More Than Just Hanging Out After School: Afterschool Programs and Youths’ Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion

by

Sarah Ann Christie

A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science
in
Capacity Development and Extension

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Sarah Christie, April, 2012
ABSTRACT

More than just hanging out after school:
Afterschool programs and youths’ feelings of inclusion and exclusion

Sarah Ann Christie
University of Guelph, 2012

This thesis explores the impacts of afterschool programs on youths’ feelings of inclusion and exclusion in small communities. A case study of the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in Ingersoll, Ontario was conducted to learn from youth about their experiences growing up, about the challenges they faced and the benefits they gained from participating in Fusion’s programs. This project focused on the youths’ perspectives, and employed various task-centered activities such as visualization and narrative techniques to engage youth and gather data. It also highlighted different tensions between youth and the community and how youth navigate these tensions while growing up. The study found that the space, staff and programs offered by the Fusion Youth Centre do change youths’ feelings of inclusion and exclusion in Ingersoll. However, there remains work to be done to change the systems of exclusions that make youth feel disconnected from their community.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who contributed to the completion of this project that I would like to thank. I can’t acknowledge everyone individually but I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who played a role in this project or who supported me throughout my graduate studies. Having you on my side made all the difference and I could not have done this without your support and encouragement.

First and foremost, to all of the youth at Fusion who participated in this project, who shared their stories, thoughts, ideas and perspectives, a huge thank you. Without you, this project would not have been possible. I’m sorry that I can’t acknowledge all of you by name but I want you to know that the highlight of this project was working with you; you inspired me and made me laugh every time I visited. Thank you for making this research project such a positive experience for me and I wish you all the best in your respective futures.

Second, a big thank you to Jason Smith, the Manager of Fusion. Thank you for allowing me into Fusion to do this research project. I had a wonderful experience working both with youth and staff and your ongoing support for this project is greatly appreciated.

Bailey, I owe you a huge debt for dealing with all my emails and for making sure that my research went ahead smoothly and on schedule. I really appreciate all the time and energy you invested in my project.
To the staff at Fusion, I wish I could list you all by name, thank you all so much for your support throughout the research process. You were all so generous with your time and your insights. You contributed a lot to the project and I am very grateful.

A warm thank you also to my committee: Al Lauzon and Nate Perkins. Thank you both for keeping me grounded and not letting me rush through the process. I had a wonderful time working with both of you.

Al, your guidance and support were critical to the success of this project. You really helped me through the process, helping me organize my often disorganized thoughts and ideas and develop a final product that I am truly proud of. Thank you for stepping back when I needed time to work through ideas and for stepping up to give me a push when I needed to get things moving.

Nate, you always made me laugh and maintain perspective on this project. And while they sometimes took me a few days to figure out, your comments were always worthwhile and I really appreciate your contributions to my project.

Kristen, thank you for being my research assistant. You made the research fun and it was a pleasure to be able to work with you. Thank you for your ideas and feedback on my methods and your input and assistance during all the workshops.

To my fellow students, thank you for your continued support. It was great to be able to talk to you all about my project and to learn more about your research as we went. I feel very privileged to have been able to take this journey with all of you.
Finally, to my family and friends, a big thank you for all your support and encouragement.

You have been with me every step of the way and I would not have been able to do this without you. Thank you for always listening to my stories, allowing me to vent and cheering me on.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................................................................... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................................ viii

TABLE OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................ viii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................ 1
  BACKGROUND .................................................................................................................................................... 1
  STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM ................................................................................................... 5
  RESEARCH GOAL .............................................................................................................................................. 5
  RESEARCH OBJECTIVES ................................................................................................................................. 5
  SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY .............................................................................................................................. 6
  METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION ............................................................................................................ 7
  THE CASE STUDY ........................................................................................................................................... 10
  LIMITATIONS .................................................................................................................................................. 11
  ASSUMPTIONS ................................................................................................................................................ 14

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................... 16
  INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................................. 16
  CONSTRUCTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUTH ............................................................................... 17
  INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 21
  POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ......................................................................................................... 26
  AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS ....................................................................................................................... 33
  CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .................................................................................................................... 41
  SUMMARY ......................................................................................................................................................... 43

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGIES ....................................................................................................... 44
  PHENOMENOLOGY ....................................................................................................................................... 45
  THE CASE STUDY ........................................................................................................................................... 46
  RESEARCHING YOUTH ................................................................................................................................ 50
  RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES .................................................................................................................. 54
  DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................................. 68
  SUMMARY ......................................................................................................................................................... 69
# TABLE OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Afterschool Program Developmental Hub</td>
<td>p4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>p42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Visual Mapping Exercise</td>
<td>p56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>VIPP in action</td>
<td>p60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Drawing Activity</td>
<td>p67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 1</td>
<td>p86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 2</td>
<td>p97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 3</td>
<td>p98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 4</td>
<td>p100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 5</td>
<td>p102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 6</td>
<td>p103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Most Significant Change Story 7</td>
<td>p106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

It's hard being a teenager, just ask anyone. Everyone expects you to be more than a kid but at the same time they refuse to treat you as an adult. Not to mention, finding just the right balance between appropriately rebellious and independent while still fitting in can be exhausting! It's no wonder people have a hard time understanding youth, how can they when youth are still in the process of figuring it out themselves? Add to this challenge of growing up in a small town and you introduce a whole new set of challenges that youth must navigate in order to find themselves, define themselves and grow up into happy, productive adults.

The Town of Ingersoll is located in South Western Ontario, 161 kilometers west of Toronto. The population of Ingersoll is approximately 12,500 and the main economic activities include sales and services, trades, transport and equipment operators and occupations related to manufacturing, processing and utilities (Town of Ingersoll, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2006). Of the 12,500 people currently living in Ingersoll, approximately 815 are between the ages of 15 and 19 (Statistics Canada, 2006). For these youth, there are three elementary schools, one high school and one private school. Some youth also attend high school in nearby towns such as Woodstock (Town of Ingersoll, 2008). Of the total population of Ingersoll (12,589), 2,880 have a high school certificate or equivalent. 1,970 have a college or other non-university certificate and 780 have a university certificate, diploma or degree (Statistics Canada, 2006).
The Town of Ingersoll has one ice rink, one community theatre, four baseball diamonds, one indoor swimming pool, two tennis courts, a curling rink, a creative arts centre, a lawn bowling facility, six community parks and one golf course (Town of Ingersoll, 2008). While there is no public transit system, the Town of Ingersoll is small enough that most facilities are within a reasonable walking distance if the weather is fair (Town of Ingersoll, 2008). Programs such as minor hockey, baseball, soccer and figure skating are also available to residents (Town of Ingersoll, 2008).

Today, small communities similar to Ingersoll face many levels of change and transition due to factors such as: expanding urban areas, changing economic and changing communities (Bryant & Joseph, 2001; Jones, 1999). Youth who remain in rural communities, by choice or because they are not yet old enough to leave, face varied and unique challenges to their development due to several factors including (Jones 1999; Looker & Naylor, 2009):

- Lack of resources in rural communities (for example public transportation and other services or facilities);
- Distance from urban centres;
- Sense of exclusion (for example youth may feel disconnected from their communities; they may feel the lack of services and opportunities as a form of exclusion; they may feel excluded when they engage in activities considered to be socially inappropriate);
• Lack of appropriate role models (those who wish to leave may find that potential role models have already left the town and that they don’t necessarily connect with those who have decided to stay);
• Community and family expectations (for example the expectation to take over the family business, to start a family young, to conform to traditional gender roles); and
• Lack of varied opportunities (personal, academic and professional).

Of course, these factors do not all apply to the same degree to all youth. Some young people growing up in rural communities may feel perfectly content with the lives they build themselves; some may experience certain challenges more intensely than others, and still others may experience these and additional challenges. However a growing trend in rural communities is for young people to experience a disconnect between themselves, their ambitions and their communities leading them to leave to seek out new opportunities elsewhere, usually in larger urban cities (Looker & Naylor, 2009).

Youth and after-school programs\(^1\) play an important role in helping youth to navigate these challenges and to develop skills and capacities that they will need in their adult lives, while giving them safe spaces to learn and adult role models to look up to and emulate (Larson & Angus, 2011; Halpern, 1999; Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005; Halpern, Barker & Mollard, 2000). These programs also act as spaces for youth to begin, or continue, writing their own definitions of what it is to be young and a youth, what it means to them, and how it affects their lives.

---
\(^1\) Hereafter referred to as only “afterschool programs”. 
Youth participate in after-school programs for many reasons (Dawes & Larson, 2011). This study explores after-school programs as hubs around which youth development and capacity building occurs through the various activities offered by the programs, the interpersonal relationships formed in these youth centres and the assets youth develop through their participation in the programs.

**Figure 1: The Afterschool Program Developmental Hub**

![Diagram of the Afterschool Program Developmental Hub](Image)

(Adapted from Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner & Lerner, 2010)

Afterschool programs lend themselves to youth development and capacity building in four critical ways. First, they provide a physical space where youth feel safe and secure. Second, relationships are developed in afterschool programs with peers and with staff through
which youth feel supported and included. Third, afterschool programs offer programs and activities that help youth build skills in various areas such as culinary arts, music, art and computers. And finally, through the space, the relationships and the programs, afterschool programs help youth to develop emotionally, changing youths’ attitudes and outlooks and helping them gain confidence in themselves and in their communities.

**STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Youth in small communities face unique challenges, including feelings of social exclusion. After-school programs play an important role in helping youth access the tools and support they need to navigate this period of transition in a positive and constructive manner. However the relationship between youth and afterschool programs requires further research in order to better understand what impact they have on youth development and capacity building.

**RESEARCH GOAL**

To better understand, from a youth perspective, the impacts of an afterschool program in the lives of rural youth and how evolving feelings of inclusion and exclusion lead to positive youth development and increased youth capacity.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This study identified four main objectives to be explored from the youth perspective:

1. Describe the youth experience in Ingersoll by interviewing youth about their experiences growing up.
2. Understand how Fusion programs contribute to youth development by talking to youth about their participation in these programs and what they have learned.

3. Understand how Fusion changes youths’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion by engaging youth in storytelling exercises about their experiences at Fusion.

4. Understand the relationships formed at Fusion and why they are important to youth development by speaking to youth about the meaning of these relationships in their lives.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This study will contribute to existing literature on youth development and youth programs and seeks to call attention to key aspects of the relationship between youth and the programs developed to meet their needs. Understanding this process and relationship is important to building a greater understanding of the impacts of after-school programs on feelings of social inclusion and exclusion in rural youth. This study also seeks to contribute to decision and policy-making processes around youth and youth development at the Municipal level in Ingersoll, Ontario.

This study will also approach the subject from the point-of-view of the youth participants and contribute to the literature a more solid grasp of the impacts of after-school programs as perceived by the youth who use them.
METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In this study, the general areas of research were determined in advance by the researcher based on relevant literature and consultation with the research supervisor and the manager of the Fusion Youth Centre. However, these areas were further narrowed and refined by the youth in a reflective process during preliminary group workshops. In the workshops, the researcher posed four questions to the youth and carefully observed their discussions and responses to these questions. Based on the data collected during the workshops, interview questions were formulated to reflect the areas that were of most interest to the youth participants and the topics to which they assigned a higher level of importance.

The study also used a phenomenological approach to explore how life is experienced, transformed into consciousness and shared with others (Patton, 2002; Denscombe, 2007). This approach emphasizes (Denscombe, 2007: 75):

- Subjectivity (rather than objectivity);
- Description (more than analysis);
- Interpretation (rather than measurement); and
- Agency (rather than structure).

Instead of seeking objective truths, phenomenology focuses on learning about people’s perceptions and meanings, attitudes and beliefs and feelings and emotions (Denscombe, 2007). Methodologies that seek in-depth information, such as in-depth interviews, about the subject’s experiences are favoured in the phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002).
When researching youth, the research must always be aware of power dynamics between the researcher and the research subject (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Efforts must be made to ensure that youth are active participants in the research process and that they feel comfortable with both the researcher and the methods used throughout the study (Hood, Kelley & Mayall, 1996; Marrow & Richards, 1996).

