

Introduction

The Equitable Standards Evaluation Model highlights the shared responsibility of achieving positive youth-in-care outcomes, across key stakeholders and sectors. As an organization that works with and supports youth and young adults in the child welfare system, Reach Youth Services made the pledge and committed to piloting the Equitable Standards Evaluation Model.

We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Equitable Standards Evaluation and commend those who led this endeavor for introducing a robust and compelling framework. Using the Model as a quality assessment tool we were able to identify areas in our service delivery and support that already align with the Equitable Standards and paid particular attention to areas that had opportunity for improvement and further action.

This endeavour reinforced much of what we do, what we believe and what we want to foster and accomplish with the youth we support.

Alignment

Many aspects of our work align and promote the outcomes set out by Equitable Standards including, but not limited to:

- An organizational approach guided by the Circle of Courage/ Reclaiming Youth model, meaning our actions and interactions create opportunities for youth to feel and experience a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These opportunities are imbedded in our daily practice.
- An organizational case management approach informed by the High Fidelity Wraparound model, ensuring young people are at the center of their care plans, have voice and choice, and are well supported by natural and professional supports in all life domains.
- Collection of statistics reflects and measures our work as it relates to our guiding principles and the Standing Committee Markers of Permanency Outcomes, namely the importance of family and lifelong connections, cultural safety, community involvement and transition supports for youth and young adults.
- Independent Living Skills Modules that provide teaching, resources and hands-on learning in Tenancy and Home Safety, Identification, Managing Finances, Setting Up Utilities & Paying Bills, Nutrition and Cooking, Hygiene and Cleaning, Health and Wellness, Transportation and Community Resources.
- An emphasis on system navigation and referrals to ensure youth and young adults are connected to the resources that meet their needs and foster their goals.
- An emphasis on community connecting to ensure youth and young adults make connections with community-based organizations that will be available as lifelong connections and supports.



- An understanding and commitment to the importance of building a diverse team that is reflective of the youth, families and community we serve. We value diversity in background, culture, and identity.
- Ensuring all staff are trained, competent, well-suited and well-equipped to work effectively in their roles as Youth Care Practitioners, Community Support Workers, Case Managers and Program Managers.
- Creating community and belonging within the organization and an environment where youth feel a part of, well-cared for and supported by the helpers in their lives.
- Ensuring youth milestones, birthdates, celebrations, births, and holidays are made as special as possible and recognized in genuine and tailored ways.
- Providing a long-term commitment to the youth we support, minimizing unplanned or unintended discharges from the program and providing post-discharge supports to the best of our abilities.



Youth Voice and Advisory



In the Spring of 2024, 14 youth were surveyed as part of our implementation of the Equitable Standards model to include youth voice and advisory. This was an important opportunity to hear directly from the youth we serve about their experience with their supports, and, to provide an opportunity for their input into our Action Plan.

Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity

Several questions were asked to assess youths' feelings and experience of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity in our program.

- 100% indicated they feel a meaningful connection to their Reach supports.
- 78.6% indicated they *always* felt cared for and that Reach supports show genuine interest and find meaningful ways to express their care. Another 14.3 % indicated they *usually* felt cared for and one youth said they *sometimes* feel cared for. No youth indicated they did not feel cared for.
- 92.9% of youth said if they have a struggle or challenge Reach supports are able to help find services and supports where they can get the help they need.
- 85.7% of youth felt important milestones such as graduation, sobriety or birthdays are recognized and supported.
- 92.9% of youth indicated staff are well-trained and equipped to support them.
- 92.9% of youth felt Reach had helped them learn about resources in the community.
- 100% of youth felt Reach supports are committed to them and that they are allowed to make mistakes, learn, and grow without us giving up on them, their plans and success.

Case Management

Several questions were asked to assess youths' experience with our case management approach, namely: ensuring young people are at the center of their care plans, have voice and choice, and are well supported by natural and professional supports in all life domains.

- 78.6% said they are *always* given opportunities to set goals and work towards achievements that are important to them. Another 14.3% said they are *usually* given opportunities to set goals and work towards achievements that are important to them, and one youth said they are *sometimes* given opportunities to set goals and work towards achievements.
- The below percentages represent youths' perspective in the areas of 'life domains' that they feel they benefit from support:
 - Medical – 11 youth – 78.6%
 - Legal – 8 youth – 57.1%
 - Residential – 7 youth – 50%
 - Education and/or work – 12 youth – 85.7%
 - Social – 10 youth – 71.4%
 - Safety – 7 youth – 50%
 - Cultural – 7 youth – 50%
 - Spiritual – 6 youth – 42.9%
 - Family – 8 youth – 57.1%
 - Emotional or Psychological – 8 youth – 57.1%



Skills for Independent Living

Youth were provided an opportunity to share how they feel about their supports and opportunities provided to develop skills needed for independent living.

The below percentages represent Youths' perspective in the areas they felt they have/had adequate support.

