.

One participant noted that the Centre website is currently under construction: the old one was “kind of not the best, it was hard to navigate,” and that time and resources were being spent over the past year on developing the new website.

Most participants said that they were also connected to the Centre through Instagram, and that both the stories and posts were regularly updated to notify followers of new programming. Either the participants follow the account directly, or their parents do and pass the information along to their kids. This further emphasizes the use of Instagram as the most viable social media platform to communicate with youth.

4. Suggested specific areas for program improvement

Participants put forth a range of suggestions for change when asked for their thoughts on anything specific that they felt could be improved at the Centre. There was little overlap between participants' answers, indicating that there are no particular outstanding issues with programming that need to be addressed, but that there are a variety of factors around participant preferences in programming that can be considered when planning in the future. Participant responses in this section centered around two main themes: the structure and type of programs offered by the Centre, and the recruitment and retention of new program participants.

One participant commented that being given more creative freedom within some programs would be beneficial: "in some of the programs like drawing and painting, we have a lot more creative freedom, but then there are others where we're kind of streamlined into doing a certain thing." This indicates that giving participants an increased sense of choice and autonomy within their creative process could therefore create increased engagement with the focus of the program, and potentially their skills development therein. This suggestion is of course not applicable to all programs, and this participant did say that they felt that this desire for more freedom was a personal choice, suggesting that there are participants who react well to the structure of working toward a common final product. Another participant responded to this question that they would like to see some previous programs at the Centre run again, particularly referencing the resin program, which they really enjoyed.

The other participant who commented on the types of programming offered at the Centre suggested a more targeted approach to bringing in facilitators; they indicated that a general call for facilitators is usually put out to the community, and that the programs that run are dependent on which facilitators respond to this call, sometimes resulting in an emphasis placed on visual arts and music-based programming. This participant suggested that the MacPhee Centre could network with and approach specific organizations or individuals with the intention of recruiting them as facilitators for an upcoming round of programming, resulting in new and innovative programs potentially attracting an increased range of participants and increasing the diversity of Centre programming.

Two participants commented on the Centre's strategy for recruitment and retention of new program participants. One noted that when there are many people on the waitlist for programs, there is no longer a need to do community outreach to seek out new participants. This suggests that the Centre's ability to do outreach to new youth is limited, at least at the time that this report is being conceived and produced, likely due to the restrictions imposed under COVID-19. The existence of a waitlist for programs indicates that the Centre could benefit from increased infrastructure to support all that seek out its

services. The impact that waitlisting participants has on the Centre's community is unknown, but it certainly affects who exactly is able to benefit from Centre programming. The other participant suggested that insight could be gained from reaching out to participants who did not stay for the full length of their program. They noted that there are forms distributed to participants to get feedback on programming and to see where things can be improved, but that they are not usually given out in the first few sessions, which is "whenever all the people who don't like it there leave." Collecting feedback from participants during the beginning of the term could serve to give the Centre valuable insights into how to accommodate youth needs for the rest of the program sessions, and increase participant retention.

5. Creating a sense of belonging within the Centre's community

When asked to give their favourite aspect of the Centre, many participants spoke about the sense of community and belonging that they felt around the Centre itself, during programming, and with facilitators, staff, and fellow youth. One participant said that they had met many friends through the Centre, and that their favourite aspect was "being in a space where I'm allowed to be all aspects of myself." Another said that they "wouldn't feel comfortable using my name, my pronouns" without the support and encouragement of the Centre community. They spoke about the personal growth that they had undertaken at the Centre: "I've matured so much and mainly because of how many people have treated me kindly there." Almost all participants spoke about their personal connection to the Centre and its surrounding community as their favourite aspect; this indicates that the skills focus of a program (painting, writing, etc.) comes secondary to these participants in comparison to the development of the sense of belonging that they feel at the Centre. The majority of youth who volunteered to participate in this study are longtime attendees of Centre programming, and therefore their answers to this question were not unexpected.