This project used multiple research methods to offer youth different opportunities to consider and respond to the questions posed (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Group settings were used, allowing participants to bounce ideas off one another and discuss amongst themselves rather than only one-on-one with the researcher; combining group interviews with individual interviews was also effective (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). All data collection was conducted at the Fusion Youth Centre to ensure that all participants were comfortable in the space (Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

This study used the following three methods for data collection: group workshops, individual interviews and validation focus groups.

**Group Workshops**

Two participatory workshops were held with youth aged fourteen to eighteen from the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre to collect data on the impacts of after-school programs; the workshops included seven and ten participants (a total of seventeen youth participated in the workshops). Pizza and snacks were provided at each workshop as an incentive to encourage youth to participate and to stay for the whole workshop. Task-centered engagement techniques were emphasized in the workshops to ensure that youth
participants were as engaged as possible. Four questions were posed during the workshops:

1. Why do youth come to Fusion?
2. What do youth bring to Fusion?
3. How do youth benefit from coming to Fusion?
4. How does Fusion affect the lives of youth outside of the Centre?

The workshops also captured moments of most significant change. The most significant change technique is often used in participatory monitoring and evaluation and is a technique used to collect significant change stories at the field level in order to gain an understanding of the impact of a project (Dart & Davies, 2005). These stories are then sorted into themes and categories and the most relevant and meaningful stories are identified (Dart & Davies, 2005).

In this exercise, participants were introduced to the exercise and asked the question:

“Looking back on your time at Fusion, tell me about a time that something significant happened to you or someone you know."

Participants were provided with several options for telling their stories including typing them on a computer, recording them using a recording device, telling them to a researcher, writing them by hand or drawing the story. Participants were also given the opportunity to suggest methods with which they felt comfortable if none of these options seemed appropriate to them.
Individual Interviews

Eleven individual, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth to follow up and build on important points raised during the group workshops and to collect more information about their observations of the impacts of after-school programs and their moments of most significant change. The interview questions were based on information that emerged from the group workshops and encouraged participants to think more deeply and to provide examples of the impacts of after-school programs.

Validation Focus Group

One validation focus group was held after the analysis of the data collected in the workshops and interviews was completed. This helped to ensure the validity of the research results and to give the youth the opportunity to review the initial findings before they were shared more publicly. This was also an opportunity to thank youth for their participation and acknowledge their important contributions to this study.

THE CASE STUDY

The Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in Ingersoll, Ontario was the case study for this research project. The case study approach allowed the study to explore in depth the relationship between young people and youth programs.

The Fusion Youth Centre was established in 2005 as a result of the Town of Ingersoll’s 2004 Community Strategic Plan. Youth continues to be an area of strategic importance to the Town of Ingersoll; the goals of the 2004 plan included (Town of Ingersoll, 2009):
• To establish successful youth programs;
• To promote youth-friendly attitudes in the Town of Ingersoll; and
• To encourage young people to develop their skills and become more civic-minded.

The Fusion Youth Centre offers drop-in and organized activities for youth between the ages of 12 and 18 in the Town of Ingersoll. Since its inception, the Fusion Youth Centre has greatly expanded and built on its original programming to better meet the needs of youth in the community. Today, the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre’s programming includes a drop-in centre, arts and music programs, recreation and sports programs and vocation programs including cooking, IT, animation, graphic design and media production (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, 2010).

LIMITATIONS

This study faces several potential limitations that could seriously affect the research process, the quality of data collected and the outcomes of this project.

Time

The time available to complete this study is limited by the time available to the researcher to complete their Graduate Studies program as well as the time contributed by youth to the study. Working with youth presented time challenges including: working around their schedules and non-attendance to workshops or interviews. Also, this study employed a number of research methodologies and it proved difficult to complete all of the activities in the time allotted for data collection.
Location

Participation in this study was limited to youth members of the Fusion Youth Centre. This limited the number of potential participants for the study and also means that findings and results may be biased towards that location and not always generalizable to other cases.

Volunteer Participants

This study was dependent on self-selected, volunteer youth participants and relied heavily on Fusion staff to help generate interest in this project and to encourage youth to participate. Throughout the course of the study most youth were very willing to engage and participate although at times it was difficult to have them commit to a time and non-attendance was a regular challenge. Food was used as an incentive to participate and was considered very successful in motivating youth to participate. One unforeseen challenge encountered in this study was the lack of female participants. Of the seventeen youth who participated in the workshops only three were female (Fusion’s youth membership is approximately two thirds male and one third female) (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, n.d.(b)). Upon consultation with Fusion staff and management, I found that there is a perceived drop in the number of female participants at Fusion in the older age bracket.

Bias

This study was subjective in nature and is vulnerable to researcher bias. Adults researching youth often bring with them their own memories of experiences as youth which can bias their research questions and the analysis of the data (Biklen, 2007). In some cases it was
observed that youth participants seemed to be trying to come up with correct answers to questions or were picking up on words or concepts introduced by the researcher, allowing these to influence their answers.

**Sensitive Subject-Matter**

At times youth participants may have felt uncomfortable discussing personal issues such as their motivations for participating in Fusion’s programs with a stranger and with their peers. It was observed that some youth felt more at ease sharing their opinions than others and this may cause bias in the findings of the study. Also, it was found that some youth were uncomfortable sharing stories or anecdotes that they felt portrayed Fusion negatively and both refused to tell these stories and discouraged their peers from doing so as well.

**Social Risks for Participants**

Due to the small nature of the community that this study worked with, participants were known to other youth and staff at Fusion. This potentially put participants at some social risk because if the study findings and conclusions were perceived to not support the organization the participants may have feared losing standing at Fusion. To mitigate this, every effort was made to ensure participant anonymity in the sharing of research findings; it was stressed that what was said during the workshops and interviews would not be linked to individual participants in any way.
Psychological Risks for Participants

Throughout the course of the study, some participants shared stories about very serious personal issues that had the potential to promote feelings of embarrassment, worry or sadness. For the workshops shared behaviour expectations were created and agreed upon by the researcher and all participants before each group workshop in order to ensure that participants could speak their honest opinions without fear of embarrassment in order to diminish this risk. And before each research activity it was also made clear to all participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable or no longer wanted to pursue a line of questioning.

ASSUMPTIONS

Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion

This study assumed that youth in Ingersoll experience and can describe feelings of inclusion and exclusion while living in Ingersoll and that these feelings are important enough to be noted by youth. It also assumed that youth are able to conceptualize these feelings of inclusion and exclusion and can describe them to the researcher.

Impacts of the Fusion Youth Centre on Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion

This research study assumed that the Fusion Youth Centre has a significant impact on feelings of inclusion and exclusion in Ingersoll, Ontario. This is based on past and current literature on the subject of afterschool programs that describes the outcomes of participation in these programs on the lives of youth.
Impacts of the Fusion Youth Centre on Youth Development

This study assumed that the Fusion Youth Centre, through its programs, activities and staff, contributes to youth development. Again, this is based on past and current literature on the subject of afterschool programs and adult role models that describes the skills and assets acquired by youth through their participation in afterschool programs and through their interactions with adult staff in afterschool programs.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to better understand, from a youth perspective, how afterschool programs are valued by youth and how participation in these programs contributes to the development of youth capacity and to increased youth agency.

There currently exists a wealth of literature on youth development from several fields including education, health, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, anthropology and criminology. Each of these fields has its own unique perspective on youth development and important issues to be addressed.

To further the objectives of this study, the literature review will explore four main sections: The first section will explore youth as a social construct: how youth are understood as a social and developmental category, changing life trajectories and youth as a strategic concept. In the second section I will look at the role of inclusion and exclusion in the lives of youth. Inclusion and exclusion play a significant role in determining youth experiences in their communities and their need for services. Third, the positive youth development perspective has played an important role in youth-centered programming and interventions; the origins and applications of this perspective will be explored in detail. Finally, the fourth section will look at the role of afterschool programs in the lives of youth and in the communities where they are established. The role of adults and the outcomes of these programs will also be explored.
CONSTRUCTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUTH

It is important to start this discussion with an overview of what we mean when we use the term youth because the concept of youth is very context and situation specific, meaning different things to different people. Understanding youth as a concept is very important to understanding youth capacity, agency and the role of afterschool programs. This section will explore youth as a social construct, changing life trajectories and youth as a strategic category.

Youth as a Social Construct

Youth can mean many things to different people, depending on context and circumstances. In 1988 Luther B. Otto described the changing profile of America’s youth. Otto attributed many of these shifts to changing family structures, increased levels of education, poverty among certain ethnic and racial groups and changing behaviours and attitudes (Otto, 1988). Society’s understanding of youth continues to change and it is important to understand these changes in order to conceptualize youth.


1. A biological category;
2. A distinctive social group; and
3. A cultural construct.
Bucholtz (2002) approaches the study of youth from an anthropological perspective and asserts that the “youth category lacks clear definition and in some situations may be based on one’s social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position” (p526). She goes on to argue that youth is not considered to be an important life stage in all cultures and wonders if youth can be considered a universal life stage (Bucholtz, 2002).

One of the most commonly considered characteristics of the youth life stage is the perceived instability and identity crisis that characterizes youth. Youth are commonly seen as “the excluded other” (Panelli, Nairn & McCormack, 2002) or as a social problem as a result of their perceived deviant actions (McCulloch, et al., 2006). Erik Erikson (1968) has written extensively on the subject of youth identity and conflict and argues while these are true characteristics of the youth life stage, they should be viewed as normal; that all youth experience such conflict and that it is part of the process of defining oneself and becoming an adult.

**Life Trajectories**

The idea of youth as simply one part of an individual’s life trajectory is one that has been explored by several authors (Bucholtz, 2002; McCulloch, et al., 2006; Pais, 2000). McCulloch, et al. (2006) contend that the life trajectories of youth have changed considerably over time, and that generally, the part of an individual’s life trajectory that can be labelled youth is being extended. The implications of this, they argue, are that it is becoming more difficult for youth to anticipate what their adult roles will be, personally and professionally (McCulloch, et al., 2006). In addition to this, Pais (2000) argues that one of the clearest characteristics of the life trajectories of youth today is reversibility, the
ability of youth to enter into adulthood, perhaps by finding professional employment, and then retreat back to a youth stage if necessary, for example by moving back in with their parents if they find themselves in financial difficulties.

Pais (2000) asserts that these life trajectories are not simply the personal life stories of the individuals experiencing them; instead, they reflect complex social processes and structures. Pais (2000) argues that one of the “fundamental aspects of the initiation of new generations into adult life is a process of complex socialization, i.e. multiple influences and transfers” (p219).

However it must be recognized that youth are not simply the recipients of this complex socialization process. Panelli, et al. (2002) conceptualize youth as strategic negotiators of space and active creators of their culture and environment. They argue that there are two ways of understanding youth (p106):

1. Adults in training; and
2. Competent members of their society.

This view of youth as active agents is supported by Bucholtz (2002) who argues that “youth are as often the agents as the experiencers of cultural change” (p530).

**Youth as a Strategic Concept**

Youth is not necessarily a universal concept; however the category youth can be used strategically in order to create meaning or to add value to a statement. Bucholtz (2002) explores the difference between terms like “solider” and “child soldier” or “mother” and
“teenage mother”. She argues that attaching the youth-related word to these terms adds meaning and value and is a strategic action designed to encourage a certain response or reaction (Bucholtz, 2002). Likewise, the ability of some judicial systems to try and sentence minors as adults based on the severity of the actions, demonstrates the fluidity of the concept of youth and the strategic extension and revocation of the youth status (Bucholtz, 2002).

In her research on youth in Botswana, Deborah Durham (2004) explores the multiple ways in which youth are understood and argues that youth is a relational concept and that there are political aspects to labelling an individual a youth. In her article she states that:

To call someone a youth is to position him or her in terms of a variety of social attributes, including age but also independence-dependence, authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities and so on. (Durham, 2004: 593).

