

## Student Leadership & Youth Empowerment (SLYE) Network

### Evaluation Report 2020



*Presented by The Students Commission of Canada, December 2020*

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## Origin Story

The SLYE Network is a grassroots, cross-sector collaborative organization (inclusive of partners from sectors such as government, non-government, faith/cultural groups, private business, schools, and youth) that works towards increased community engagement and equitable access to services for Toronto youth.

Monthly network meetings are organized for the collaborative so that members have the opportunity to meet new people who are invested in youth, to share their resources, and to find innovative ways to collaborate. In addition to monthly network meetings, weekly network meetings are organized with the SLYE Youth Council that consists of 12 volunteer youth leaders facing social and economic barriers (low-income, racialized, LGBTQ2S+, newcomers, women, and differently abled).

The main activity of the SLYE Network is the Peer to Peer (P2P) Leadership program, which provides volunteer leadership opportunities to P2P Youth Leaders comprised of youth (ages 14-18) who are furthest away from opportunity in Toronto. Once the P2P Youth Leaders complete the training, they put their skills into practice by leading school youth outreach events, the Roadshow. The Roadshow is a youth outreach initiative that takes place in Toronto (Downtown, York, East York, North York, Etobicoke, and Scarborough) high schools during the spring and fall, and in community spaces (malls, community centres, etc.) throughout the year. The Roadshow consists of a series of outreach events that connect thousands of youth with essential programs and services (health, employment, volunteering, education, recreation, arts, scholarships) being offered in their community.

The P2P Leadership program is funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation for three year (2019-2021). This program gives 3,375 youth facing barriers an authentic opportunity to build essential leadership qualities (self-awareness, confidence, empathy, conflict management, problem solving, teamwork, communication, critical thinking, decision-making) and volunteer as leaders by taking ownership of their program so youth can take charge of their own lives and positively engage in their community. This program doesn't end with the P2P Youth Leaders; it helps 45,000-50,000 of their peers connect with and navigate essential resources in their community through the Roadshow.



The information above was copied  
from [www.slyenetwork.com](http://www.slyenetwork.com)

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of how youth are engaged SLYE's Peer to Peer (P2P) Leadership program, an initiative funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The P2P Leadership program provides volunteer leadership opportunities to P2P Youth Leaders comprised of youth (ages 14-18) who are furthest away from opportunity in Toronto. The SLYE Network supports P2P Leaders to build essential leadership qualities and then the youth put their skills into practice by organizing and implementing school outreach events (the Roadshow) that helps their peers connect to essential community resources. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, SLYE has had to transition their activities virtually. Hence, this report also aims to understand the impact of this pandemic on the young participants.

SLYE chose two quantitative survey modules, *Preparing to Lead* and *Resource in the Community*, to identify trends and measure outcomes of the program. P2P Leaders and Network Partners (youth service providers) also participated in focus groups to share their needs and experience. An overview of the findings is documented below.

**Preparing to Lead:** Overall, youth seemed to gain a lot of leadership skills through their participation in the program. They self-reported an increase on all the aspects of this module from the beginning to the end of the program.

- Youth felt that SLYE offered an environment fostering learning experiences and allowing them to play an active role in decision-making.
- These results were similar to what was observed in the programming year of 2019. Youth who participated in this program in 2019 also showed statistically significant increases on all the components and on the overall results.

These similarities suggest consistency in the program and the valued conveyed by SLYE throughout the years.

**Resources in the Community:** Overall, youth seemed to gain skills in navigating resources of their community with the SLYE program. Their results showed statistically significant increase from the beginning to the end of the program.

- Youth felt more involved in their community towards the end of the program than they were at the beginning.
- They also felt like knowing more about their community resources and being able to navigate and access them more easily.

These results were similar to what was observed in the programming year of 2019. Youth who participated in this program in 2019 also showed statistically significant increases on all the components and on the overall results.

SLYE seems to be a valuable asset in connecting youth with the various resources throughout the years.

**Youth Focus Groups:** The focus groups helped assess the impact of the pandemic on the young participants. Overall, the lockdown helped youth to get closer to their families, but resulted in getting more distant from their friends. Although some were able to keep a connection by

communicating online, others felt “awkward” on online platforms. Youth were able to do a lot of volunteering online, but also had a variety of hobbies to keep them busy during the pandemic. Although it was sometimes challenging to access the resources they needed (such as computers and money), they appreciated the support they received from SLYE. The program had a positive impact on youth as it helped them learn, gain experience in volunteering and project management, as well as helped them develop many skills (e.g. leadership, team work, communication, etc.). Youth were thankful for the program and hope that SLYE will continue to offer in-person and online options after the pandemic.

**Network Partners Focus Group:** The network partners focus group helped to assess the strengths and the weaknesses of the partnership, especially in time of the pandemic. The partners certainly had to face both individual and organizational challenges, such as the loss of funding while navigating individual responses to the pandemic and lockdown. Some programs also experienced some difficulty with outreach. Nonetheless, the transition of their activities online was generally successful, and even allowed them to reach out to new audiences. The virtual roadshows from SLYE were highly appreciated throughout the network as they created some visibility and engagement.

## Process and Tools to Date

SLYE chose two (2) quantitative survey modules to identify trends and measure outcomes of the program. Over 60 youth participants filled out the two modules used to evaluate the program at the end of the program:

- The **Preparing to Lead** module examines the extent to which youth have educational experiences that respond to their needs and prepare them to lead.
- The **Resources in the Community** module examines the extent to which youth know about and are able to easily navigate (i.e. reach, use, or join) resources in their communities. Resources include educational organizations, health services, housing services, counselling, and more.

P2P Leaders also filled out a demographics module to share more about themselves.

Program	Quantitative Tools	Qualitative Tools
SLYE — Youth (P2P Leaders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Preparing to Lead (n=68)</li><li>- Resources in the Community (n=64)</li><li>- Demographics (n=72)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- COVID-19 Needs Assessment Focus Groups (n= 30)</li></ul>
SLYE — Network Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- N/A</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Network Partner Focus Group (n=10)</li></ul>

Each module consists of 10–20 questions.<sup>1</sup> All of the questions within the 3 modules used a 5-point scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree) to determine how much participants agreed or disagreed with the statements.