Several participants noted that they were aware that their experiences with the Centre were not universal to all participants, one stating that they had met "a few people who don't like it there", but that "if you feel included, which you probably should, and you probably will", the experience would be positive. This raises the question of what inclusion at the Centre looks like, who exactly is being included, and who, if anyone, is excluded. One participant spoke about the need to create an environment that is accepting of everyone, without any caveats, and not just to those who are already established within the Centre community. They emphasized that all participants at the Centre should be made to feel included by their fellow youth and facilitators, regardless of how they choose to express themselves, their personal opinions, political beliefs, other communities they may belong to, or any other such factors. They stated that this idea of tolerance is "just how it is in the real world," and that "even though you may not agree with someone, you still need to be civil with them."

Several participants identified their favourite aspect of the Centre as being one of its physical aspects: one noted that they "like how open [the Centre] is - it's a comfortable place to be, whether you're immediately doing something or you're just trying to chill during a program." Others said that they loved the comfortable couches, the "really cool plants," and the "green chairs." These comments show that for

longtime participants who consider themselves part of the Centre community, the physical space has been a key component to their positive experiences there. This space and many of the “hands-on” aspects of Centre programming have been less accessible in the past year, and it is worth considering how this has affected participants’ experiences within programs and sense of connection with the Centre itself.

Recommendations

These recommendations were formulated from the data obtained from our literature review of Community arts programs in Canada, the thematic analysis of publicly available program evaluations, and the thematic analysis of MacPhee Centre participant interviews.

Recommendation #1: Increase measures for accountability and transparency with the public

The research team’s first recommendation highlights the need to increase organizational transparency with the public. As a result of our analysis, it is our first suggestion that the MacPhee Centre may consider adding more transparent communication measures with the public in order to build trust with their community. Publishing data collected from program evaluations can mean that potential new Centre participants and their parents have a better understanding of what to expect from the Centre and its programming, which could increase participant retention and reduce program dropout rates. It also provides comprehensive information to potential new community partners, donors, and funding bodies who are interested in the Centre’s work, which would lead to increased support and funding for the Centre to continue their growth and impact on the community (Carman, 2011). Building more of these relationships allows the Centre to further diversify their sources of revenue and reduce competition with similar nonprofits for limited funding sources such as government grants, increasing overall organizational efficiency (Carman, 2011). Given that the Centre provides services aimed toward BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, increasing their access to more detailed information about the programs and their outcomes will allow them to find programs suiting their interests and further their education.

Non-profit program evaluations may be conducted for a variety of reasons. They may allow organizations to make strategic decisions based on achievement of specific goals, to increase trust with community partners to further the achievement of these goals, or simply to provide data to funding bodies as a requirement for grant applications (Carman, 2011). The wide range of potential uses for program evaluation data should be considered when designing such program evaluations, such that the Centre obtains publishable results. The Centre should consider the intended audiences for the data, so that the evaluations are designed to obtain the desired feedback for each anticipated audience (Umar & Hassan, 2017). They should also consider these audiences when deciding what they define as “outcomes” for their programming, as well as whether these outcomes apply to individual programs and participants, the Centre as a whole, or the community-at-large. Paying tribute to one of our interviewees’ suggestions, we recommend gathering evaluation data from participants during the beginning of the program as well as at the end, in order to gain insight into how to accommodate youth needs for the rest of the program sessions, and to ensure that participant experience reflects the desired outcomes. We also

suggest providing increased support for staff learning and development, as organizations who do this are more likely to design and collect efficient program data (Umar & Hassan, 2017).

When deciding which information to present to the public, the research team suggests carefully considering all forms of program evaluation data, including reviews from past students, student evaluations about the program, and survey results. Focus should be placed on providing accurate and accountable information about both the positive and negative aspects of each program to create balanced descriptions of programming. The research team suggests adding more information on the specific ways students achieved various outcomes, as well as what outcomes each program covers. Including outcomes that students will master throughout the program may add to the MacPhee Centre's transparency and accountability to the public, and enable students and parent/guardians to decide on programs in terms of fit and availability.