Youth is a social category that is under constant reconstruction (Durham, 2004); it has both the ability to renew and create context and meaning and is an arena in which social relations are both perpetuated and contested (Bucholtz, 2002). The processes, both political and pragmatic, through which the concept of youth is created and re-created must be taken into account when studying youth and trying to understand the roles of youth in their communities (Durham, 2004).
INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

Inclusion and exclusion exert a substantial influence over the lives of youth, playing a large role in what spaces and resources youth have access to throughout their adolescence and how youth feel about their role in their communities. This section looks at discourses surrounding inclusion and exclusion and the role of afterschool programs in promoting or perpetuating inclusion and exclusion in the lives of youth.

Discourses of Inclusion and Exclusion

The idea of social inclusion and exclusion began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s as new social movements gained popularity and re-introduced the idea and importance of community (Labonte, 2004). With this new focus and attention on community, concepts such as community participation, community competence, community capacity and community development began to emerge and gain significance. Ronald Labonte (2004) argues that community competence and capacity eventually became social capital while participation and development merged into social inclusion. He also argues that social cohesion became the rational for the scaling back of government programs and services, ostensibly as a means of allowing communities to rebuild and regenerate organically after suffering from pressures such as globalization and inequality (Labonte, 2004).

While he recognizes the importance of this evolving discourse Labonte (2004) argues that “the twinned concept of social inclusion/exclusion is more helpful than its other ‘social’ cousins, social cohesion and social capital” (p116). This is because cohesion relies on an ideal form of human interaction that ignores the realities of the human experience and
social capital lacks a fixed definition and there is no agreement about how communities and societies should govern themselves (Labonte, 2004).

Shucksmith builds on this discourse of social inclusion and exclusion, describing social exclusion as a process rather than an outcome. Along with Chapman, he defines social exclusion as:

...a multidimensional, dynamic concept which refers to a breakdown or malfunctioning of the major societal systems that should guarantee the social integration of the individual or household (Shucksmith & Chapman, 1998: 230).

In their earlier work, Shucksmith and Chapman (1998) identified the following four major societal systems whose failures could lead to the social exclusion of some individuals or parties in communities or societies (p229). They are:

1. Democratic and legal systems (promote civic integration);
2. The labour market (promote economic integration);
3. Welfare state systems (promote social integration); and
4. Family and community systems (promote interpersonal integration).

In a later paper, Shucksmith (2004) refined these four categories into the following (p45):

1. Private systems (market processes);
2. State systems (authority structures with bureaucratic and legal processes);
3. Voluntary systems (collective action processes in civil society); and
4. Networks of family and friends (reciprocal processes in society).
Shucksmith and Chapman (1998) also argue that activities and programs intended to address issues of social exclusion must look beyond the concept of poverty. Poverty, they state, denotes people whose resources are limited to the point that they are excluded from the standards of acceptable living in their communities (Shucksmith & Chapman, 1998). Social exclusion they argue is much more multi-dimensional than poverty (not limited to income and expenditures), a process rather than a state of disadvantage and a relational issue that depends heavily on local context (whose focus is not limited to the individual or household) (Shucksmith & Chapman, 1998).

**Youth and Inclusion/Exclusion**

Leyshon (2008) argues that social inclusion and exclusion are socially constructed through experiences and social interactions. He goes on to state that young people are not just passive recipients of existing inclusionary or exclusionary systems but also active producers of these systems (Leyshon, 2008). This implies that youth are not simply the victims of inclusionary systems, excluded from full participation in their communities by adult members and acting only as clients for the services that communities provide for them. Youth also participate actively in the creation and maintenance of these systems, both inclusionary and exclusionary. For example, youth often claim space by hanging out in certain areas or leaving signs, such as graffiti, of their physical occupation of the space (White & Wyn, 2008). Youth also reproduce exclusionary systems, for example cliques that allow entry to some individuals but not others, based on pre-defined criteria set out by the group (Adler & Adler, 1995).
Social inclusion and exclusion affect youth in many ways. Youth often lack resources that would allow them to be included in certain lifestyles or places. The identity crisis experienced during adolescence can also affect their personal sense of belonging in certain activities and organizations (Leyshon, 2008). For example, because of their age they often lack important social networks and physical mobility (for example when they aren’t old enough to go places independently or are not yet able to obtain a driver’s license) which can exclude them from certain opportunities, areas and activities (Shucksmith, 2004; Pavis, Hubbard & Platt, 2001).

Many youth also feel that community activities do not represent their interests or that activities that they are interested in are not considered legitimate by the rest of the community. Youth often wish for greater diversity of activities and venues, offering them appealing activities and places to go (Panelli, et al., 2002; White & Wyn, 2008).

**Afterschool Programs and changing feelings of Inclusion/Exclusion**

Youth programs play an important role in the levels of social inclusion and exclusion experienced by youth. Some youth programs are inherently exclusive (for example girl guides) while others try to adopt a more inclusive approach.

Popular structures such as cliques often determine inclusionary and exclusionary status very early in life, usually at the pre-adolescent age when young people enter school (Adler & Adler, 1995). These groups are generally hierarchical and affect prior and new friendships, thereby affecting a youth’s social status and context (Adler & Adler, 1995). Youth programs can offer youth a sense of belonging as they embrace the space and
make new friends. This can be important in countering the social exclusion that many youth face in other organizations and institutions such as schools where cliques are usually very common.

Youth may also feel excluded from public spaces because they do not have the means to justify their presence. For example, in shopping malls youth who do not have a lot of disposable income are seen as nuisances by shop owners because they loiter but not do purchase anything, are noisy and discourage other potential customers from entering (White & Wyn, 2008; Panelli et al., 2002).

One of the key aspects of social inclusion is the creation of spaces where youth can go, feel comfortable and interact with one another. This is one of the defining features for youth programs such as youth centres. One of the driving forces behind the creation of youth-specific spaces is that youth don’t always feel, or are not made to feel, welcome in public spaces (White & Wyn, 2007; Panelli, et al., 2002).

Afterschool programs can promote social inclusion by creating spaces where youth feel welcome and comfortable. Sometimes this is a permanent space (for example a youth centre whose sole purpose is to provide space for youth), and sometimes it is a more temporary space (for example a sports club that rents facilities). Generally, these programs attract youth through the provision of physical space (for example a youth centre) or by offering activities (for example music, dance, sports or crafts).

Access to resources is one important way that youth programs promote social inclusion for youth in their communities. Youth programs provide access to resources both through
their activities, which often provide access to space and equipment, and through interactions with staff and peers, which gives youth access to information and networks (Halpern, et al., 2000; Jarrett, et al., 2005).

Through their interactions with peers and adults internal and external to the program, youth gain access to the information and knowledge contained in these individuals. This often includes learning more about jobs in specific fields, subjects such as travel or academics, and human networks which can be useful for youth seeking employment or entrance into an academic institution (Jarrett, et al., 2005; Kohfeldt, Chhunn, Grace & Langhout, 2011).

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive youth development (PYD) is a popular area of literature in the field of youth development and also a popular approach with many afterschool programs. This section will explore: models of youth development, the origins of the positive youth development perspective, the definition of the approach and what PYD looks like in practice.

Models of Youth Development: PYD in Context

Youth development generally refers to the stages that young people pass through on their journey to becoming adults. Throughout this process, youth have the opportunity to acquire skills and competencies that will aid them in their adult lives (Jones, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). However there is much discussion on how youth process through this developmental process, what risks and opportunities they encounter and what strategies they use to pass through successfully.
Several models of youth development exist, including PYD. One of the earlier models was developed by Erik Erikson, who proposed an eight-stage model of life-span development which covers an individual’s entire lifespan from infancy to late-adulthood. In this model Erikson (1968) describes the stages as:

1. Trust vs. Mistrust (Infant);
2. Autonomy vs. Shame (Toddler);
3. Initiative vs. Guilt (Preschooler);
4. Industry vs. Inferiority (School-Age Child);
5. Identity vs. Identity diffusion (Adolescent);
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young Adult);
7. Generativity vs. Self-Absorption (Middle-Age); and
8. Integrity vs. Despair (Older Adult).

The first four stages address childhood, the fifth and sixth stages focus on youth and the final two stages deal with adulthood. Adolescence was very important to Erikson because it was the time of identity formation, a stage he considered critical to healthy adulthood (Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981).

A second model of youth development is the prevention model. The prevention model is based on a “deficit perspective” (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner & Lerner, 2010) of youth and incorporates the idea that it is generally more efficient and effective to prevent potential problems before they occur rather than to address them after they are established (Small & Memmo, 2004).
Small and Memmo (2004) identify three types of prevention models: primary prevention attempts to prevent a problem within a normal population; secondary prevention involves intervening in circumstances where early signs of a problem have been observed; and tertiary prevention attempts to reduce or minimize an existing problem within a specific population.

The prevention model of youth development remains popular and is often effective at dealing with issues such as teenage pregnancy, delinquency and substance abuse (Small & Memmo, 2004). However, opponents point out that this approach tends to focus on youth failings while ignoring positive actions by youth and that it gives only limited attention to the balance between risk and protective factors and how these factors apply to different individuals within the same population (Small & Memmo, 2004).

A third model of youth development that emerged in response to the prevention model is the resiliency model. The resiliency model became popular as researchers began to realize that not all youth who were exposed to risk factors displayed symptoms of dysfunction. This realization led to the development of initiatives aimed at promoting resilience among youth, rather than just suppressing dysfunction (Small & Memmo, 2004).

While the resilience model does better on focusing on the positive attributes of youth, critics often argue that this model ignores the larger environment in which youth exist (Small & Memmo, 2004).

Finally, the positive youth development model was developed in the late 1990s and builds on the prevention and resiliency models.
Origins of Positive Youth Development

The positive youth development (PYD) perspective emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s from the work of comparative psychologists who were interested in the idea of positive psychology (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). Prior to this shift, discourse around youth development had focused primarily on a “deficit perspective” (Bowers, et al., 2010) of youth development that understood youth as potential risks to be guided and managed until they reached adulthood (Damon, 2004; Larson, 2000; Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas & Lerner, 2005b; Small & Memmo, 2004; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins 2004; Benson, 2007; Jones 2005).

In his article on PYD Jones (2005) describes this shift from a prevention approach to positive youth development perspective as having three main components (p2):

1. From needs assessment to asset mapping;
2. From risk factors to protective factors; and
3. From risk behaviours to thriving behaviours.

Peter Benson is commonly acknowledged as one of the founders of the PYD perspective and has written extensively on the subject since the mid-1990s. Benson’s developmental assets theory is grounded in developmental systems theory and posits that assets, community and society are all interrelated and that the acquisition of developmental assets has a cumulative impact (Benson, 2007). Essentially, the more developmental assets acquired, the less risk behaviours youth would engage in and the more thriving behaviours they would adopt (Benson, 2007).
Developmental assets theory conceptualizes youth development in terms of twenty internal and twenty external developmental assets (Benson, 2007). Benson (2007) defined development assets as: “a theoretical construct identifying a wide range of environmental and personal strengths known to enhance educational and health outcomes for children and adolescents” (p33).

Expanding on this concept, Benson (2007) also developed the terms asset-building community and asset-building society. An asset-building community, he described as an:

...evolving conceptual model describing the nature and dynamics of places and settings that provide a constant and equitable flow of asset-building energy to all children and adolescents (Benson, 2007: 33).

Asset-building societies he called:

...an emerging line of conceptualization and public inquiry regarding the roles of social norms, public policy, rituals and media in advancing the asset-building capacity of individuals, systems and communities (Benson, 2007: 33).