P2P Leaders and network partners also participated in focus groups. The focus groups provided a space for youth to reflect on their experiences and needs during COVID-19, share ideas for improving the program, and share the impact that participation has had on their lives. In total, 30 youth contributed to the two focus groups held in September and October 2020. The network partners also participated in a focus group to reflect on their experience in the partnership. The focus groups were facilitated by SCC staff and were recorded and transcribed to be analyzed for significant themes with counts of how many times each theme was mentioned. Significant quotes were drawn from the analysis to support the numbers with participants' thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences. Names or identifying information have been removed from the quotes and replaces with denotations such as "[name]" or a letter in place to insure anonymity.

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<sup>1</sup> Questions are grouped into statistically reliable sets. Reliability is a measure of internal consistency of a set of questions. In other words, each set of questions is good at measuring the related, but different aspects of what is being studied.

## Organization of the Report

This report will be broken down into five sections. The sections will be as follows:

- 1) Demographics:** This section will give an overview and breakdown of the various demographics who took part in the program evaluation. The information in this section will be displayed as an infographic to allow for a visual representation of the data.
- 2) Preparing to Lead module:** This section is a quantitative analysis of how youth answered the preparing to lead module with a graph to visually represent the data.
- 3) Resources in Community module:** This section is a quantitative analysis of how youth answered the resources in the community module and is graphed to provide a visual representation of the data.
- 4) Qualitative results — Youth:** The analysis of the focus group is organized based on the frequent themes that came out of the conversations.
- 5) Qualitative results — Network Partners:** The analysis of the focus group is organized based on the frequent themes that came out of the conversations.

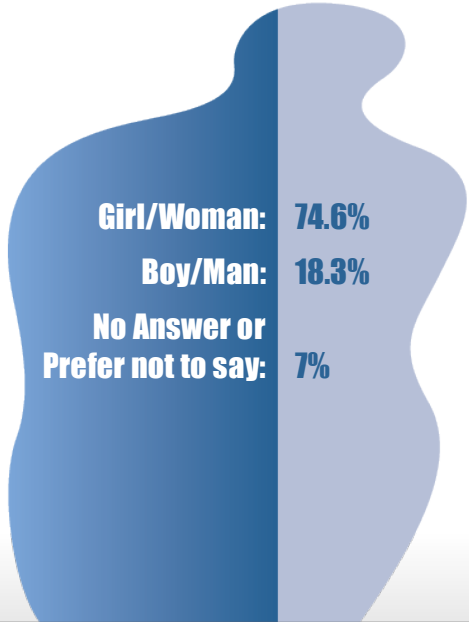
# Demographics

**15**

Average  
Age

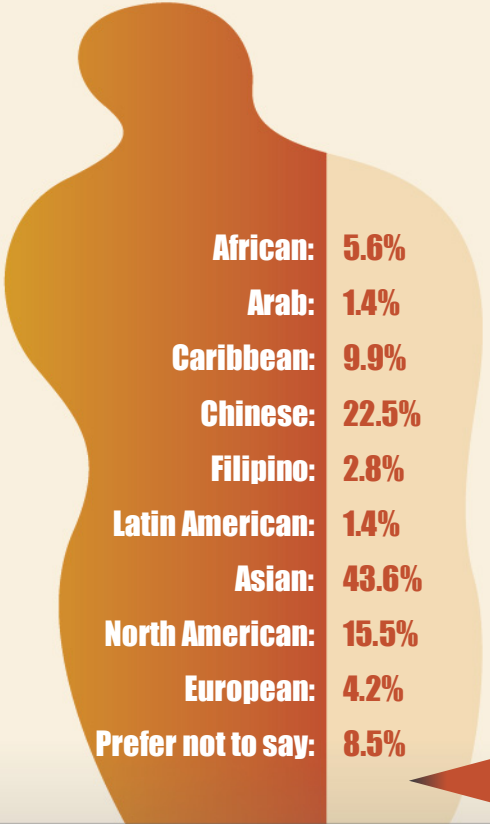
This section outlines the demographic breakdown of the youth who attended SLYE.

## Gender



**Girl/Woman: 74.6%**  
**Boy/Man: 18.3%**  
**No Answer or  
Prefer not to say: 7%**

## Cultural Backgrounds

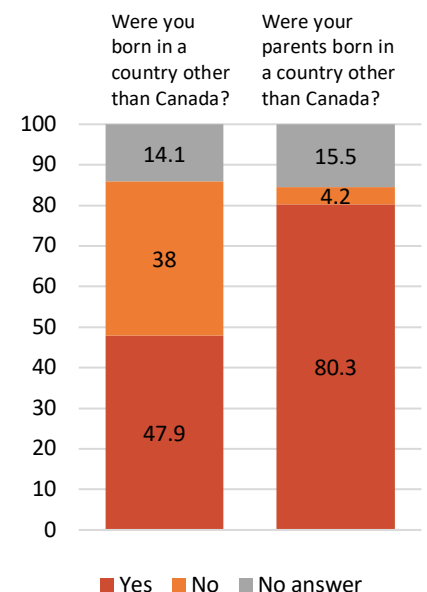


**African: 5.6%**  
**Arab: 1.4%**  
**Caribbean: 9.9%**  
**Chinese: 22.5%**  
**Filipino: 2.8%**  
**Latin American: 1.4%**  
**Asian: 43.6%**  
**North American: 15.5%**  
**European: 4.2%**  
**Prefer not to say: 8.5%**