As with all nonprofits, we recognize that the Centre is limited in capacity by its staffing and funding: therefore, the Centre should design its evaluations such that there is enough data to fulfill its intended purpose, but not so much that extensive resources are required to analyze and present it to the public.

Recommendation #2. Considerations for the Centre's online presence & social media management

2a. Continue investing resources in online social platform management for program promotion and outreach

The research team's second recommendation to the MacPhee Centre is to consider investing further resources into their social media platforms to explore how they can be leveraged to increase outreach and communicate effectively with the Centre community. Our interview participants indicated that they used Instagram as their main source of most updated information about the Centre, which correlates with national data from Media Technology Monitor Canada reporting that 67% of Canadian youths aged 12-17 use Instagram daily (2020). Other platforms may also be viable options for communicating with youth: 42% of youth aged 12-17 use TikTok every day, and 53% of youth aged 8-15 use Youtube (Media Technology Monitor Canada, 2020). Our analysis of the website and social media activity for Maritime Community arts organizations showed that a total of 16 updated their communities about changes due to COVID through their Instagram accounts, compared with 11 who updated their websites (Figure 5). This indicates that social media is used to communicate up to date information with the public more often than organizational websites, likely due to limitations in technological literacy amongst nonprofit staff: no knowledge of website maintenance or coding is needed to update social medias. Organizational websites are crucial to hosting key information such as mission statements, full program descriptions, bios of staff and board members, and information derived from program evaluations as described in Recommendation 1. Interviewees indicated that time and resources are limited. Therefore, we recommend that the Centre continue to move forward with their current communication plan of regular updates to their social media channels, and update the website on a semi-regular basis such that it contains up to date and accurate organizational information for outside parties to access.

Given the Centre's focus on youth empowerment, we suggest that they involve youth in the Centre's community in the creation of content for their social media channels: conceptualizing content in collaboration with teens leads to greater engagement (Thomas et al., 2020). The Centre may therefore consider introducing procedures to involve youth as co-creators of publicity and outreach content for social media channels, with proper parental consent and youth assent permissions. The Centre's youth are digital natives, and as such are very familiar with engaging with online content and social media. However, although they may be proficient in how to both consume and create forms of digital media, they may not have all of the skills, knowledge, and understanding they need to be considered fully digitally literate. Familiarizing youth with the concept of digital literacy and providing education on how to build skills in digital literacy will provide youth with an understanding of how to safely and effectively navigate digital spaces and interact with online forms of media. They may allow youth to create content with a greater understanding of the implications of sharing media online, and open new creative avenues through mastery of digital media tools. These skills in critical thinking, communication, and information management are crucial life skills that will serve youth not just in their involvement with the Centre, but in many aspects of their future personal lives and careers. Teaching digital literacy may also benefit the MacPhee Centre by increasing their ability to use their website and social media platforms more effectively, thereby reaching a greater audience and increasing online engagement to improve communication and outreach. The research team suggests partnering with digital experts from local organizations such as Halifax Public Libraries to develop an appropriate education plan on digital literacies for Centre youth and staff.

2b. Increase measures for youth security and privacy online

In considering the concept of digital literacy and safe navigation of online spaces, we also suggest that the MacPhee Centre establish a sound privacy policy around sharing pictures of youth to their website and media channels. Participants may readily agree to appearing on the Centre's media channels or having identifying information shared, given the sense of community surrounding the Centre and their eagerness to participate in program promotion and outreach; however, it is worth considering the possible consequences of sharing media depicting youth with the public. Publishing media with details such as youth names, faces, social media handles, etc., means that youth can be identified and perceived by outside parties, to unknown consequences. This contributes to their digital footprint, the permanency of which should be carefully considered; media shared online may be shared by others and passed through various networks, magnifying its audience beyond the Centre community. It is also possible that once media is uploaded to a certain platform, ownership of the copyright transfers to the platform and the Centre no longer has control over how the content is used. Both of these factors make it very difficult to remove all traces of the content once published, and can raise major ethical problems when the media depicts minors with identifying details. Centre staff should have a full understanding of the risks associated with sharing identifying media online, and engage in discussions with Centre youth to ensure that they are also fully informed of these risks.