**What is Positive Youth Development?**

The definition of PYD varies slightly from author to author but it is generally agreed that PYD is a “strength-based conception of adolescence” (Lerner, et al., 2005a: 10) that “envisions young people as resources rather than as problems for society... [and] emphasizes the manifest potential rather than the supposed incapacities of young people” (Damon, 2004: 13). The discourse of PYD was also expanded by some authors to include
the environment in which adolescents live, arguing that youth development is heavily
influenced by the environment and the resources and relationships available in that

One influential way in which PYD has been conceptualized is the Five Cs Model of Positive
Youth Development. This model argues that when the strengths of youth are strategically
aligned with growth promoting resources in their environments, the outcome is positive
development (Bowers, et al., 2010). In this discourse, there is a strong emphasis on
plasticity and the ability of youth to adapt and cope in different and challenging
circumstances. The results of this alignment between the strengths of youth and growth-
promoting resources, or the assets acquired by youth through the process of positive
development, may be organized into five categories: the five Cs.

The five Cs, as described by Bowers et al. (2010) are: “competence, confidence, connection,
character and caring” (p721). Some authors have expanded on this model and added a
sixth C to the model: contribution (Lerner, et al., 2005a). Contribution refers once again to
the “plasticity” of youth but emphasizes a two-way relationship between youth and their
environment, stressing that while the environment exerts pressure on youth and affects
their development potential, so too do youth have the capacity to affect, change and
contribute to their respective environments (Lerner, et al., 2005a).

Positive Youth Development in Practice

Different authors describe different indicators or important characteristics for identifying
PYD; however most agree that to be an indicator, or characteristic, of PYD, a factor must
buffer negative influences and promote positive or resilient behaviours (Damon, 2004; Park 2004a; Park 2004b; Lerner, et al., 2005a; Catalano, et al., 2005; Jones, 2005; Larson, Walker & Pearce, 2005).

These indicators and important characteristics may include transformational shifts in the nature of the child, a change in the nature of the interactions between youth and their communities and the development of moral identities and perspectives (Damon, 2004).

Subjective well-being and the development of character strengths are also argued to be important indicators of PYD (Parks, 2004a; 2004b). Parks (2004a) argues that subjective well-being is important not only as an indicator of PYD but also as an enabling factor because of the role it plays in fostering life-satisfaction. In his article on character strengths, Parks (2004b) asserts that character strengths (such as kindness, optimism and social intelligence) not only emerge from PYD but act as buffers against stress and trauma and promote positive development in youth.

Other indicators or outcomes include the development of initiative (Larson, 2000), a rise in mutually-beneficial relationships (Lerner et al., 2005a), an appreciation of spirituality and religion (King, 2007), the emergence of political activism (Flanagan, Syvertsen & Wray-Lake, 2007; Boehnke, Fuss & Boehnke, 2007) and an improvement in the ability to work as part of a team (Larson, 2007).

Most of these indicators may be observed in programs to promote PYD and also as outcomes of these programs and indicators of their success.
AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Adolescence is a period of change and transition for many young people as they struggle to create an identity for themselves and build knowledge and competencies that will help them in their adult lives. While this period of change is normal for all youth, some youth struggle more during this time than others.

Early afterschool programs were developed in part, because this transition between adolescences and adulthood was seen as a period of potential risk for youth and therefore for their communities. These programs tended to be based on the prevention model of youth development and sought to stop youth from learning and engaging in negative behaviours during the unsupervised hours after school.

The prevention model of youth development can be separated into three types of interventions: universal prevention, which directs its programming at the general public; selected prevention, which directs its programming at a particular sub-group within a population; and indicated prevention, which directs its programming towards high-risk individuals who exhibit problem symptoms (Small & Memmo, 2004).

Earlier afterschool programs would generally have fallen into the second or third types of intervention, targeting youth as a particular sub-group within the general population or specific youth who exhibited symptoms of dysfunction.

Contemporary afterschool programs are based on a wider variety of youth development models including resiliency and PYD. Each program has their own objectives and approaches and they often seek not only to prevent negative behaviours but to promote the
development of positive behaviours and asset-building in young people. Today, afterschool programs are a significant part of youth development strategies in many communities around the world.

**Role of Afterschool Programs**

The emergence of the “after-school movement” (Nicholson, Collins & Holmer, 2004: 56) was a reaction to perceived problem behaviours and lack of safety during the unsupervised hours between the end of the typical school day and the end of the typical work day (Nicholson et al, 2004; Dietel, 2009; Halpern, 1999; Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow & Martin-Glenn, 2006; Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert & Parente, 2010; Vandell & Shumow, 1999; Halpern, et al., 2000; White & Wyn, 2008).

Communities felt that public spaces such as streets and playgrounds were no longer safe spaces for young people to hang out after school and that so much time without adult supervision was promoting the adoption of negative behaviours by youth. Other driving factors behind the popularity of afterschool programs include (Halpern, 1999: 81):

- Sense that it is stressful and unproductive for children to be left alone after school;
- Concern that children need more time and individual attention than schools can provide to master basic academic skills; and
- Conviction that low-income children deserve the same opportunities as their peers to explore arts, sports, and other developmentally enriching activities.
Changing societal norms such as increasing numbers of single-parent homes, working mothers and the decrease in the need for youth to work to support their families are also seen as driving forces behind the establishment of ASPs (Durlak, et al., 2010).

Halpern et al. (2000) describe youth programs as “alternative spaces to be” (p34), alluding to youth programs as places where youth can hang out, be themselves and define themselves. They also discuss the important role of youth programs in finding the right balance between drop-in activities, which he describes as the “heart and soul” of the programs they studied (p16), and structured activities which could include homework time, gym, field trips and specialty classes (Halpern, et al., 2000).

Afterschool programs are supplied by many different groups and organizations. The largest providers, especially for low- and moderate income youth are generally schools and private non-profit social service agencies (Halpern, 1999). However Durlak et al. (2010) note that there is currently no “standard format or operating procedure for an afterschool program” (p287).

Durlak et al. (2010) go on to list what they consider to be the important features of afterschool programs:

- Structure and Process (physical facilities, interactions with staff and sense of belong);
- Implementation (how well the program is realized and what resources it has access to); and
• Participation (how often the program is open and whether or not youth participants are actively engaged).

The effectiveness of youth programs and afterschool programs depends heavily on how well they are implemented and run. Vandell and Shumow (1999) explore the necessity of afterschool programs by looking at other options available to families and communities: self-care, parents, relatives or sitters, lessons, strict tutoring, chaotic youth centres and stimulating programs.

They conclude that the benefits of afterschool programs depend heavily on several contributing factors such as the perceived safety of the neighbourhood, the quality of the programs available and resources available to the family (Vandell & Shumow, 1999).

Nicholson et al. (2004) are more generous about the benefits of quality afterschool programs. They argue that when properly implemented, afterschool programs (Nicholson et al., 2004):

• Relieve stressors that youth feel at home or at school;
• Create an environment where youth feel physically and emotionally safe;
• Provide opportunities for youth to learn new skills and work out problems;
• Allow for creative expression which improves emotional health and allows youth to relieve tension and explore their individuality;
• Encourage youth to stay in school longer;
• Encourage youth to pursue further studies or careers in fields such as math, science, technology and engineering, fields which some youth, for example girls and low-income youth, may not have previously considered pursuing; and
• Promote positive behaviours by addressing issues such as mental and emotional health, fitness and body image.

These benefits have also been seen to be especially effective when a program works with low-income or at-risk youth (Halpern, 1999; Halpern et al., 2000; Lauer et al., 2006; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Mahoney, Lord & Carryl, 2005). However, in all cases, it is important that youth programs and ASPs be purposefully tailored to meet the needs of the youth and the communities they serve in order to be most effective.

Role of Adults in Afterschool Programs

Adults, both internal and external to afterschool programs, play a significant role in shaping the youth experience in, and the outcomes of, these programs. One of the largest challenges faced by afterschool programs is often existing negative youth-adults relationships and mistrust between these two parties. Jarrett, et al. (2005) describe three steps in the relationship-building process between youth and adults (pp7-8):

• Stage 1: Youth-adult disconnect;
• Stage 2: Interacting with adults; and
• Stage 3: Connecting with adults.

Larson, et al. (2005) describe a spectrum between “adult-driven” and “youth-driven” upon which afterschool programs find themselves. At one extreme of this continuum, adult-
driven programs are based on a model wherein “adults know best” (Larson, et al., 2005: 58) and these adults decide the direction of the program and are responsible for its daily operations (Larson, et al., 2005). At the opposite extreme, youth-driven programs see young people as active partners and adults play only a minor role in decision-making and operations processes (Larson, et al., 2005).

Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. Larson et al. (2005) argue that adult-driven programs often inhibit youth ownership and creativity while youth-driven programs often lack leadership and experience. In order to make youth programs as effective as possible, balance points must be found on the spectrum that best meet the needs and preferences of youth in specific communities (Larson, et al., 2005).

Whatever the dimensions of their role, most authors agree that the quality of the relationships built between adults and youth are one of the defining features of afterschool programs (Jarrett, et al., 2005; Serido, Borden & Perkins, 2011; Larson et al., 2005; Halpern, et al., 2000).

Serido et al., (2011) describe supportive adults as a “protective factor” (p47) and argue that positive relations between youth and adults “foster a sense of self-worth and well-being in young people” (p47). They also maintain that a positive correlation exists between youth-adult relationships, the strength of youth voice in an organization and the perceived benefits of the program (Serido, et al., 2011).

Youth may also benefit materially from positive relationships with adults. Jarrett et al. (2005) describe how youth may gain access to career and academic opportunities through
their relationships with adults and the information, assistance, exposure, support and encouragement they provide.

**Outcomes of Afterschool Programs**

Afterschool programs have many different outcomes, depending on their objectives and their approach. One of the goals of early afterschool programs, aside from reducing levels of juvenile delinquency and offering youth safe spaces to hang out, was to improve academic performance.

Mahoney, et al. (2005) use an ecological systems perspective to explore the connection between participation in youth programs and academic performance for disadvantaged youth. They found that youth who attend afterschool programs as their primary out-of-school activity saw a significant improvement in their academic performance (Mahoney et al., 2005).

Another possible goal for afterschool programs is the development of specialized and technical skills such as sports and performing arts. Larson, et al. (2005) argue that adult-driven programs are more effective at teaching these skills because of the need for a more central adult presence in learning these skills. Conversely, they maintain that youth-driven programs are more effective at promoting outcomes such as empowerment, leadership and community change because of the leadership role assumed by youth in this type of program (Larson et al., 2005).

In a later paper, Larson and Angus (2011) look specifically at the role of youth programs in promoting skills for agency, and specifically strategic thinking skills. Supporting his earlier
argument that youth-driven programs promote the development of experiential skills, Larson and Angus (2011) found three key aspects to youth work that promote the development of agency (p278):

1. The arc of work;
2. A real-world context; and
3. Personal ownership.

Each of these three stages is generally found in youth-driven programs because of the emphasis on giving youth the opportunity to design, plan, implement and monitor their own projects in a real-world context. This gives youth concrete experience in success and failure and fosters a sense of ownership over the project (Larson, et al., 2005). Adults play a minor role, giving support and advice where needed and requested (Larson et al., 2005).

Finally, youth engagement is critical to determining what outcomes will be achieved from any youth program. Dawes and Larson (2011) explore youth’s motivations for participating in youth programs and how motivation and engagement change and develop over time. They found that youth participate in youth programs for many reasons, including to find support, to learn and to hang out with friends. However, the dominant reason for the changes in motivation and engagement level was a personal connection between the youth and the activity (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

Dawes and Larson (2011) identified three types of personal connection (pp263-264):

1. Learning for the future;
2. Developing a sense of competence; and
3. Pursuing purpose.

Each of these types of personal connection helped youth participants to become more psychologically engaged and therefore to gain the most benefit from their participation (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

In the world of youth programs, diversity is an asset that should be exploited. The different approaches and goals adopted by youth programs are strengths because these various programs can complement one another, providing a full spectrum of support services for positive development in youth.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework for this study explores how afterschool programs affect feelings of exclusion and inclusion focusing on three key areas:

1. Afterschool programs (key components: staff, programs and space)
2. Changing feelings of inclusion and exclusion
3. Outcomes: Positive Youth Development

Youth must be active participants in this model, participating in afterschool programs, engaging with staff and taking advantage of the space and resources available. Only when they are active participants is positive youth development truly achieved. If they simply pass through the afterschool program without actively engaging it is more likely that the
afterschool program fulfills a preventative role instead of a positive development role (Small & Memmo, 2004).