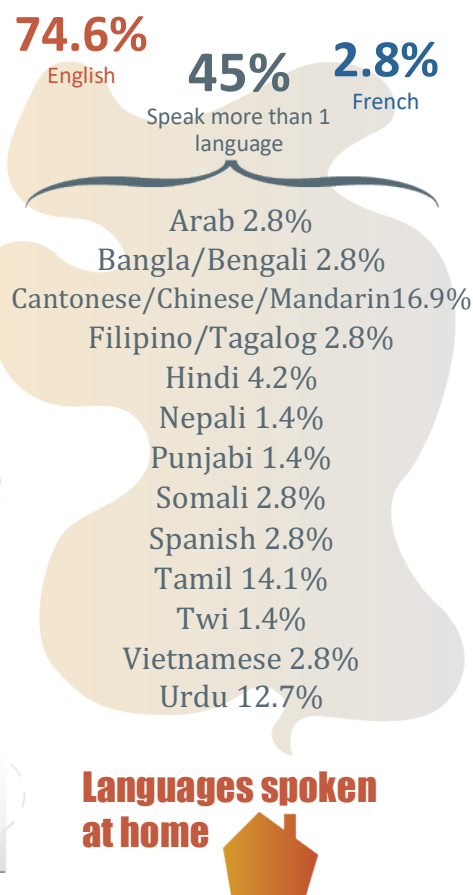
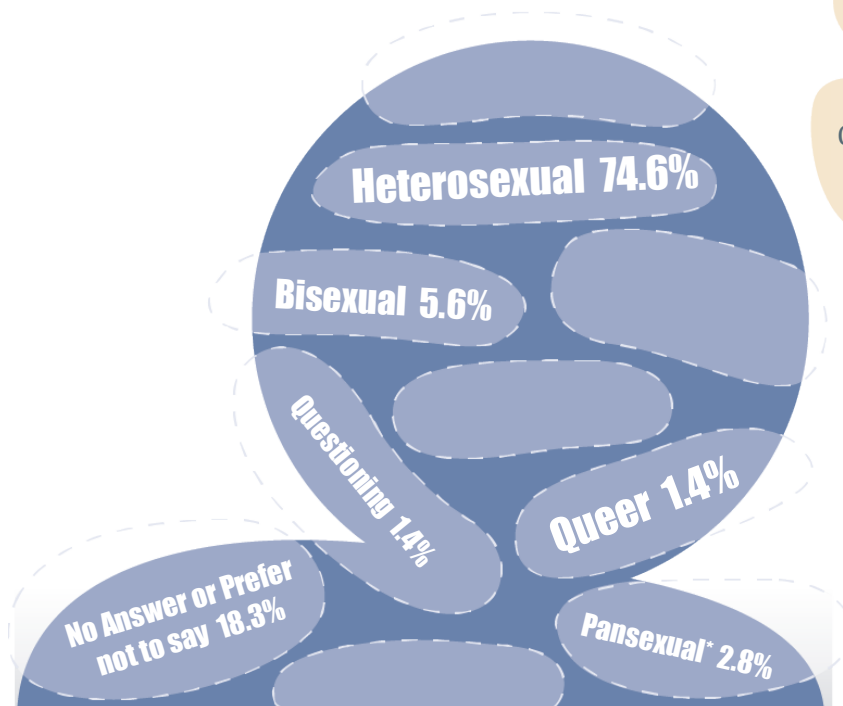
14.1% of the participants identified to more than one cultural background.

## Country of Origin

Participants were asked two questions to determine their country of origin.

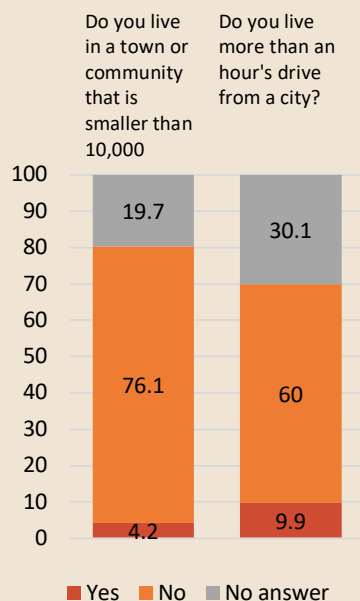


# Sexual Orientation



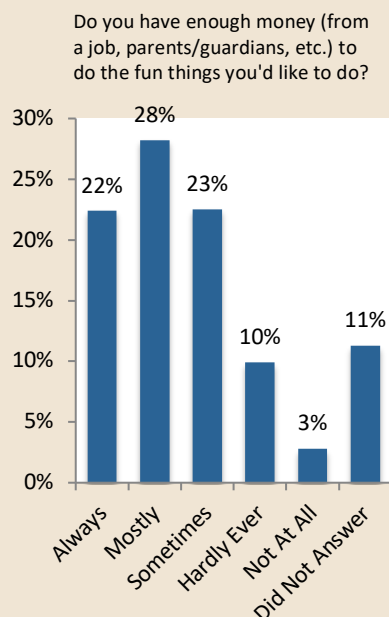
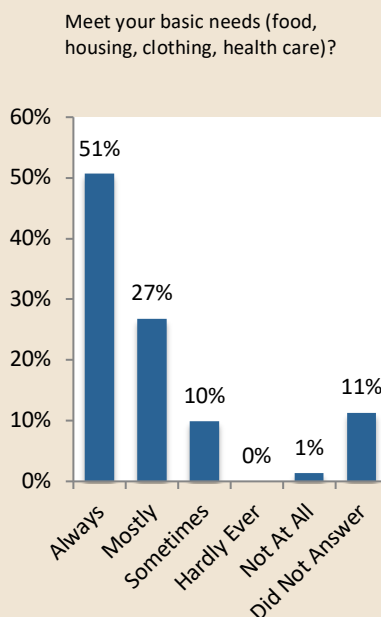
## Rural or Urban

Participants were asked two questions to determine whether they lived in rural or urban areas.



