



# Gaining CLARITY: Gathering Community Perspectives on Youth Resilience To Protect Against Suicide

Erin Delfs, Helen Chiang, Anne Huisken, Dr. Shelly Ben-David, Dr. Katrina Plamondon, Dr. Sana Z. Shahram

## Background

- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death amongst youth in Canada
- Past research has identified resilience as an important factor that protects against youth suicide
- Resilience is often defined as the ability to adapt and feel hope while facing adversity
- Several individual-level studies have explored resilience and suicidal behavior amongst specific at-risk youth
  - Youth who died by suicide but showed no risk factors have been overlooked in the research
  - There is a dearth of evidence pertaining to what actions can be taken to foster resilience in youth
  - Research also has yet to uncover what building resilience looks like within a community
- Our previous literature review revealed that social support systems and inclusive environments foster youth resilience<sup>1</sup>
- Taking a **community-level approach** to building resilience is necessary to protect *all* youth against suicide risk before it happens.

The purpose of The *Community-Led Actions Important for Resilience Throughout Youth (CLARITY) Project* is to develop community-based supports to protect against youth suicide.

## Research Methods

### Approach

- Five deliberative dialogues (DDs) were conducted via Zoom to validate and extend findings from our literature review.
  - DDs bring people together to reflect on a specific set of questions, informed by evidence
- DDs took place from November, 2020, to January, 2021, and were 2 hours in length
  - Participants met with a member of the research team to provide consent verbally and/or in writing
  - Dialogue participants were invited to create and share a collage about what resilience means to them within a community setting.

### Recruitment

- We primarily sought to recruit participants from the Central Okanagan.
  - Target groups included youth (15-18 years old), emerging adults (18-25 years old), caregivers, caring adults, and community stakeholders
  - Snowball sampling, word of mouth, and social media outreach were used to recruit participants
- Invitations to participate were formally extended through email

## Deliberative Dialogue Objectives

The objectives were to determine:

- What factors of resilience promote feelings of hope, optimism, and sense of purpose in the face of challenges for youth and emerging adults?



- What types of support from others foster resilience in young people?



- How can Central Okanagan communities support young people's paths of resilience?



**Youth Recruitment Poster** This poster was emailed to local schools, youth-related community organizations and shared on social media platforms.

## Data Analysis

Dialogues were recorded and analyzed using theoretically informed analytical framework.<sup>2</sup>

## Results

### Participants reached:

- Youth (n=4)
- Emerging adults (n=9)
- Caregivers (n=2), e.g. parents of youth enduring mental health struggles
- Caring adults (n=7), e.g. local youth-focused researchers, counsellors, and support workers
- Community stakeholders (n=9), e.g. behavioural assistant, high school teacher, youth and family services worker.

### Sense of Belonging

- Inclusive environments were shown to cultivate a sense of belonging in youth
- Inclusive environments described intersections of online and in-person spaces in which young people felt free from discrimination and competition with their peers
- Sense of belonging was also shown to be fostered by support from peers.

*“Stress feels less burdensome when you find your people.”*

### Collective Action

- The importance of collective action in promoting resilience reflected the effectiveness of a community-level approach to preventing youth suicide
- Collective action described a communal, continuous approach to fostering youth resilience through engaging individuals across multiple generations to dismantle and rebuild social structures and establish safe spaces for youth.

*“Resilience is a continuous group effort [...] it's an action that has to be taken by everyone.”*

### Specific Actions to Support Youth Resilience

- Creating universally-accessible spaces and supports (as opposed to spaces/supports youth have to disclose something in order to be qualified for)
- Other actions pertained to establishing resilience-based training courses for youth and caring adults.

## Conclusion

DDs offer insights into the contexts young people navigate and their implications on mental health and resilience, catalyzing efforts to create substantiated community supports to protect against suicide among all youth in the Central Okanagan.

## Future Directions

Develop community-based initiatives that wrap-around currently available supports for youth in the Central Okanagan as informed by DD findings.



## References

1. Shahram, S. Z., Smith, M. L., Ben-David, S., Feddersen, M., Kemp, T. E., & Plamondon, K. (2021). Promoting "zest for life": A systematic literature review of resiliency factors to prevent youth suicide. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(1), 4-24. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12588>
2. Plamondon, K. M., Bottorff, J. L., & Cole, D. C. (2015). Analyzing data generated through deliberative dialogue: Bringing knowledge translation into qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(11), 1529-1539. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315581603>

## Acknowledgements

The CLARITY study is funded by the **Blenk Family Fund**, which was established with the **KGH Foundation** to strengthen the network of mental health support and services available to young people in our local community.

Thank you to Dr. Shahram, Dr. Ragoonaden, and the rest of the research team for their efforts guiding, educating, and supporting us through our work on the CLARITY Project.