*Figure 2: Conceptual Framework*

![Conceptual Framework Diagram]

It is usually accepted that youth experience varying levels of exclusion in their communities because they lack access to resources and opportunities (Jones, 1999; Looker & Naylor 2009). As they participate in afterschool programs youth have a space in which they feel safe, they interact and engage with staff and they participate in programs that help them develop skills and competencies (White & Wyn, 2008; Panelli, et al., 2002). Over time, this participation leads to the development of new strengths and assets including character, confidence, competencies and connections (Bowers, et al., 2010). Through this process feelings of exclusion change to inclusion as youth have better support networks and are better prepared to engage and participate in wider society. These feelings of inclusion, which includes the development of assets and relationships, contribute to positive youth
development and more positive outcomes for youth (Halpern, et al., 2000; Jarrett, et al., 2005; Small & Memmo, 2004).

**SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an overview of literature relevant to this study. Understanding youth as a social construct is critical to any discussion or research of youth so I have provided a summary of the main literature discussing how youth are understood and conceptualized. As I have presented, youth is not a simple category, it is complex, multi-dimensional and often changing. Inclusion and exclusion are also important because they affect the environment in which youth live and where afterschool programs operate. These feelings also change over time, depending on how youth interact with each other, other community members and resources within the community. Positive youth development is covered because it is one of the main goals of modern afterschool programs, representing a shift from the deficit perspective of youth development in which youth are understood as liabilities towards a resilience approach where youth are seen as assets with potential. The field of positive youth development has also undergone many changes, but continues to focus on asset-building in youth. Finally, an overview of literature on youth programs is included to build understanding of current theories surrounding youth program. Special attention is paid to the role of adults in youth programs which proved especially relevant to this study. The conceptual framework provides a visual interpretation of how I understand these four main areas of literature to fit together. Afterschool programs, comprising of staff, activities and the physical space they occupy change experiences of exclusion to inclusion promoting positive youth development results.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGIES

This chapter provides an in-depth explanation and review of the methodology used in this study and the rationale behind the selection of these methods. In this chapter I will look at the epistemological foundation of the study, the case study framework and specific challenges that arise when researching youth. These then establish the basis for a more in-depth discussion of the specific research methods used in this study. Finally, this section will describe the process used to analyze the data.

This study took a phenomenological approach to exploring the relationship between youth and youth and after-school programs in rural communities, focusing specifically on the youth perspective. I also chose to situate the approach within a case study framework to add context to the study and to ensure that the scope of the project was feasible for a Master’s thesis.

The research methods used in this study were:

- Group workshops (using task-centered techniques)
- Individual In-depth Interviews
- Validation Focus Group

Participants in this study were self-selected youth who participate in programs and activities at the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in Ingersoll, Ontario. All participants were between fourteen and eighteen years of age. Seventeen youth (fourteen males and three females) participated in the workshops, and eleven interviews (with twelve youth) were conducted following the workshops. Most youth who participated in
interviews had participated in a workshop however two youth who were unable to attend the workshops expressed an interest in completing an interview and were also included. All were invited to the validation focus group although participation in this activity was not required.

**PHENOMENOLOGY**

Phenomenology is a research strategy that explores how life is understood by those who participate in it (Denscombe, 2007). Phenomenology itself has many different definitions; building on Phillipson’s (1972) work Davis (1995) defines phenomenology as:

> The attempt to understand and describe phenomena exactly as they appear in an individual’s consciousness (Phillipson, 1972: 120-123), to get at the interrelationship between life and world, and to understand how phenomena interact with the way humans actually live in their world (p122).

Davis (1995) also suggests that the role of the phenomenological researcher is to “discover how meaning is constructed, not the structure of meaning” (p122).

Therefore, phenomenology focuses on “lived experience” (Denscombe, 2007; Davis, 1995; Creswell, 1998) and emphasizes subjectivity, description, interpretation and agency over objectivity, analysis, measurement and structure (Denscombe, 2007).

According to Morgan and Smircich (1980), phenomenology makes certain assumptions about human nature. They argue that within the phenomenological approach:
Humans are viewed as intentional beings, directing their psychic energy and experience in ways that constitute the world in a meaningful, intentional form...Human beings shape the world within the realm of their immediate experience (Morgan & Smircich, 1980: 494).

The ultimate aim of phenomenology, as described by Seamon (2000), “is to use descriptions as a groundstone from which to discover underlying commonalities that mark the essential core of the phenomenon” (p2). In this project, I used first-hand descriptions of the youth experience at the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre to explore the relationship between youth and youth and after-school programs in rural communities.

Because of the subjective and interpretive nature of phenomenology, I have focused on qualitative and descriptive methods of data collection, including group and individual interviews, for this study. It was never my intention to draw generalizations or conclusions from the responses gathered, but rather to represent the voices of the youth as I heard them and to draw comparisons between accounts; thereby describing the nature of the relationship between youth in Ingersoll and the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre from the youth perspective as accurately and honestly as possible.

**THE CASE STUDY**

A case study focuses on one instance of a phenomenon and is a basis for exploring, in-depth, events, relationships, experiences and processes (Denscombe, 2007). Using the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in Ingersoll, Ontario as a case study provided
an effective way of establishing boundaries for the study, both in terms of geographic
location and potential participants.

Creswell (1998) describes a case study as a system that “is bounded by time and place and
it is the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity or individuals” (p61). Case
studies are especially helpful in projects where the research questions address the “how”
and the “why” of a phenomenon. In these instances, a case study may “contribute to our
knowledge of individual, group, organization, social, political and related phenomena” (Yin,
2009). Yin also argues that the case study method “allows investigators to retain the
holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009: 4).

Case studies also allow the researcher to explore a more nuanced view of reality (Flyvbjerg,
2006). This framework generally focuses on depth of information as well as relationships
and processes, and look at elements within phenomena in holistic ways, rather than as
isolated factors (Denscombe, 2007).

The literature also identifies four types of case studies: 1) a typical instance, which assumes
that findings from the chosen case study may be relevant to other cases; 2) an extreme
instance, to study the impact of a specific factor in the case; 3) a test-site for theory or
critical instance, which is a case selected as a site to test a specific theory; and 4) a least
likely instance, which is a case selected to test the validity of a theory by looking for it in an
unlikely place (Denscombe, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). In this study I will be using
the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre as a critical case, one that helps to test a
theory (Yin, 2009); in this case, that a strong relationship between youth and youth and
after-school programs enhances youth capacity development.
The case study method faces several serious critiques that limit its accepted uses in research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Denscombe, 2007). Flyvbjerg (2006) outlines five of these critiques which he describes as misunderstandings or oversimplifications of case study research (p221):

1. General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge;
2. One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development;
3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building;
4. The case study contains a bias towards verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions; and
5. It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Flyvbjerg (2006) uses his article to refute these critiques; arguing that when a case study is approached and implemented carefully and properly, these critiques are either invalid or may be overcome.

However in this study I recognize the validity of these critiques and sought to mitigate them as much as possible, both through an awareness of the potential pitfalls of using a case study and through my choice of research methods.
Like phenomenology, case studies tend to promote the use of narrative (Flyvbjerg, 2006) mixed with other methods which may supersede the case study method or which may be embedded within the case study (Yin, 2009). In this study, I focused on research methods that emphasize the collection of stories and narratives and these data collection methods were embedded within the case study framework. These methods are described in greater detail later in this chapter.

The Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre

The Mission Statement of the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre is:

“Youth directed initiatives will guide our team in providing a fun, safe and inclusive environment where youth know they belong and are empowered to make positive change in their lives.” (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, 2012).

Established in 2005, the Fusion Youth Centre is a nonprofit organization owned by the Town of Ingersoll. It is unique in Ontario because of how it combines leisure, technology, arts, leadership, youth engagement and skill development (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, n.d.(a)).

In 2003, the Town of Ingersoll initiated a grassroots planning process and identified youth as one of its priority areas; after further consultation the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre was opened (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, 2010). Fusion is open six days a week to youth aged twelve to eighteen in Oxford County. In February 2006, Fusion opened its doors and 448 youth signed up (270 males and 178
females). In 2011 Fusion had a total of 1,359 youth members (825 males and 534 females). Visits to Fusion range from 1,288 youth to over 2,000 youth per month depending on factors such as: programs offered, the weather and other activities in town (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, n.d.(b)).

Its programs include (Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, 2010):

- Arts and Culture;
- Leadership
- Life Skills
- Recreational, Fitness and Sports
- Skate Park
- Technology

To view Fusion’s 2012 Program Schedule please refer to Appendix One.

**RESEARCHING YOUTH**

Researching youth presents unique challenges to the researcher. My goal, when selecting my research methods, was to present the accounts, ideas and perspectives of the youth participants as honestly and accurately as possible and to engage youth in the research and analysis process.

When researching youth, the researcher must make careful decisions about methodologies, thinking carefully about what they wish to achieve and how they envision youth
participation in their project. Best (2007) presents four principles that she argues should underline the selection of methodologies in any youth study (p9):

1. A sustained concern for and consideration of the complexities of power and exploitation in the research encounter;
2. An acknowledgement of the connection between power and knowledge. Such an acknowledgement requires that we recognize that the accounts we provide shape and construct reality as much as they describe it. Youth researchers play a significant role in shaping the social experiences of children and youth through the discursive constructions or accounts we provide;
3. A desire to conduct sound ethical research that empowers youth and children and to find ways to improve the conditions under which their lives unfold; and
4. A commitment to radical reflexivity that interrogates the varied points of difference that intersect in our own lives and those we study.

This emphasis on acknowledging power dynamics in research and the impact of our research on youth participants is common to most authors (Best, 2007; Leonard, 2007; Heath, Brooks, Cleaver & Ireland, 2009; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke & Craig, 1996; Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). Eder and Fingerson (2001) argue that the researcher should focus on creating a more egalitarian setting and can do this by placing an emphasis on understanding their participants rather than on finding specific answers to their questions.

It is often argued that in research, youth are treated as passive subjects rather than active participants (Hood, et al., 1996) and that this negatively affects youth agency as well as the
research findings and results. One strategy used to ensure that youth are not exploited in research is to require informed consent from a legal guardian on behalf of the youth (Marrow & Richards, 1996; Leonard, 2007). However some authors argue that requiring consent from an adult can take away youth voice and agency, denying them the power to make the decision regarding whether or not to participate in the study for themselves (Marrow & Richards, 1996; Heath, Charles, Crow & Wiles, 2007; Sauci, Sawyer, Weller, Bond & Patton, 2004; Koren, Carmeli, Carmeli & Hasalm, 1993; Leatherdale, Sparks & Kirsh, 2006).

For this study, I was required to obtain informed consent from a legal guardian for all youth participants under the age of 18. With this in mind, I wrote a letter of information and a consent form to be distributed to all youth interested in participating in the study.

Youth interested in participating in the study were asked to have the form signed by a legal guardian and returned to the researcher before taking part in any research activities. However it proved very difficult to have the forms signed and returned, therefore for some youth, Fusion staff members obtained oral consent from parent or guardian by phone.

Keeping in mind that it is the youth who should have the final say regarding their participation in a study of this nature, the consent forms also included a space for youth to sign, indicating that they had read and understood the letter of information, including all of their rights as research participants, and were willing to participate in the study. In this way, I hope to have given youth a voice in their participation in the study, ensuring that all participants were actively interested and engaged throughout the research process.
When designing research methodologies for a youth study, it is important to make informed decisions on what methods are most likely to engage youth and collect the best responses. Qualitative interviews have been found to be an extremely effective research method in youth studies because they give youth a voice and an opportunity to express their experiences and concerns (Heath, et al, 2009; Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

These interviews may be completed individually or in a group format such as a focus group. A group setting often makes youth feel more at ease because they can discuss issues amongst themselves and the researcher takes a backseat to the proceedings, acting more as a facilitator than a leader of the discussion (Heath, et al., 2009; Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Palys, 1997).