The research team recommends that the Centre research and understand ownership rights to media shared on different platforms, such that they can make fully informed decisions of what types of content to share in order to protect youth from any associated risks. They should also keep up to date on changes to platforms' copyright policies, and update their privacy policy accordingly. Parental consent should always be obtained in addition to youth consent (if the youth is a minor) prior to publishing any media with youth involvement, and this should be documented through consent forms to protect the Centre in the case that there are any conflicts that arise. Forms should be as comprehensive as possible, and secured through password protection or other methods if presented in digital form. It is also recommended that the Centre consider how youth could possibly be identified through any media they choose to participate in, and consider implementing protective measures such as cropping out faces or removing names. The Centre should develop its privacy policy to be as consistent and thorough as possible, and should incorporate the above considerations. The research team emphasizes its recommendation to pursue digital literacy education and training for youth and staff, which will contribute to their understanding of security and privacy online.

Recommendation #3: Considerations for pursuing the hybrid model of program delivery (online & in person)

3a. Consider how this model will affect the Centre's community impact and ability to uphold its central pillars

The research team's third recommendation to the MacPhee Centre is to consider various factors presented in this report when deciding future development of online programming. As of yet there is a lack of literature on how the transition to online has affected the ways in which Community arts organizations are able to serve their communities, and the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating virtual programming into future planning for the MacPhee Centre will need to be analyzed by the staff and community surrounding the Centre to determine if this is something that will work for them. The Centre's Letter of Introduction (2020) states that "virtual programs bring the MacPhee model to youth who otherwise would not be able to access programming," including youth from anywhere in the province, and emphasizes that this means that youth "who are part of inpatient treatment" can participate in programming as well. A significant advantage of virtual programming is therefore that it can increase the Centre's overall outreach – this means an increase in the total number of youth participants and other metrics used by the Centre to measure its impact, which could lead to increased funding or donations from those who consider these figures in the Annual Report. It also means that the Centre can provide its services to disadvantaged youth who were previously unable to participate in in person programming, which is efficient in implementing initiatives that speak to social justice dimensions such as accessibility (Rowell, Morrell & Alvermann, 2017). Providing virtual programming options could also reduce the waitlist for certain programs that are high in demand as indicated by our interview participants, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, as it eliminates availability of physical space as a limitation to program capacity.

It should be noted that all of these advantages are dependent on the facilitators available to the Centre and the type of programming that they offer, as well as the online resources and infrastructure that the Centre can provide. Facilitators of virtual programming will need a higher degree of digital literacy than those for in person programming, and the Centre will either need an increased number of them to accommodate new participants, or they should be comfortable managing a higher volume of participants in the virtual space. If the Centre chooses a more targeted approach to recruiting facilitators, as suggested by one of our interviewees, this could mean an increase in the diversity of programming. The research team recommends consulting with facilitators to determine which programs are viable for delivery in the online space, and their capacity for participants.

Virtual programming may also change the Centre's ability to uphold some of its four central pillars, particularly participants' ability to gain social skills, which was noted by our interviewees as one of the most important skills they would apply to future experiences and one of the things they most sorely missed during online programming. It is also unclear as to how the virtual programming experience affects participants' "sense of community and desire for positive participation in society", as further explored in Recommendation 3c. The research team recommends that the Centre investigate the effects of virtual programming on participant experience through the collection of feedback for program evaluation.