## Money for Basic Needs & Fun Activities

Finally, participants were asked the degree to which they had enough money to meet their basic needs and participate in fun things



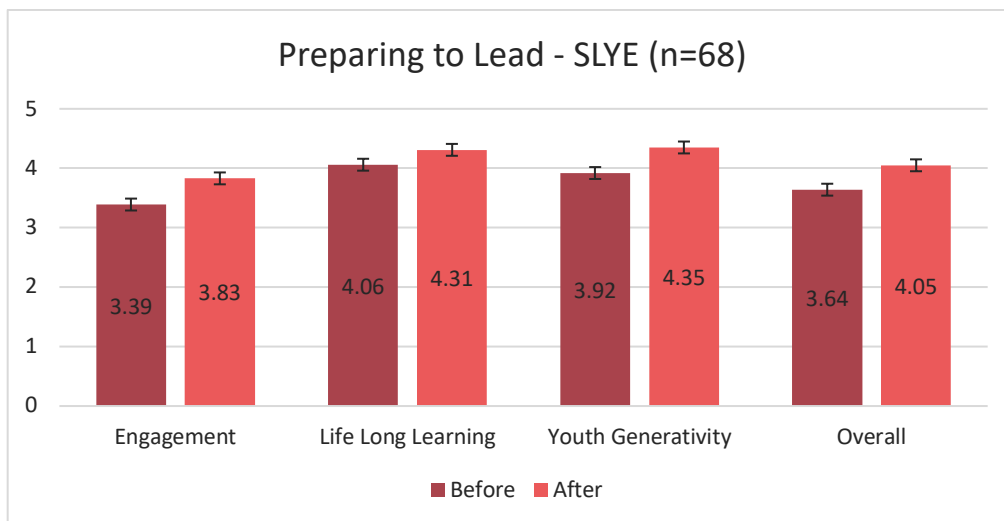
## Quantitative Results

### Preparing to Lead

The **Preparing to Lead** module focuses on youth leadership in terms of the following three components: **Engagement**, **Lifelong Learning**, and **Youth Generativity** (leaving a legacy for future generations). This questionnaire contains 25 items that youth are asked to respond to on a five-point scale: Not at all (1), A little bit (2), Moderately (3), A lot (4), and Completely (5).

This module was post-retrospective. This method allows to explore participants self-reported change during and/or after a program. Youth were invited to fill this module after their participation in the program. For each statement, they rated their agreement at the beginning of the program, and at the moment. (see Appendix A for the results on each question).

The following graph presents the overall average as well as the average of each component, which were statistically analyzed.



**Takeaway:** Overall, youth who participated in the Peer to Peer Leadership program from SLYE reported increasing leadership skills throughout the year. The results suggest that youth themselves felt like improving their leadership skills from the beginning of the program to the end. When statistically comparing the results, the t-tests<sup>2</sup> revealed significant increases on all three components as well as on the overall results. It seems like youth felt that SLYE offered an environment fostering learning experiences and allowing them to play an active role in decision-making.

These results were similar to what was observed in the programming year of 2019. Youth who participated in this program in 2019 also showed statistically significant increases on all the components and on the overall results. These similarities suggest consistency in the program and the valued conveyed by SLYE throughout the years.

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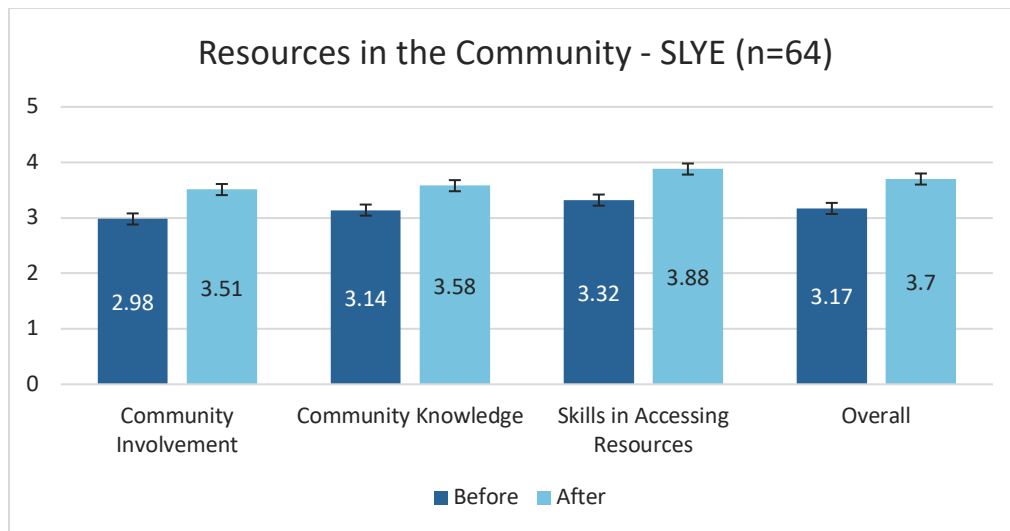
<sup>2</sup> A t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. The larger the t-score, the more difference between the two groups.

## Resources in the Community

The **Resources in the Community** module contains 11 items that youth may rate from “Not at all” (1) to “Completely” (5). These statements are divided into three components related to different aspects of resources: **Community Involvement** (is the individual taking part in the resources?), **Community Knowledge** (does the individual know about the resources or how to find them?), and **Skills for Assessing Resources** (one’s capacity to find and/or take part in the resources).

This module was post-retrospective. This method allows to explore participants self-reported change during and/or after a program. Youth were invited to fill this module after several months of participation in the program. For each statement, they rated their agreement at the beginning of the program, and at the moment. (see Appendix B for the results on each question).

The following graph presents the overall average as well as the average of each component, which were statistically analyzed.



**Takeaway:** Overall, youth who participated in the Peer to Peer Leadership program self-reported increasing ability to navigate the resources available in the community. It seems like youth felt more involved in their community towards the end of the program than they were at the beginning. They also felt like knowing more about their community resources and being able to navigate and access them more easily. When statistically comparing the results, the t-tests<sup>3</sup> revealed significant increases on all three components as well as on the overall results.

These results were similar to what was observed in the programming year of 2019. Youth who participated in this program in 2019 also showed statistically significant increases on all the components and on the overall results. SLYE seems to be a valuable asset in connecting youth with the various resources throughout the years.

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<sup>3</sup> A t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. The larger the t-score, the more difference between the two groups.