Finally, the researcher must always remember that location is very important when conducting research with youth. As Heath, et al. (2009) argue, “physical space is rarely neutral” (p93) and can give an advantage or disadvantage to one party. When researching youth it is important to remember to stay in spaces where youth feel safe and comfortable enough to open up to a stranger who may be asking questions of a personal nature (Heath, et al., 2009).

In this study, I focused primarily on qualitative interviews, using both group and individual settings to collect data. Within the group interview settings I used task-centered methods with an emphasis on visualization and narrative techniques. This helped me to engage youth and encourage them to share their stories and experiences. These methods will be discussed in greater details further on in this chapter.
I decided to focus on qualitative interviews for this study because of the phenomenological nature of this study. I am interested in learning, from a youth perspective, more about the nature of the relationship between youth and youth and after-school programs. These methods allowed me to build a better relationship with the youth participants, thereby enabling me to explore issues in-depth and at-length which was necessary to meet the objectives of this study.

All research was conducted at the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre as the primary location to ensure that the researcher and the study were easily accessible to youth participants.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

I started my data collection process with three informal visits to the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre where I interacted with staff and youth during the course of normal, day-to-day activities at the Centre. During the second of these visits I also attended the regular Fusion staff meeting where I was more formally introduced to staff by the manager and had the opportunity to present my project to staff and to enlist their help in recruiting youth participants for the project.

Due to my project’s focus on the youths’ point of view, I do not count these site visits as formal data collection. However they proved invaluable in providing me with context for my research and helping me to improve my understanding of the Fusion Youth Centre and the youth experience at the Centre. These visits were also an ideal time to establish good
relations with staff who were an excellent source of assistance and resources when setting up the research and recruiting participants.

As mentioned above, I used three main research methods for the collection of data:

- Group Workshops (using task-centered techniques)
- Individual In-depth Interviews
- Validation Focus Group

**Group Workshops**

Workshops are similar to focus groups in their group nature and focus on interaction. I chose to use workshops for two reasons. First, I felt that the youth participants would feel more comfortable in a group setting and more willing to share their thoughts and ideas (Eder & Fingerson, 2001; Heath, et al., 2009).

Second, because I was working with youth aged fourteen to eighteen I felt it was important to make my research methods as interactive as possible in order to keep youth interested and engaged. The workshops emphasized task-centered activities which I hoped would give youth participants more control over the research process (Heath, et al, 2009).

Workshops provided a good medium for these types of activities (Heath, et al., 2009; Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). Within the group workshops I employed three different data collection methods:

1. Visual Mapping Exercise;
2. Visualization in Participatory Programmes;
3. Most Significant Change Technique.

*Visual Mapping Exercise*

When running group workshops it is always important to begin with a general introductory or ice breaker activity. This signals the beginning of the workshop and helps to energize participants and ensure that they are engaged (UNICEF Bangladesh, 1993).

In the case of my project, most participants already knew one another since they had previously interacted with each other in the centre. Therefore I decided to forgo an introduction exercise (I personally introduced myself to each participant and used nametags to ensure that I was able to address each participant by name) and use a visual mapping exercise as a warm up and to focus participants on the topic of the study.

For the visual mapping exercise I provided a floor plan of the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre and dot stickers in four different colours. I asked the participants:

“*When you come to Fusion, where do you like to spend your time?***

*Figure 3: Visual Mapping Exercise*
Each participant was given four different coloured stickers and was asked to indicate their favourite areas at the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in order of preference. Pens were also provided so that they could note what exactly about those rooms they liked (for example, if they placed a dot in the gym, they could note “fitness program” or “pick-up basketball”). During the course of this exercise, it was pointed out that the map was slightly out of date. Youth were also allowed to amend the map as they saw fit.

This activity was very effective at setting the tone of the workshop, ensuring that participants felt that the workshop was unintimidating and fun.

Visualization in Participatory Programmes

Visual research methods are one way of appealing to young people’s high levels of visual literacy as well as engaging youth and keeping them interested in the research process (Health, et al., 2009). There are several advantages to using visual methods, they include (Heath, et al., 2009; FAO, n.d.):

1. People constantly use visual images to interpret their lives and to articulate everyday realities;
2. Visual methods are effective for exploring potentially sensitive issues; and
3. Visual methods can help to prevent the researcher from imposing their own point-of-view on participants and allows participants to generate their own thoughts and ideas more freely.

For my study, I chose to use Visualization in Participatory Programmes (VIPP), sometimes called Visualization in Participatory Processes.
VIPP involves supplying participants with multi-coloured pieces of paper (sometimes in different shapes and sizes) and markers and asking them to write their ideas on the cards. The cards are colour coded, so each colour refers to a specific question or topic provided by the researcher. The cards are shuffled to hide the identity of their authors and then sorted into categories and ranked by participants. Participants then discuss the ideas presented, debate their arrangement and organization, moving cards around as necessary to reflect their discussion (UNICEF, Bangladesh, 1993; FAO, n.d.).

This is an effective technique because it places an emphasis on capturing ideas from all participants, thereby encouraging less talkative individuals, or individuals who do not enjoy discussion-based activities, to participate and not allowing more dominant personalities to monopolize the discussion (UNICEF Bangladesh, 1993; FAO, n.d.; Heath, et al, 2009). VIPP is also effective because it takes the attention away from the researcher and focuses it on the youth and the task at hand (Heath, et al, 2009).

Facilitation is a key aspect of VIPP because interaction between participants is critical to the success of this exercise (UNICEF, Bangladesh, 1993). One advantage to VIPP is that it is easily modified to suit the specific conditions under which the research project is taking place (for example the place, culture, age of participants) (UNICEF, Bangladesh, 1993; FAO, n.d.).

When using VIPP, I posed four questions to participants:

1. Why do youth come to Fusion?
2. What do youth bring to Fusion?
3. How do youth benefit from coming to Fusion?
4. How does Fusion affect the lives out youth outside of the Centre?

In general, the youth found this activity engaging and were very eager to participate. Initially they reacted with a flurry of activity and ideas; however some questions proved more difficult than others. Questions one and three were the easiest for youth to understand and respond to. However questions two and four were more difficult for the youth to understand and more prompting was required from the facilitators to help youth engage and respond. Some topics generated intense interest and discussion, for example discussion around how youth felt stereotyped in the community.

It was also observed that some participants were unwilling to write down their answers. They were active contributors to the activity but relied on other youth, or the facilitators to record their ideas. This caused some disorganization because many ideas presented were not recorded right away and the facilitators had to ask some youth to act as scribes to ensure that all ideas were captured.

In this activity, it was also important that the youth be active participants not just in the generation of ideas but also in the interpretation of the findings (Heath, et al., 2009). Therefore when the generation of new responses began to slow down the youth were asked to sort and categorize their ideas, identifying the main themes that they observed. This was the most difficult part of this exercise. Grouping some like ideas was easy enough but participants struggled to come up with themes and categories for the ideas that they had generated. Facilitators prompted respondents to form categories but this seemed to bias the process and was shortly abandoned in order to maintain the integrity of the study.
**Most Significant Change Technique**

Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is a participatory monitoring and evaluation tool that asks participants to write or record their most significant change stories. The stories are then collected, reviewed, sorted and ranked by the researcher before being disseminated to relevant stakeholders (Dart & Davies, 2005).

MSC uses narrative data collection methods which are effective because they explore how individuals make sense of their own lives through the stories they tell about themselves (Heath, et al., 2009). The stories that people tell also tend to focus on critical moments, which makes them a good tool for capturing incidences of change and transition (Health, et al, 2009). It is also effective because it allows participants to identify issues that are important to them, not just respond to topics introduced by the researcher (Heath, et al., 2009).
McLintock (2004) identifies five main advantages of storytelling as a part of narrative research methods (p2):

1. Storytelling lends itself to participatory processes;
2. Stories can be used to focus on particular interventions;
3. Stories can be systematically gathered and verified;
4. Narrative data can be analyzed using existing conceptual frameworks or assessed for emergent themes; and
5. Narrative processes can be integrated into ongoing organizational processes.

The MSC technique focuses storytelling on specific domains of change that are of interest to the researcher and makes use of the perspectives of different stakeholders in a way that encourages discussion and analysis rather than argument (Dart & Davies, 2005). In this way, MSC is a continuous process of searching for significant outcomes and then deliberating on the value of these outcomes in a way that encourages participants to think deeply about their values and the values of the organization (Dart & Davies, 2005).

I selected MSC as a method for my research project because it allowed youth participants to tell their own stories in their own words. It is also a method that prevented me from providing too much direction to the participants and therefore influencing the types of stories that they told.

When introducing the MSC activity during the workshop, I started with an open question:

“Looking back on your time at Fusion, tell me about a time that something significant happened to you or someone you know.”
Participants also had the option of choosing another theme around which to write their story if they wanted to. One potential drawback to this method is that while it allows youth to explore their own experiences, putting themselves at the centre of the story sometimes trivializes external factors, either because they are not seen as important or because the storyteller is not aware of them (Heath, et al, 2009).

When writing the stories, I asked all participants to include a title, information about the person/people in the story, a description of the events and an explanation of the significance of the story. Youth were also given a variety of methods through which to tell their story including typing it on a computer, writing it by hand, telling it to a facilitator to be written, recording it on a recording device or doing a drawing that represented their MSC. Most elected to type their stories, some wrote it by hand and one person chose to record it.

This was a difficult activity for many participants because some individuals are naturally more adept storytellers than others (Heath, et al, 2009). While some started writing right away other struggled to think of a significant moment during their time at Fusion. With help from facilitators most were able to think of a moment that was important to them. Four participants elected to write that they had experienced no significant change while coming to Fusion. It is recognized that this activity may have focused attention on participants who are naturally better storytellers and who could develop a story over those who struggle to make sense of their experiences in a narrative fashion (Heath, et al., 2009).

However many of the completed stories that were collected were very meaningful and highlighted a variety of youths’ experiences at Fusion from success in programs, enjoyment
of activities and positive and negative experiences with staff. To view the stories please refer to Appendix Three.

**Individual, In-depth Interviews**

I chose to follow up the group workshops with individual in-depth interviews to allow myself the opportunity to explore issues that were raised during the workshops in a more in-depth and detailed fashion and to interact one-on-one with some of the youth who participated in the study (Palys, 1997; Denscombe, 2007). In-depth interviews are particularly effective when exploring individuals’ thoughts, behaviours and perspectives; especially when some potential participants may feel excluded or uncomfortable discussing certain topics in group settings (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Qualitative interviews are a very popular method among youth researchers because it is an opportunity for young people to discuss their ideas and perspectives one-on-one with the researcher without worrying about reaction from their peers or authority figures (Health, et al., 2009).

However in-depth interviews can also be time-intensive and vulnerable to bias by the researcher (Boyce & Neale, 2006). To mitigate these drawbacks, the interviews used in this study were semi-structured, using a basic interview guide informed by a clear list of the issues I wanted each of the interviewees to address (Denscombe, 2007; Heath, et al., 2009). The questions were open-ended, allowing participants to develop their own ideas and, to a limited extent, direct the interview (Denscombe, 2007se). For a copy of the interview guide, please see Appendix Four.
Combining the group interviews with individual interviews is an effective strategy when researching youth because it allows participants to develop ideas collectively with the support of their peers and then continue to advance these ideas with the researcher in a space where they experience no peer pressure (Eder & Fingerson, 2001).