- What it means to be a good tenant – 85.7%
- How to keep your apartment safe and stable - 85.7%
- Budgeting - 71.4%
- Getting your IDs - 85.7%
- Paying bills and understanding - 71.4%
- Nutrition and cooking – 92.9%
- Hygiene, laundry and cleaning - 78.6%
- Health and wellness - 85.7%
- Bus and transportation – 85.7%
- Awareness of community resources - 78.6%



Areas of Improvement

Reach Youth Services believes in ongoing reflection and continuous improvement. This process effectively challenges us to look for opportunities where we can further enhance the

opportunities and services we provide to the youth and young adults we support. Using the pillars, below is a list of the areas we identified as opportunities for enhancement and development (focusing on areas that fall within our scope and resources):

- Emergency Kits and Welcome Package
- Significant Community Connections
- Land-based Connection and Healing
- Connection to Youth in Care Networks
- Secure Career Path
- Nutrition Training
- Healthy Relationship Skills Training
- Real Life Practice and Implementation of Financial Skills



Planned Action Steps – Short, Intermediate and Long Term

A strategic plan was held on September 20, 2023 to narrow and select the areas we wanted to address in the short, intermediate and long term.

Short Term Goals

Emergency Kits

Following the initial consultation on Equitable Standards, emergency kits were identified as an important need for youth living independently. As a response to this identified need, emergency kits (candles, flashlights, blankets, canned goods etc.) had been handed out to youth in the winter of 2022 and winter of 2023 and this will now be part of our welcome process as youth enter the program and find their first apartment. Similarly, we introduced to our process 'Welcome Packages' that includes ours and advocates contact information, community resources and youth rights information.

Timeline: September 2023 to January 2024

Community Connections

Already part of our practice, but an affirmed priority is the importance of ensuring youth are connected to community-based organizations and grass-root community groups. An emphasis on facilitating community connection to ensure youth and young adults make contacts that will be available as lifelong connections and supports.

This will be implemented as a monthly community event to the various community resources such as Studio 393, The Link- The Hub, Huddles, City of Winnipeg gyms and participating in the various community safety walks.

Timeline: Current and ongoing



35.7 % of youth indicated a desire to check out different community resources and programs.

Land-based Connection and Healing

Reach engages with a Cultural Advisor and a Spiritual Care Provider to facilitate ongoing opportunities for teachings and ceremony including Pipe Ceremony, Sweatloge, Naming Ceremony, and learning traditional teachings.

Timeline: Current and ongoing

85.7% of youth indicated a desire to participate in cultural teachings and ceremony.

Intermediate/ Medium Term Goals **Connection to Youth in Care Networks**

VOICES

- Set up a presentation for staff and youth and obtain pamphlets for VOICES (if they have) to add to the welcome pack.

Timeline: TBD

Long Term Goals

Our longer-term goal(s) include a commitment to ongoing program development and the facilitation of important opportunities designed for youth in the following areas:

- Secure Career Path – Career Exploration
- Healthy Relationship Skills Training
- Cooking and Nutrition Classes
- Cultural Opportunities
- Speaker Series

In November 2023, we launched Meaning Seekers – a series of program opportunities for all Reach youth. Meaning Seekers is a program designed by Reach leadership, meant to inspire youth and foster growth through belonging, purpose, story telling and life skills. In practice, Meaning Seekers provides opportunities in career exploration, cooking and nutrition, speakers with lived expertise and shared experiences, workshops in healthy relationships and cultural teachings and traditions.

Meaning Seekers delivers on several of the priorities identified through our quality assessment review using the Equitable Standards evaluation model. Meaning Seekers is voluntary and adaptable based on interest and youth feedback.

- 85.7% of youth indicated they would like the opportunity to learn about career and job opportunities.
- 71.4% of youth indicated they would like the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships.

- 71.4% of youth indicated they would like the opportunity to learn about nutrition and practice cooking.
- 57.1% indicated they would like the opportunity to learn about safe sex and harm reduction.
- 85.7% of youth indicated a desire to participate in cultural teachings and ceremony.

Other opportunities (identified by the youth) that we will do our best to incorporate are: wellness, drawing classes, getting help with certificates, sports and recreation, hair care, and informal social opportunities.

Policy Change

Real Life Practice and Implementation of Financial Skills

As part of our commitment and role in readiness-based transitions, we are introducing a practice/policy to ensure all youth are receiving funds and paying rent independently at least two to three months prior to discharge to ensure financial proficiency and ensure a safety net is in place should the youth find this responsibility challenging. Case by case exceptions will be considered, such as youth who are transitioning to adult services where this will not be an expectation or responsibility.

Timeline – Winter 2023

Advocacy

Advocacy is an important part of what we do. Highlighted throughout this process was the importance of advocacy in ensuring ‘youth are provided the supports and care needed as long as needed’ – with an emphasis on a *Readiness Based Transition to Adulthood*.

We have developed a ‘pre-discharge readiness assessment’ that will be used to assess readiness and when appropriate advocate for continued supports that are based on ‘needs and readiness.’

Conclusion

Using the Equitable Standards Evaluation Model as a quality assessment tool we were able to identify areas in our service delivery that already align with the Equitable Standards and pay particular attention to areas that had opportunity for improvement and further action.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Equitable Standards Evaluation and look forward to the ongoing collaboration with those leading and other stakeholders as we contribute to advancing this important work.