## Qualitative Results

### Youth: Needs Assessment Focus Group (COVID-19)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the quarantine that happened starting in the spring of 2020, SLYE transitioned their activities to virtual platforms. Youth were able to participate in online leadership trainings and coordinate virtual Roadshows. This tool aims to capture the impact of the pandemic had on the participants, their needs, and the way in which the program may have helped or will help support the participants. In total, 30 youth participated in this conversation during two online focus groups. These focus groups were qualitatively analyzed together, in order to find the emergent themes.

#### *What have you noticed about how you have been experiencing the pandemic and how have your relationships with friends, family and peers changed?*

##### *Family closeness*

In general, the young participants agreed that the pandemic and the lockdown allowed them to get closer to the other members of their family. Spending a lot of time together, slowing down their schedule, and eating meals as a family helped them to reconnect, to talk and to strengthen their bonds. Thus, it generally seemed to have a positive impact on the youth and their connection to their family. Nonetheless, one youth also mentioned that spending a lot of time in a small space with the same people has caused some challenges.

*“For me, during the pandemic my family has gotten a lot closer. We’ve been trying new recipes. We’ve been playing games during quarantine. It was pretty fun.”*

*“I spent a lot of time with my family, which was a good thing. Because before the pandemic we were all busy with our lives, we weren’t able to talk a lot to each other. But now that we’re home we can spend a lot of time together at home.”*

*“With my family on the other hand, I think I just like, grew closer to my family and my parents because we were able to just like, have meals together. Just like, spend time together. Just like spend time together. And like, do things that we like to do together. But sometimes, even within our family, we almost got like, irritated with each other because we were just like, sitting in a small apartment at the same time for a long period of time.”*

##### *Changes with social connections*

The impact of the pandemic on youth’s relationships with their friends was more complex and different from one individual to another. Some of them felt like they became more distant from friends (6), having less in-person contact. Although they communicated more online with their friends (7), some youth mentioned that the online space created some awkwardness and made it harder to communicate (3). However, others felt that they had more time to talk with their friends and were even able to reconnect with some older friends, outside of their daily social circle (2). Overall, it seems like friendships tended to shift with the pandemic, without disappearing completely.

*"I do agree with what like, the rest of the people said. Like, I am more distanced with my friends during the pandemic. But even though I am at school I still feel that there is still a bit of distance because we, of course, like, everyone in class is sitting separately and everyone is just really quiet."*

*"I only left to play soccer and basketball and, of course, when nobody was around. And I had realized that the relationship with my friends and family, I have spent a lot less time with my friends as we have not been able to hang out together."*

*"In the beginning I feel like a lot of my friends and I also like, try to keep in touch. But like, as the days went on like, we just like, tried to occupy ourselves with other things. So, like, we kind of lost connection in between. And some of my friends don't have like, phones or social media so, connecting with them was a lot harder than some friends who did have social media and phones."*

*"Ok. So, before the pandemic, right, I was just going to school and doing my stuff. I talked to my friends that were at the school and nothing else. But since we were home a lot I couldn't see my friends like, inside the school. I had to text them a lot more. And through texting I've been able to connect with a lot of my classmates from like, years ago that I never talk to before. For example, like, when I moved I didn't talk to my older friends and now I'm starting to talk to them more."*

### **Emotional**

Regarding the general impact of the pandemic, there were mentions of feeling isolated or lonely during the conversation. The fewer social contacts and the communication challenges certainly contributed to these feelings. Another youth mentioned they were sometimes afraid due to the virus, and some youth also mentioned getting bored.

*"I haven't seen the outside world a lot."*

*"Yeah so, um, just during the beginning of the pandemic, I guess like, I kind of felt a little bit lonely because I was kind of like, feeling like, forced to stay inside and I was kind of like, afraid to go outside because like, I was afraid of catching the virus."*

### **What activities are you participating in at this time and what activities would you be interested in participating?**

#### **Activities youth currently engage in**

Youth mentioned a variety of activities they did during the lockdown ranging from volunteering to personal hobbies. Volunteering was a very popular answer, as youth said that the lockdown gave them the time they needed to do their volunteering hours for school. Another popular answer was learning; youth said that they took this time to assist to workshops that interested them or research about college courses and opportunities. They enjoyed taking this time to learn about topics that matter to them. Finally, a majority of participants discussed the hobbies

they have been doing. These hobbies varied a lot from one person to another (e.g.: reading, streaming, cooking, exercising, etc.), and some youth even mentioned doing things that they had not done for a long time.

*"I've been participating in a lot of workshops. So, like, how to balance your life a bit more better, mental health, and all that."*

*"Some activities that I've been participating are like, some online workshops and I've also been volunteering."*

*"I've just been trying to like, search for like, a lot of like, online tutoring opportunities and stuff to gain volunteer hours. And then like, I've also like, attended like, a few summer camps and like, workshops on like, mindfulness, etcetera."*

*"During the pandemic I've also gotten into different hobbies that I would usually never see myself doing. As of right now I would list to continue trying new things."*

#### **Activities youth would be interested in**

Youth also discussed the activities they would like in the future, especially keeping in mind the virtual transition and the on-going pandemic. One of the frequent answers was to have online or remote jobs opportunities (6) to help them with their finances, since they feel that work opportunities for youth are difficult to find now. Youth also mentioned they would like more workshops or resources regarding mental health (3). On the other hand, youth wished for more fun activities (6), informal and focused on entertainment such as game nights, or clubs. Finally, some participants mentioned that they wish to have more interactions with other youth (2).

*"I think something that would be more fun for youth would also be like, virtual things like, game nights. There are like, game nights that you can do virtually. I just feel like, it's entertaining. And for people that are not interested in learning about topics that are educational, it's something fun that they can do to feel less lonely."*

*"Some activities that I've been interested in participating in are like, maybe like, some youth groups where a group of youth can like, get together and just like, talk about, you know, their day or like, how they're coping with the pandemic."*

*"I think just I throughout the pandemic I've had this like, lack of motivation to do like, self-care or like, exercise because I feel like, you know what, let me just sit on the couch and like, watch tv or something. So, I think like, some of those activities regarding like, self-care, or maybe like, working out or like, exercise."*

***What resources do you need during this time to feel supported? Do you have any barriers in accessing the supports that you might need?***

***Resources youth need***

Youth mentioned a variety of resources they would like to access. The most frequent answer was to have school support such as tutoring and homework aid, since many youth found online school challenging. Some of them also expressed a desire for greater access to technology such as computers, jobs or financial aid, and social and mental support.