3b. Invest in the Centre's infrastructure for supporting virtual program delivery

If the Centre is to pursue expanding its virtual program delivery, the research team recommends investing in online infrastructure to support these programs. This could include providing updates, alternates, or augmentations to the current virtual conferencing platform that the Centre uses, such that social interaction can be maximized amongst participants; this is particularly important for programs such as *Dungeons and Dragons* and the GSA, as feedback from our interviewees suggested that their experiences were severely limited by the lack of socialization. This could also benefit the Centre in their meetings with staff, community partners, and other stakeholders in the community. The Centre should also explore investing in software that maximizes the artistic component of the participant experience, such as map-making software for *Dungeons and Dragons*, graphic novel making software, or music production software to support these facilitators in delivering their best programming. The research team suggests consulting with local arts organizations, relevant university departments, IT firms, or software developers to determine the best way to choose and implement additional software into current or future Centre programming.

It is also recommended that the Centre consider our interviewees' feedback on which aspects of online program delivery they found advantageous when deciding which programs to deliver online in future as well as additional supports to invest in. For example, the photography and songwriting programs received positive feedback from our interviewees, and as such the Centre may consider what virtual infrastructure might be useful for these programs.

3c. Consider how the online environment changes the participant experience and sense of community & belonging at the Centre

Our final recommendation is that the Centre consider the difference in participant experience between online and in person programming. Our interview participants attended a lower volume of programming over the past year of COVID, citing burnout from online school and a lack of engagement with virtual programming. The shift to the online environment widened the audience for MacPhee Centre programming, but it may have come at the cost of disengagement from Centre participants who prefer the hands-on experiences available in in person programming. This decrease in attendance from such long-term Centre participants suggests that the beneficial aspects of in-person programming are very important to youth who have attended a large volume of Centre programming in the past, and therefore including these aspects is important for motivating new participants to continue attending programming in the long term. It also suggests that the hands-on aspects are crucial to providing the necessary support for at risk youth that forms the Centre's organizational mandate. The Centre should also consider the effects of online programs on participants' health. Online programming increases screen time for participants, and there has been an overall rise in mental health cases and heightened feelings of isolation in teens who engaged in online learning through school over the past year (Li et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2021). An analysis of teen content on TikTok showed that they were not motivated to complete work delivered in online learning, and that they sought increased support and empathy from their educators (Literat, 2021). This analysis also showed that students with learning disabilities such as ADHD particularly struggled with online learning (Literat, 2021); as the Centre's focus is on providing services to youth at risk of dropping out of school, they should consider how they can adapt online programming to meet these youths' needs. The Centre may also explore how TikTok can be an effective tool to gain insight on youths' experiences with online learning to inform future program development.

Our interview participants expressed that many of the most significant benefits that they received from their time at the Centre were the relationships that they formed and the sense of belonging that they felt at the Centre, which relates to Collaboration, the Centre's fourth central pillar. New online participants may have difficulty forming relationships at the Centre with people they have never met in person before; Centre staff and participants should therefore consider how it can replicate this feeling of connection and belonging for online participants, such that if an online participant were to come to in-person programming, they would feel just as welcomed as those who regularly visited the Centre. Creating a welcoming environment is particularly important in programs such as the GSA, where participants may feel nervous disclosing their feelings to unfamiliar peers and facilitators, and online privacy and security should be considered to ensure the maintenance of a safe space (Allemang et al, 2021). Educators teaching online this year found that maintaining a positive demeanor and encouraging interaction with peers were crucial to student engagement and social relations, through the use of breakout groups and providing opportunities to give feedback outside of virtual meeting times via shared platforms (Miller, 2021). Social media is one avenue through which participants can give feedback and foster connections with peers; many youths who engaged in online programming this year connected

with new peers through social media platforms. This relates to the finding that using social media can be used as a constructive coping strategy for adolescents to deal with anxious feelings during the COVID-19 quarantine (Cauberghe et al, 2021). This emphasizes the recommendation that the Centre continue to update its social media to communicate with their community, as adolescents experiencing loneliness are more likely to use social media to connect with others; it also provides the suggestion that it might include more humorous content, as it relates to increased adolescent happiness (Cauberghe et al., 2021). The Centre might consider reaching out to participants of online programs this year, especially those who did not stay for the full term, as they have valuable insights into how they related to the sense of belonging created by the Centre that these longtime participants feel, and feedback on what the Centre could do to increase their feelings of belonging at the Centre in the virtual space.

