

Media Release



Growing up in Timiskaming: Planet Youth survey results are in

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Planet Youth Timiskaming is a 5-year pilot initiative based on the Icelandic Prevention Model, an approach with demonstrated effectiveness in reducing substance use and improving well-being among young people for over 20 years. The initiative focuses on identifying youth-related issues in real time with local data, and then working together as a community to address them.

In November 2023, Planet Youth Timiskaming asked grade 10 and 11 students from all five district high schools to complete a comprehensive lifestyle survey. The results are in, and 555 students aged 15-17 have told us about their lives and experiences growing up in Timiskaming District.

The reports, which do not identify students or schools, have identified several strengths in our local communities. The results show that most students (84%) find it easy to receive caring and warmth from their parents, and 85% say that their parents know their friends. The majority of students (69%) reported they got along with their teachers, and about three-quarters say that they have friends who care about them. These are all strong protective factors for children and youth.

However, the data also revealed some areas of concern. Only one-in-three students (33%) rated their mental health as good or very good, and just one-in-four (25%) believe that the students at their school are nice to one another, which can negatively impact their view of school as a "safe space". Low mental health and a lack of safe spaces are risk factors for our young people, as is starting to use substances at a young age. About one-in-three (35%) of students had their first drink of alcohol at age 13 or younger. Any alcohol or drug use before the brain is fully formed (around age 25) can negatively impact its growth and development. The data also shows us that over half of the teens surveyed are spending 3 hours or more on social media each day, and only one-in-four students feel that there are enough activities for youth in their communities. Close to two-thirds (63%) of students are not getting enough sleep at a time when sleep is vital for their developing brains.

But there is good news, too. To respond to the survey findings, community members and local organizations have come together to form three Local Action Teams (LATs) – one each in the North, South, and Central parts of Timiskaming. The LATs are open to all, and include a wide variety of partners such as parents and caregivers, school staff, public health, police, municipal staff and elected officials, health and social service agencies, and the faith community.

"Planet Youth is based on the principle that the whole community needs to be involved in order to impact youth behaviours." says Johanna Paradis, Community Services Coordinator for the Town of Englehart, and Leader of the Central Timiskaming LAT. "We are encouraged to see so many people joining these groups and taking a real interest in what the young people had to say. There is a role for everyone in this work, and we encourage anyone with an interest in improving outcomes for youth to get involved with the LAT in their area."

Looking ahead, the LATs will come together again in the next month to choose 2-3 main areas from the data to focus on, and develop a plan for action. In some countries that have adopted this model, actions have primarily taken the form of strengthening relationships between youth and their

caregivers, fostering connections between parents, and increasing access to organized extracurricular activities.

Planet Youth Timiskaming is coordinated by Timiskaming Health Unit and is guided by a Regional Steering Committee with representation from the District of Timiskaming Social Service Administration Board, the Town of Kirkland Lake, the Town of Englehart, the City of Temiskaming Shores, Conseil scolaire catholique du district des Grandes Rivières, District School Board Ontario Northeast, Conseil scolaire publique du nord est, Kuuwanimano Child and Family Services, the Salvation Army, and Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy.

Visit www.TimiskamingYouth.ca to learn more.

To get involved with Planet Youth Timiskaming, please contact Erika at aeltermane@timiskaminghu.com

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Media Contact:

Erika Aelterman
Planet Youth Coordinator
aeltermane@timiskaminghu.com

www.timiskamingyouth.ca

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Thriving youth.*