*“I think since we’re doing online learning like, we appreciate more educational resources like tutoring and we’d benefit from that a lot. Because it might be difficult to learn new materials at home.”*

*“Well, for me, I think technology and finance can be a bit of an issue because finding jobs can be hard now. And a lot of people lack the like, technology. Like, some people don’t have mics and stuff.”*

*“I think if we had access to like, more remote jobs for like, youth ... a lot of us want to work... so then like, for everything to close down for us to get out of the habit, for me personally, it just sucks. I think if we had more things that like, you know, we had more opportunities, it would really help. Especially for our incomes too and to help us for things that we need to buy.”*

***Barriers to accessing resources***

Youth explained that some of their schools provided technology, such as lending computers and tablets, but there were long delays and a high demand for this aid, making it harder to access this resource. Furthermore, teachers seemed to be really busy, to get so many emails that they could not provide the help to students they usually did in school.

*“Before the pandemic if I had any questions related to my school work I would be able to talk to my teacher directly. But talking to my teacher during this pandemic has been very difficult and they have had to answer a lot of emails from other people as well. So, they haven’t been readily available as from before.”*

***How do you think the SLYE program has made an impact for you and your peers?***

***Volunteer experience (14)***

There were many ways in which SLYE had an impact on youth, but the most popular one was certainly the ability to gain volunteering experience. Youth were thankful to have the chance to get their volunteering hours and even more. They highly appreciated the experience and valuable learning opportunity.

*“During the pandemic I had an online graduation so, I thought I was not gonna get any volunteer hours. And my goal was to get like, most of my volunteer hours before grade nine. At least some of them. And I thought because of COVID-19 there’s not gonna be any volunteer opportunities but then I came across SLYE and it helped me so much!”*

### **New learnings (12)**

They also discussed how their participation in the SLYE program gave them an opportunity to learn about various topics. Either from the workshops or from managing the roadshows, youth certainly learned a lot.

*"I learned a lot of things for different like, um, categories like mental health, life balance, and all of those different types of topics, um also about Black Lives Matter. And they also gave me an opportunity to host a workshop, which was really cool for me because during the pandemic I always, I imagined the being no opportunities but they provided a lot during the pandemic. And it kinda made the pandemic from boring to fun for me."*

*"My team members are really nice and we got our message across and um, we attended other Roadshows as well which was really educational. And then we also attended those like, the economy workshops and then the um, leadership trainings and they were all very educational."*

*"Recently, SLYE has done more educational events, which is very helpful. My favorite event was the Better Me event. More relaxing and fun events where we don't do any work but work on ourselves as people, I would enjoy it."*

### **Developed new skills (10)**

Their participation in the program also allowed youth to develop a variety of skills such as leadership, communication, organization and teamwork.

*"Also helped a lot with the skills, like better able to communicate, you know, through online platforms and presenting. Just boosting my confidence."*

*"It was about June when I started participating in their leadership programs and they really helped me so I also shared it with my friends and they were able to join for the following sessions. And then I was also able to participate in the Roadshow which was a unique experience. And I just really liked working with someone else and being able to like, present something because I had nothing to do for months."*

### **Connected to other people and the community (9)**

Youth also discussed the fact that the activities they did with SLYE gave them an opportunity to meet new people, to connect to other youth and to feel closer to their community, which felt good, especially considering the pandemic.

*"So, participating in SLYE activities has been really fun because it gave me the opportunity to like connect with other youth and learn a bit more about not only myself, but the world around me, despite being at home. Um, I've also like, learned um, how like, the importance of community, especially in this time. Because we got to connect with others and we're able to understand-- we don't really realize when we're missing on something until we miss out on it. So, um, by participating in SLYE I've learned to like, really appreciate different memories and make new memories in spite of all that's going on."*

### **Had fun (5)**

P2P Leaders mentioned they had a lot of fun throughout their participation in the program. Youth agreed that the program had a huge impact and contributed to make them feel better in these unprecedented times.

*“I think the SLYE program has helped me a lot, for example, I was home alone a lot and I was really bored and there weren’t really any online events. And I think SLYE was the first place where I found online events to participate in and cure the boredom of my time.”*

### **Recommendations**

Overall, participants seemed really satisfied with the program and appreciated the experience they had. Only two small recommendations came out of the focus groups. First, a participant mentioned that they felt less included in the conversations happening online and wish the same type of dynamic would happen online than it did when the meetings were in-person. Finally, another youth mentioned that they appreciated the online version since it was easier to attend in terms of transportation and schedule. Therefore, they wish that SLYE will keep the two options available in post-COVID time.

*“For me I found like, the online approach, it was mostly the host talking. It’s not much of a two-way interaction between the host and the attendees like the at school events.”*

*“Before the pandemic SLYE, I’m pretty sure they used to do the Roadshow and other events in person. And then they started going online. I think after the pandemic if they can have like, a mix of both online and physical events, right. And they can like, vastly increase they’re range of participants that they can get for their events.”*

## Network Partner: Focus Group

The Network Partner Focus Group was conducted for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the effectiveness of the SLYE Network, and how the SLYE Network partner organizations have been affected by the pandemic. Ten (10) network partners (youth service providers) were invited to give their feedback on the successes and the barriers they experienced this year. The data has been broken into two sections:

1. **Organizational Impact:** The individual successes and barriers that partners (service providers from various local youth-serving organizations) experienced this year.
2. **Partnership Impact:** The effectiveness of the SLYE Network, a partnership among local youth service providers, this year.