Youth need to feel that they are welcomed into the MacPhee Centre community in order to get the most out of their programs. In offering programming to youth outside of the Centre's Dartmouth community, they need to consider redefining what this "community" is, and how it may be diluted through the decentralization of online learning. Our recommendation is for the Centre to focus on the notion of expanding adolescents' sense of belonging, including but not limited to geographical dimensions (e.g., beyond the Dartmouth area), but also expanding the notion of community through socio-affective relationships, roles and responsibilities, and sustained provincial outreach. Further research could also explore the democratization dimension of arts-oriented spaces such as museums (Toé & Émond, 2019) or adolescents' mediation of aesthetic experiences when making (Lemonchois, 2017; Mendonca, Savoie, & Émond, 2019; White & Lemieux, 2017). This disposition is central to ensuring that youths throughout the province have access to the safe spaces that the MacPhee Centre offers in its mission.

Conclusion

This research report presented qualitative findings on: 1) program evaluations of Canadian Community arts programs for youth across Canada to evaluate the state of online accessibility, availability, and outreach during the 2020-2021 year (corresponding to waves 1-2 of the COVID-19 pandemic), and 2) findings from one-on-one interviews, conducted on Teams, with 8 youths aged 12-17 enrolled (or previously enrolled) in a program from the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. From these analyses, the research team has emphasized how Community arts programs mostly benefit from updating their social media channels directly with programming, in addition to their websites. From the interviews, thematic emphases were directed towards: COVID-19 adaptations and the shift to virtual program delivery skills reinvestment for future employment, communication about programming during COVID-19, suggestions for program improvement, and fostering a sense of belonging. From there, we provided three recommendations that are policy-, community-, and youth-focused. These echo the need to:

- 1) Increase measures for accountability and transparency with the public;
- 2) Consider (continuing, increased) social media management; and
- 3) Consider implementing hybrid models of delivery, with specific attention to budgeting, infrastructure, and dedicated attention to youth's sense of belonging.

We trust that these recommendations will be useful to other Community arts organizations that faced similar challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further recommendations for research include the need to investigate underrepresented and marginalized youths' perceptions on ways their sense of belonging, facilitated through Community arts organization's involvement, changes depending on specific variables such as social contact frequency (in-person vs. online) materials accessibility and malleability (Keune & Pepler, 2019; Lemieux & Rowsell, 2020; Sheridan et al., 2020), arts-based embodiment and impact on learning (Pepler, David-Soylu, & Dahn, 2021), and sustained engagement in the arts.

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Appendix A: Community arts programs surveyed

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Appendix B: Phase 1 data selection methods

Overview

The *Synopsis of MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning Feedback on Outcomes* project involved a search and review of strategic programs relating to other community hubs for youth that employ the arts. It was conducted between June 25, 2020, and October 20, 2020, under the direction of Dr. Amélie Lemieux and the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. A priority of the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning, which provides youth programs to the adolescents of Nova Scotia, includes exploring the success and outcomes linked to programs offered. The intent of this project was to help address this priority.