In the course of this project, I conducted eleven interviews with twelve youth from the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre. The individual interviews were completed in three rounds, I completed five interviews in the first round, four in the second and two in the third. After each round I would review the interview transcripts and adjust the questions as necessary in order to fill any gaps I had identified or to add follow up questions where I deemed it necessary. Therefore the interview process was reflective, each stage building on the next in order to build a complete picture of the youths’ experiences and ideas on the topics presented.

It was very interesting to see the differences in youth between the group workshops and individual interviews. Some who were very extroverted and confident during the workshops appeared much more nervous and reserved during the interviews. Others who were quiet or seemed distracted by their peers during the workshops were much more focused in the interviews and had a lot to say.

While I tried to keep a uniform process for the interviews, it was necessary for me to be responsive to the needs of youth participants in order to ensure that they were comfortable with the methods and the research process. Therefore one interview was done with two respondents because they asked to do the interview together, one was conducted with a Fusion staff member present because it made the youth more comfortable and one was
completed via email because the youths expressed an interest in participating in an interview and that was the most convenient format for them.

**Validation Focus Group**

Focus groups are essentially a group version of the individual interview, used to bring a group of participants together to discuss one or several issues of interest to the researcher (Palys, 1997; Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Morgan, 1996).

The validation focus group was held after I had completed the data analysis and written a draft of the findings. I returned to Fusion with these materials to discuss their accuracy and merit with participants. This was extremely important as it contributed to a sense of youth ownership over the research project as well as helping me, the researcher, to see and understand alternative interpretations of the data I collected and to generate more findings and research questions that could be explored in future projects (Heath, et al., 2009; Palys, 1997).

Focus groups are effective because they allow participants to discuss issues amongst themselves, thereby decreasing the power of the researcher while allowing the researcher to understand the rationale behind the different points of view (Denscombe, 2007; Health, et al., 2009; Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Morgan, 1996). Focus groups can also be less intimidating to youth because of the emphasis on group interaction, rather than on answering questions posed by the researcher (Health, et al., 2009; Bagnoli & Clark, 2010).

I completed one validation focus group which was attended by only four participants. Participation in this final focus group was voluntary and there were not that many youth
who were interested in learning more about the study once it was completed. However these four were interested so the validation focus group was completed. I started the focus group by thanking participants for their participation in the study and then provided a brief overview of the study's findings and how I had decided to organize them in Chapter Four:

1. The Youth Experience in Ingersoll;
2. Understanding how Fusion programs contribute to youth development;
3. Changing feelings of inclusion and exclusion;
4. Connections.

I then asked youth if they had any feedback or comments on the research findings or process.

As a group we also completed a brief drawing exercise to summarize the study findings. I asked youth to draw pictures representing why they come to Fusion, what makes Fusion's programs important, what makes Fusion a youth-friendly environment and what the connections formed at Fusion are significant.

This was an effective way of summarizing the main findings of the study while engaging youth in an active and task-centered activity. During the activity we discussed their drawings and what they symbolized and related these back to the findings of the study.

After completing the drawing activity there was further discussion about the study and I asked their opinion on topics for future research. They provided two potential topics that are summarized in Chapter Five.
The validation focus group was also an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the research process as a whole and to give feedback to the researcher regarding the methods they found most effective, the methods they found less effective and the researcher’s presence at the youth centre. Overall the youth who participated in the study were
interested in the process and gave favourable feedback. Two even expressed an interest in reading the finished product when it was made available.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

After each field visit, I sat down to transcribe the information I had collected. For the data collected in the workshops, the VIPP activity was analyzed during the workshops by the youth and I felt it was important to look at the MSC stories as complete entities, rather than deconstructing them. Therefore I drew the main themes from both the VIPP activity (as identified by the youth) and the MSC stories and used these themes to develop the interview questions.

The interviews proved much more complicated. There were so many different ideas, conflicting opinions and perspectives that I was temporarily overwhelmed by the data and found it difficult to organize and make any sense of.

During the transcription process I carefully listened to each interview several times. Completing the transcriptions myself was very useful because it meant I was very familiar with the content of each. When I had finished transcribing the interviews I went back to the literature to review the main themes and ideas identified there. I also revisited and refined my conceptual framework which was helpful in understanding the data. After reviewing the data I went back to the transcripts, reading through each several more times to ensure that I was very familiar with the content and building a mental list of potential themes that I saw emerging.
Open coding was the next step I took, going through each interview transcript and identifying important words or themes in the text. Upon completion of this exercise, I found myself with a list of almost 400 words/themes that I had enthusiastically and perhaps overly-comprehensively identified. I then used the software NVIVO to sort through this list, grouping like codes together and creating families of codes.

Once the list was of a more manageable size I used my analytical framework (see Appendix Five) to screen the codes through my research objectives. This was a useful way to sort codes, contextualize them within the research objectives and discard some of the codes that I had identified so enthusiastically but that were not necessarily relevant to my research.

Throughout the data analysis process it was important to me to do my best to maintain the integrity of the youths' voices and stories. I was hesitant to deconstruct the data too much in case I lost the meaning of what they were telling me. After all, this research study emphasized the narratives of youth, not my interpretations of these narratives. Therefore I wanted my research and analysis to be representative of the youth.

**SUMMARY**

This study took a phenomenological approach to the exploration of the impacts of afterschool programs in a small community. Using the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre as a case study, the study used various qualitative research methods to engage youth in order to understand, from their perspective, the role afterschool programs like Fusion play in their lives. I started with group workshops to understand what issues
were important to the youth. I also collected most significant change stories to gain insight into the youth experience at Fusion.

Based on the findings of the workshops I developed interview questions to investigate the issues flagged by youth as important in greater depth. Seventeen youth participated in the workshops and twelve youth completed interviews. I coded the interviews individually, identifying the main themes in the data. Once the analysis was completed and the preliminary findings and discussion had been written, I returned to Fusion to complete a validation focus group, presenting youth with the findings from the project to ensure that the findings were accurate and truly represented youths’ experiences.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings that emerged from the study. I begin with an overview of the themes that emerged in the group workshops held early on in the project. The themes that emerged in the workshops were recorded and used to refine the questions used in the interviews.

The interviews proved to be a very rich source of data. I was pleasantly surprised at how open the youth participants were about talking to me and sharing their stories. There is always the risk that participants will feel hesitant or unwilling to talk to someone who is essentially a stranger but I found that the youth responded very well to the questions and shared their stories and experiences very enthusiastically.

I have included excerpts from the interviews to support and illustrate my findings in this chapter. However because of the small sample size used in this study and the small community that I worked with at Fusion, no personal identifiers have been included to indicate who made the comment. This is to protect, as much as possible, the privacy and confidentiality of the participants of this study. For the same reasons, Fusion staff who are mentioned in the stories are represented by their first initial.

In the interviews I asked a range of questions covering topics including: what it is like to be a teenager in Ingersoll; how youth feel they benefit from coming to Fusion; why youth might feel a sense of belonging while at Fusion; what makes a good Fusion staff member; the role of afterschool programs like Fusion in towns like Ingersoll; and what recommendations youth had for the Centre. Participants answered in narrative form with
prompting from the researcher. The full interview schedule has been included in Appendix Four.

A total of nineteen youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen participated in this study, three were female and sixteen were male. Participation was voluntary and Fusion staff assisted with the recruitment process. Seventeen youth initially participated in the workshops and all of these youth were invited to complete an interview. Two additional youth who were unavailable for the workshops expressed an interest in participating in the study and were therefore included in the interviews. Some youth were born in Ingersoll while others had moved there more recently. Several have been coming to Fusion since it opened in February 2006; the most recent had been coming to Fusion for two years. Their plans ranged from pursuing careers in music to postsecondary degrees in astrophysics and they all had strong opinions about the role of Fusion and the impact that it had on their lives and in their communities.

This chapter divides the findings into four sections, aligned with the study’s research objectives:

1. Describe the youth experience in Ingersoll.
2. Understand how Fusion programs contribute to youth development.
3. Understand how Fusion changes youth’s experiences of inclusion and exclusion.
4. Understand the relationships formed at Fusion and why they are important to youth development.

Findings from the workshops have been included in Appendix Two.
The first section, *The Youth Experience in Ingersoll*, highlights how youth feel about being a teenager and growing up in Ingersoll including how they feel they are perceived by the community. They spoke of their experiences growing up in Ingersoll, interacting with their peers and with community members as well as issues at school. Growing up in a small town seemed to create common experiences for most or all of them that were reflected in their responses. Some of these experiences are common to all youth, wherever they grow up: making friends, seeking to create an identity for yourself and finding out what you are good at. Others were more specific to Ingersoll, for example the availability and accessibility of programs and services and the ability to visit other urban centres close by.

The second section, *Understanding how Fusion programs contribute to youth development*, looks at the benefits that come from having a centre like Fusion in the community. Youth were generally very appreciative of Fusion and highly valued the programs that the Centre offers. When discussing how they benefit from the programs they talked about developing skills for future careers as well as becoming more confident or building self-esteem. Learning, knowledge and access to resources were reported as key benefits of the programs although it was interesting to note that not all youth participate. While all of the youth spoke highly of the programs, some admitted to not using them because of a lack of interest or because they didn’t feel like they had enough talent or skill.

The third section, *Changing Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion*, explores how Fusion changes youths’ feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Ideas of inclusion and exclusion were dominant in much of the discussion as youth described how they felt in the community, at school and in Fusion. Youths’ contributions to Fusion were a large part of responses in this
category and contributing gave many youth a sense of inclusion in the Fusion community. There was an underlying theme of change in this category as well, as youth discussed changing attitudes and opinions, both theirs and in the community as well. The concept of a youth-friendly community was also interesting to explore with youth. It was sometimes a struggle to define what makes Fusion a youth-friendly environment or what is a youth-friendly community, but it was an idea that I was keen to follow up on.

Finally, the fourth section, Connections, highlights the idea of connections formed within Fusion. This was a theme that emerged in the workshops as youth discussed the importance of friends and Fusion staff in their lives. There were many different types of connections to be described in the discussions and it soon became apparent that these were a key aspect of Fusion’s contributions to youth development and capacity building. Youth placed a high value on these connections, repeatedly emphasizing how a peer or staff member had changed their lives for the better. The idea of loss is also discussed in this section as youth talk about how they feel about friends and staff leaving Fusion and how they think they will feel when they turn 19 and can no longer return to the Centre.

It should be noted in the discussion about judgement and stereotypes within the community that this study collected data only from youth and focused on their perceptions. No comments were solicited from store owners, community members or Fusion staff. These findings are not meant to be presented as objective truths but rather as true from the youth perspective.

I wish that I could include all the information that I collected in my findings, however that would make for long and probably boring reading. So I’ve included those findings that I
found most important and that correspond best to my research objectives. I also included some of the most significant change stories in this section to highlight both the findings and the stories themselves. No indicators are included in the stories or quotes in order to protect the identities of the youth who wrote them. Any Fusion staff member mentioned in the stories or quotes are identified only by an initial. The quotes preceding or following the stories are not necessarily by the same author, the stories were simply placed there because they fit with the theme being discussed. I did not edit any of the stories except to remove any personal information; they are presented as written by their authors.

THE YOUTH EXPERIENCE IN INGERSOLL

In this section I look at findings from the first two of my research questions:

- What is it like to be a youth in Ingersoll?
- Why do youth come to Fusion?

The Youth Experience in Ingersoll

Youth had a lot to say about what it was like being a teenager in Ingersoll, usually preceded by a loud exhalation or nervous laugh. One of the dominant themes that emerged when youth discussed what it was like to be a teenager in Ingersoll was the idea of boredom and a lack of options. Almost all of the youth indicated that they felt that Ingersoll was a small town that lacked youth-centered activities and that they often felt that they had nothing to do, or a very limited number of options besides school, Fusion and hanging out at home:

Towns like Ingersoll are so small and there's nothing else to do.
Many youth who participated in the study responded that they found little to like about growing up or living in Ingersoll as teenagers. Of the eleven youth interviewed only one had an answer to the question: “What are some of the good things about being a teenager in Ingersoll”, that wasn’t related to Fusion. Most youth either could not think of an answer or simply said that they didn’t like growing up there.