### Organizational Impact

#### Increased stress and burnout (9)

The focus group's participants discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on an organizational level. Among the topics discussed, participants mentioned "Zoom burnout" or the tiredness resulting from spending extended hours online and in virtual meetings. They also discussed how the whole situation created a lot of stress for them, their employees, their volunteers, and their youth, making it harder to navigate a work-health balance. Although some of them liked the fact they were able to work from home and did not have to spend time for commute, most of them find working remotely challenging.

*"I find really difficult. Just stress. So, like, your coworkers are stressed. Your managers are stressed. Your community partners are stressed. Your volunteers are stressed. So, it's hard to know what is and isn't ok. What's fair and ok to ask of everyone. And then also trusting that other people are maintaining their own boundaries to keep themselves um, in a position where they feel good. So, it's hard to sort of -- it's an extra level of navigating that I think."*

#### Decreased participation and engagement (8)

The online aspect and the impossibility to meet in-person also impacted outreach and participation. It seemed to be more challenging to create relationships with the youth virtually, and it also made it harder to find volunteers.

*"A lot of youth are hesitant to want to speak with me because that in-person, um, that first introduction has been taken away, so it's just been really challenging to even do that initial outreach."*

#### Decreased funding (5)

Many challenges arose during the pandemic; some were new, others were latent, and the pandemic just exacerbated them. Among the "new" challenges, participants discussed that a lot of them lost the funding for their programs, or at least a part of their funding. Although new funding streams were created in response to the pandemic, the pool of organizations reaching for this type of funding was so large that it became hard to access it. This also highlights the pre-

existing flaws of the current funding system in place, which generally offers short-term funding opportunities for long-term problems.

*"I would also say funding. Although there's been a lot of opportunity for new initiatives to take place online, it's challenging because everybody is looking in the same pool of funding."*

*"I think there's just been a very temporary thinking about this pandemic. What this pandemic has demonstrated, is that there are long term problems. Problems that existed before this pandemic that are existing currently in this pandemic. So, this short-term funding structure was never going to be the solution."*

#### **Increased barriers (4)**

During the pandemic, many organizations had to adapt quickly, which resulted in some success and challenges. For some partners, the pandemic strengthened their relationships with colleagues. On the other hand, in some cases, it got harder for partners to contact other organizations as most organizations were focusing on adapting their own program and schedules. Furthermore, the targets and deliverables imposed on the organizations stayed the same despite the pandemic, which discouraged some of the partners as it was much harder to reach out their participants. Finally, other systems were also affected by the pandemic, which in turn affected the programs. For example, the police background checks were stopped during the pandemic, making it harder for programs to get new staff members or volunteers.

*"The targets have remained the same for the program, so that's kind of concerning. We'll see. We're halfway through the fiscal and, you know, nowhere near where we were last year in terms of meeting our targets."*

*"One thing we struggled with was with our mentors, we needed to do screenings and police checks with them and that was difficult for them to obtain online. I believe Toronto Police Services weren't providing vulnerable sector screenings at the time. So, there was liability issues and we were able to make matches which impacted our numbers unfortunately."*

#### **Reaching new youth (4)**

The main success discussed by the partners was that transitioning their programming and services online helped them reach new audiences. Virtual components to programming is something that some organizations will keep moving forward in order to continue engaging youth that they do not usually reach.

*"The one thing that I do want to say is I would definitely like to still continue our virtual presence online in the future. We have been experiencing a little bit of fatigue with some our online stuff that we've been doing at [organization name]. Um, but I can also see how it's reaching a whole new audience. Um, so, I do hope it's something that we can take into the future. Not completely leave it behind. Maybe scale it back a little bit and supplement it with some in person initiative."*

*“So, just like, the different accommodations for youth. I think these new initiatives have been helpful. I've heard some of our youth say that, like, ‘I appreciate being able to like, join [program name] and maybe not go in person’. So, um, yeah, it's capturing new clientele and providing like, alternative accommodations for youth that weren't there before.”*

## **Partnership Impact**

### **Supporting with outreach (11)**

Network partners were invited to share what they believed generally worked well with the SLYE partnership during this period. Participants mentioned a few things that have helped their programs such as monthly newsletters and outreach activities. Many of the partners agreed the virtual Roadshows organized by SLYE were a great success and created much needed outreach opportunities and visibility for the local organizations.

*“I really liked the online Roadshows. It was a really easy way to get us into the schools. Hopefully the schools will allow us to do those again at some point because I think it's just a very unique outreach opportunity. In the wake of us being cut off from that major point of access, having this online outreach opportunity was very necessary. So, shout out to SLYE for that.”*

*“I was genuinely worried that during this time I wouldn't be able to connect with people and outreach and numbers would dip but thanks to the efforts of SLYE I've been able to connect with people and still develop partnerships within the community. So, I'm really looking forward to more Roadshows, and more email blasts.”*

### **Supporting with communication (4)**

As mentioned earlier, a challenge during this time has been the lack of communication between partners. Although many organizations became creative in finding virtual activities they could do, the youth service providers are finding there is a lot of repetition from one program to another. Some partners mentioned they would like to have more opportunities to share ideas and exchange knowledge (e.g. sharing data collected). Many partners agreed that the SLYE Network meetings have been helpful in increasing communication between partners and circulating community resources and information.

*“I'm finding a lot that we're repeating a lot of activities and programs. Um, and something that I wish had happened more is that we had all had conversations about, you know, what areas we saw gaps in... so that there would be an understanding that ok, so this group is going to be handling this gap. And so that way it's more spread out so that youth aren't seeing five different mental health workshops. ... Um, also, with surveys, I know just about every organization's probably doing like, some type of survey. Are we sharing that data? I'm not seeing that. I'm hoping we can find ways as a network to share that knowledge.”*

*“Making sure that we're collaborating and that we're actually talking to one another about what's happening in our respective communities or our ends of the communities, maybe in smaller groups, and then maybe having*

*larger meetings with everybody to share what's going on. Maybe small breakout rooms might be useful."*

*"I agree with what everybody has said in terms of the network being extremely helpful. [Name] is doing an amazing job in terms of picking when to have our meetings, and allowing all partners to connect, communicate, and get our program and services circulated."*

## Discussion: Making meaning of the findings

In the Preparing to Lead module, youth reported good levels of leadership skills, and actually felt an improvement in those skills throughout the year. Youth reported feeling more engaged, wanting to learn more, and wanting to leave a legacy to future generation even more at the end. Interestingly, this year's results were similar to last year's results even with the shift from in-person to virtual programming. Youth who participated in the program in 2019 reported a similar increase in their leadership skills to youth who participated in 2020.