The project had two objectives:

- 1) *To identify, review and provide a synopsis of various youth programs being implemented provincially/within the Maritimes and in selected national jurisdictions as well as those proposed by stakeholders through their calls for a national review of youth programs.*
- 2) *To examine and assess existing local/national initiatives that have youth art program dimensions to identify gaps that could be addressed by the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning within their offerings.*

To facilitate meeting these objectives and ensure delivery of the project outputs (Workplan, Draft Report, Final Report), periodic check-ins were held between the research team (led by Dr. Amélie Lemieux and team from Mount Saint Vincent University) and the project authority by teleconference and email. On October 20, 2020, the researchers presented the draft report findings to the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning at a teleconference meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Input from MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning at this event affirmed the approach being taken (i.e., selection criteria and scope, approach to the analysis) and provided insight into topic areas/issues of interest to the MacPhee Centre that could be examined more closely in the Final Report.

Selection Method

A multi-method approach was used to identify Community arts organizations from the following sources:

- Google Search
- A list of Community arts organizations provided by the MacPhee Centre
- Research was conducted both via websites and social media accounts for each Community arts organization

An environmental scan and document search using the Google search engine was completed to identify community hubs that offer youth arts programs and related documents (e.g., policy frameworks, action plans, annual reports, outcomes and impacts) that were produced by community hubs; offered between 2015 and 2020, with a focus on pre-, during, and post-COVID-19; and available in French or English. Key words used in the search for English language documents included “Community arts centre for youth ngo/ NGO community centre youth arts” with and without “ngo.” And including the name of cities “Halifax/Fredericton/Charlottetown/St .John’s or Newfoundland.” As well as “Community arts centre for youth” without a city name. Youth program websites across Canada identified by the MacPhee Centre were also reviewed to identify regional/national programs that may have been missed in the Google search. Targeted searches were also conducted to identify regional youth hubs in areas that did not come up in the initial search (e.g., “creative learning programs”, “youth programs”).

Inclusion/exclusion criteria:

A national search of youth programs outside of the Maritimes used the following selection criteria:

- Size of cities in comparison to maritime hubs.
- Being in conjunction with an arts hub or arts based universities

Targeted searches were conducted for programs in cities such as Toronto or Montreal (French speaking).

National organizations offering youth programs (e.g., Unity Charity, dareArts, ArtHive, ArtsSmarts, Blue Print for Life, Heart of the City, and Leave Out Violence [LOVE]) were also included.

In addition, targeted searches using Google were completed to identify strategic documents from Canadian stakeholders (with a pan-Canadian mandate or Quebec-based and informative to the Action Plan in that province). The project authority provided a spreadsheet of federal initiatives.

This process resulted in an initial list of over 176 community hubs for consideration. An initial scan of the database was conducted to remove duplicate entries and to confirm that programs met the basic inclusion criteria. A scan of titles was conducted to eliminate any clearly irrelevant programs (by title alone). This process reduced the database to 26 Community arts organizations. This list formed the basis of the database going forward and was included in the work plan deliverable submitted to the project authority on January 10, 2021.

After meetings with the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning it was decided that the research would only focus on the Maritimes and not span across Canada. Further, the focus of this research project switched from program effectiveness alone to COVID-19 response amidst the pandemic and online communication with patrons about public health guidelines and program offerings pre, during and post COVID-19.

The research switched to focus on COVID-19 responses on Community arts organizations online domains, with a focus on their websites. It was concluded that only a rare few organizations updated

Lemieux, A., Beaton, E., & Wood, C. (2021). *MacPhee Centre For Creative Learning Program Assessment Report*. A CLARI Nova Scotia Research Report, 34 p.

their websites on a regular basis and included COVID-19 responses or program changes. Only big Organizations like UnityCharity updated their websites regularly. After another consultation with the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning it was decided to broaden our search and include social media.

Methodology

The documents were organized in a Microsoft Excel database with separate worksheets to identify different Community arts centres, their programs, whether they were online or not.

The research team, initially composed of Ms. Wood and Dr. Lemieux, met weekly from June 30th to December 30 2020. In January 2021, we expanded the research team with the addition of Ms. Beaton to conduct and organize the interviews. All parties contributed to the research. Ms. Beaton completed the CORE training program to conduct the interviews.