In the Resources in Community module, youth reported knowing their community well and knowing how to access the resources that are available to them. They also reported a significant increase in these skills to access and navigate the resources of their community. Again, these results from 2020 were similar to the previous year's results.

This consistency suggests that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the SLYE Network was able to foster a space allowing youth to learn and to develop their skills. These results give evidence that SLYE was able to successfully transition their activities in the virtual world, without comprising the effectiveness and integrity of the program.

According to what youth mentioned during the focus groups, they also appreciated the effort made by SLYE to transition and keep the program running. Participating in SLYE constituted a valuable opportunity for youth to gain volunteering experience and to do their volunteering hours for school. They appreciated learning about various topics, connecting to other youth and their community, and developing many of their skills. Youth provided some suggestions for future activities and workshops, as well as mentioned that they would like some informal youth meetings, focused on entertainment such as game nights or clubs. The SLYE network partners might be interested in implementing some of these suggestions.

Regarding the Network Partners focus group, partners faced various challenges during the pandemic, on an organizational level. The partners had some outreach difficulties, they lost permits and funding, and they had to navigate through the personal reactions to the pandemic and lock down. Nonetheless, a lot of good came out of the pandemic as programs were able to adapt and transition their activities online. All the partners seemed to highly appreciate the SLYE partnership and the Roadshows as it gave visibility for the various community programs, and helped maintain youth participation and engagement with essential services.

## Conclusion

The P2P Leadership program provides volunteer leadership opportunities to P2P Youth Leaders comprised of youth (ages 14-18) who are furthest away from opportunity in Toronto. The SLYE Network supports P2P Leaders to build essential leadership qualities and then the youth put their skills into practice by organizing and implementing school outreach events (the Roadshow) that helps their peers connect to essential community resources. With the COVID-19 pandemic, SLYE had to transition their activities virtually. Hence, the purpose of this report is to gain a greater understanding of how youth are engaged SLYE's Peer to Peer (P2P) Leadership program, as well as to understand the impact of this pandemic on the young participants.

All of the results presented in this report suggest that SLYE successfully navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and transition their activities online. The impact the program had on youth's leadership and abilities to navigate community resources were highly similar to the previous years' results. This was also evident through the youth focus group results. Finally, the network partners also seemed to appreciate SLYE's support through this pandemic.

Youth voice gathered in this report can help to better understand the reality of youth that SLYE serves, the impact of such a program, and can help to develop and improve similar programs that are beneficial for youth.

Additional opportunities for youth to share their stories of the program will offer a deeper examination of the individual, social, and system level changes that may be occurring as a result of the program and the process. Our recommendation is to discuss the present results with youth in the community to see if this data portrays what they are experiencing.

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## Appendix

### A – Preparing to Lead

Prepared to Lead Module – Results per questions		
Statement	Before	After
1. I am asked for input about what activities I would Like to do before activities are planned.	3.23	3.48
2. Adults do not make negative assumptions about me.	3.24	3.39*
3. Adults talk to me in ways that I can understand and am comfortable with.	3.74	3.80*
4. I am encouraged to discuss things and ask questions to others.	3.45	3.86
5. I am encouraged and supported to solve problems in new ways.	3.67	4.05
6. I am learning new skills.	3.54	4.15
7. I feel like adults and peers are learning from me.	3.05	3.52
8. I participate in the decisions about group activities.	3.38	3.97
9. I participate in setting group rules and guidelines.	3.24	3.76
10. If youth want to do an activity that for some reason isn't appropriate, we are told right away and given an explanation of the reasons why.	3.34	3.84
11. I have opportunities to learn on my own (e.g. adults start a discussion with me about issues so that I can figure it out on my own rather than telling me what to do).	3.38	3.85
12. I make sure that all group members have a say in laying out our purposes, expectations, motivations and roles.	3.74	4.18
13. I am involved in discussing issues of respects, conflict, or discipline.	3.44	3.82
14. Adults support me without being condescending or assuming that I need or want their help.	3.45	3.79
15. I expect to go on learning for a long time.	4.03	4.33
16. I like to be able to improve the way I do things.	4.21	4.50
17. I'm continually improving as a learner.	4.12	4.45
18. I don't like to accept an answer until I have worked it out for myself.	3.62	3.85
19. I like to question the things I am learning.	3.66	3.97
20. I like to learn about things that really matter to me.	4.36	4.53
21. I like it when I can make connections between new things I am learning and things I already know.	4.20	4.38
22. I like learning new things when I can see how they make sense for my life.	4.24	4.45
23. I have knowledge and skills that I will pass on to others.	3.80	4.29
24. I think about ways to help others become leaders.	3.77	4.26
25. I feel it is important to help people younger than myself.	4.15	4.51

\*These results were NOT statistically significantly different.

## B – Resources in the Community

Prepared to Lead Module - Results per questions		
Statement	Before	After
1. You know where to volunteer in your community.	2.78	3.25
2. I know where to get information about programs in my community.	2.67	2.98
3. There are organizations in my community that I can go to for help.	3.31	3.97
4. I often give others advice about where and how to connect with organizations in the community.	3.44	3.73
5. I know someone who would help me find and access resources and opportunities in my community.	3.18	3.65
6. You are a person who tells others about your community	3.24	3.79
7. I feel comfortable communicating with other individuals in my community.	3.40	4.06
8. I feel comfortable communication with other organizations in my community.	3.15	3.66
9. I can easily find and access the community support or service I need (such as education, health services, housing support, counseling)	3.34	3.85
10. I can easily find opportunities that interest me in my community.	3.15	3.79
11. If I'm interested in joining a community program (e.g. volunteer, activity, sports, religious, etc.), I know how to do so.	3.51	4.02