Researcher: Tell me about some of the good things about being a teenager in Ingersoll?

I don’t know, we can still come to Fusion I guess.

I don’t know…I’d say Fusion because that’s like the only thing.

I grew up here and stuff but I don’t really, I guess you could say, “like” Ingersoll.

The one youth who was able to find something good about Ingersoll talked about the advantages of living in small town. These advantages included knowing your neighbours and people in your community, and being able to walk anywhere in town:

Most small towns, it’s just like you pretty much know everyone and it’s kind of like you know where everything is like the back of your hand...And I can walk from, I live across town, and I can walk from my house to here in ten minutes.

Other activities available in Ingersoll include the bowling alley, mini golf and community centre with a pool (Town of Ingersoll, 2008). However while youth acknowledged that these facilities exist they did not seem to find them appealing or appropriate. When pressed on this issue they cited cost and distance as barriers.

As one youth said about the community centre, while pointing out the window:

Well there is one, but it’s waaaay over there.
It was interesting that this distance was a barrier to some youth while other considered the town to be very walkable. One factor in this is certainly personal preference and time. Some individuals simply do not see it as worth it to walk that far to go to the community centre. Or if youth feel that they are very busy they might not feel they have to time to walk across town, whereas because Fusion is located downtown it is more convenient. Another factor noted by some of the youth is that Ingersoll lacks a public transit system. Therefore if they are not old enough to drive or do not have access to a car, walking or taking a taxi are their only options.

Cost was another barrier identified by youth. The fact that you would have to pay each time to go swimming, bowling or golfing made these activities feel inaccessible to many youth. Some noted that prices for activities like bowling had recently increased which discouraged them from using these facilities. Other youth indicated that these activities became boring either because they did not have friends who were interested in doing the activities with them or because they found them to be the same every time they went and so lost interest:

It gets so repetitive and boring...going to the bowling alley, or to the golf course, or just swimming in general

Another contributing factor to the finding that youth feel they lack recreational options is that they reported feeling judged or stereotyped when out in the community. The idea of stereotypes based on age was a widespread among many participants, many of whom felt that they were treated differently because of their age and that community members did not like to see youth hanging out in public spaces:
When a group of youth are hanging out in a park or something, people are automatically going to think: “Oh look, they’re probably passing a joint or something”.

Many youth also reported feeling unwelcome in local shops. They reported that they felt like they were followed while shopping and that if they stayed in one store or café too long they were asked to leave.

Some youth found this treatment to be really disturbing and frustrating:

I hate it. I hate the stereotype because people look at me for being my age and I hate it.

While others did admit that they are not always on their best behaviour when out trying to have fun:

There’s nothing else to do except find somewhere else that we can hang out which is normally like a store and we goof around and throw things on the floor and fight with swords and, you know, teenager stuff.

One youth commented on the topic of youth behaviour specifically, arguing that youth are often responsible for how they are treated in the community. This individual expressed frustration that some youth did not seem to know when it was appropriate to act like a kid and when to try and act more mature:

I mean, you can be rude and immature with your friends but not out in public.

They felt that this behaviour and the resulting stereotyping of youth in the community prevented them from finding new employment opportunities:

Right now, I’ve found that not a lot of places are hiring, especially teenagers. And I’m thinking it’s because of some of the ones that act like idiots out in public and stuff like that.
Group mentalities were another finding from the study. One youth discussed how when they find themselves in groups it is easy to forget accountability and to get caught up in having fun without necessarily thinking about consequences or ramifications:

They’ll call up their friends, they’ll walk around town and this gang mentality pops up where you’re in a group of people. If something happens there’s not one person to blame, there’s a bunch of people and you can’t, people think you can’t blame a bunch of people for doing things. So they’re prone to go around and...break something.

Despite this provocation, there was a strong feeling that youth were targeted within the community because of their age and that youth were held responsible for the actions of a few:

When it comes to like store owners, they think that every kid is like a trouble-maker. I don’t know why...Like, I can’t go in [local coffee shop] without the manager like looking at me awkwardly. And I’ve never done anything bad.

And they often felt like they were treated differently from their adult counterparts and that this was unfair:

If you go into a store or restaurant we get stereotyped...Cause they always like tell us to leave our backpacks at the front but an adult with a backpack will walk in and they don’t say anything.

Another issue facing youth living in Ingersoll is the easy availability of drugs and the pressure to fit in. Many of the youth who participated in the survey pointed out that drugs had a pervasive presence in Ingersoll and were a constant challenge. Fusion was described as a place where they felt safe from these pressures.

Cause Ingersoll’s small, and besides not being able to do anything and besides just giving a place for kids to go, it does get them off like, I don’t know, like the
bad sides of Ingersoll. Like with drugs and stuff. It gets them away from that and like it gives them a place to feel safe and accepted.

This peer pressure was also discussed in other areas of youths’ lives including interpersonal relationships. Several youth participants mentioned drama as a significant challenge in their lives. When questioned about what drama is and what it entails they spoke at length of the challenges of living in a small town where everyone knows each other, where privacy is sometimes difficult to maintain and where reality is often shaped by rumours over facts:

The smallest thing can cause the biggest drama. Like being friends with someone who everybody's like: “that person’s not cool”…and someone makes a huge commotion about it and it just gets everywhere.

Although some youth did cite this as a benefit to living in a small town like Ingersoll because it means you know your neighbours and because it is sometimes easier to connect with people when you know a little bit about them from what people are saying. Although they acknowledged that you cannot always trust what other people say:

You kind of know a little bit more about people...if you don’t know the person directly, you know about them, at least someone you know will probably know a little bit about them. Whether it’s true or not...

Finally, another source of drama reported by youth was the existence of cliques. Cliques, as discussed in the literature review, are a hierarchical group of people who define the group including certain individuals and excluding others (Adler & Adler, 1995). And while youth identified cliques and social hierarchy in general as problematic they recognized that these groups existed in Fusion as well. However there was an interesting note that Fusion cliques are sometime different from cliques outside of the Youth Centre and that just coming to Fusion is often enough to gain a person admittance to the “Fusion clique”:
In school you have your like little cliques, and I guess here [Fusion] you still have the cliques, but because you come to Fusion you're part of the Fusion clique.

**Motivations for Coming to Fusion**

Youth come to Fusion for many reasons, most related to their experiences, described above, as youth in Ingersoll. First, many youth mentioned that Fusion is very conveniently located near Ingersoll’s downtown core and therefore easy to reach after school or on weekends. They also noted that it is very accessible to youth on restricted budgets because the membership fee is only five dollars and you only have to pay once, unlike other recreational facilities in town:

> Here you pay five dollars for a membership and you can come whenever you want for free.

As described above, many youth reported that they are bored and feel that they have nowhere to hang out besides at home. Fusion then, is a place to go where they can feel comfortable and hang out with friends:

> [Fusion] gives you a place to hang out with your friends without getting into trouble.

Related to this idea of a place to go is the concept of an escape from other places or people. Several of the youth talked about how Fusion is a place to go when they want to get away from home or from a situation that they find stressful:

> If I’m disagreeing with my parents at home I usually just come down here to get away from them.

Youth also come to Fusion to connect with friends, to make new friends and to take advantage of support networks made up of peers and Fusion staff. Connections was a very
important aspect of why youth come to Fusion but also how youth benefit from coming to Fusion and so will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

**FUSION PROGRAMS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

This section explores findings related to my third and fourth research questions:

- What are Fusion programs important?
- What skills and competencies do youth gain from participating in Fusion programs?

**Importance of Fusion Programs**

Youth indicated that Fusion contributed to their personal development by providing them with different programs to learn, to connect and to build their self-esteem. Fusion offers many different programs and activities (see Appendix One for Fusion’s 2012 program calendar). Eleven of the twelve participants mentioned programs when talking about how they benefit from coming to Fusion. Many youth see these programs as an opportunity to explore areas that they had not had the opportunity to engage in previously:

> It allowed me to explore areas of interest and provided me with some insight into what I may want to do for a career.

Participating in Fusion programs also helped build youths’ self-esteem. Specifically, participating in programs and activities was linked with gaining skills which changed how individuals perceived themselves and how they were perceived by others:

> Instead of being “that loser kid that does all the tech stuff”, I’m “that awesome kid that does all the tech stuff”.


Fusion programs also helped youth build their confidence in themselves by giving them the opportunity to develop skills and to use those skills in front of their peers. Some youth talked about how they now have the confidence to do things that they never did before:

I used to never sing in front of anybody but now I record.

Youth also indicated that they learned responsibility by participating in programs because while they can use the resources and participate in the activities, they are also expected to be responsible and take care of the centre. For example, Fusion runs different meal programs, offering free or cheap dinners for youth. The programs are run by staff members and in exchange for helping to cook, clean or serve youth receive a free meal:

Like, you can help with meals and stuff to get a meal. And like after you have to do the dishes together. Like, we’re expected to keep it clean like we would our own house. And, I don’t know, it’s just taught us responsibility of “yes, we can do what we want, but they have expectations that we take care of it”.

Finally, freedom was a key aspect of Fusion’s programs; many youth responded that they found Fusion’s programs effective and learned a lot because they are optional. Youth have the choice to participate or not, and there is no one forcing them to do certain activities or to commit to any activity for longer than they want to. They indicated that this freedom to choose activities also makes the activities more enjoyable which helps them learn:

They’re not as strict about what you have to do. It’s by choice and you get to enjoy it more because you’re not forced to do it. It’s all an option (emphasis in original transcript).

In some cases, having the freedom to choose activities also meant that youth found that they developed new attitudes towards learning. Whereas in school they sometimes felt
forced to learn certain things, at Fusion these same activities were viewed as opportunities instead of requirements and therefore greeted with much more enthusiasm:

I think it’s successful because of the staff that we have and the programs that we have. Because [at Fusion], it’s enjoyable for us and everything we do may be enjoyable but we’re learning a new skill at the same time...Which I think is a really clever way of tricking us to learn. Cause for music at school none of us are like: “Oh yeah, I want to sing, I want to learn the guitar, I want to do this”. But we come to Fusion and it’s like: “Oh I can get drum lessons here! I can learn to sing! I can do this really?” Or like art, people complain about art at school but they come to Fusion and get S to teach them different things.

One aspect in which almost all of the youth participants indicated that they benefited from Fusion programs was how they prevent youth from engaging in other, riskier activities such as drugs and crime. Ten out of the eleven interviews responded that because they can participate in Fusion programs they felt they felt less pressure to be outside engaging in riskier activities:

Instead of being bored and going around breaking things with their friends, they get bored, come here, and find something better to do, more productive.

**Skills and competencies gained through participation in Fusion programs**

While participating in Fusion’s diverse programs, youth indicated that they gained many new skills. Some of these they said were purely for fun or out of interest. Other skills learned at Fusion include life skills such as cooking, as described in the meal programs above; youth are often invited to cook and prepare meals with staff, something that many indicated they found very useful.
Some youth noted that the skills they learned while participating in programs at Fusion were important because they helped them develop abilities and competencies that will help them in their future careers:

I do it because I like it a lot. I just love doing it. But it’s also stuff that I can take away and what not for future endeavors. Like, for example the music room. I just like watching D do all the mixing and stuff because that’s something I’m really interested in doing in the future. So I figure I can learn here, I can take it away…and then enhance later on, rather than learn all of it later on.

One youth used skills learned at Fusion to open his/her own business which they found to be a very eye-opening experience:
Most Significant Change Story

I had always been involved with Fusion. About 2 years ago my life changed for the better. There was the business program making its debut at Fusion. The staff member at the time had brought in someone from the Small Business Enterprise Centre in Woodstock to do a presentation on a ministry program called Summer Company. This program was to get youth involved in being entrepreneurs and provided them with a grant of $3000.

After the presentation, I went home and had this idea swirling and bubbling in my head. My idea was to open a computer repair company. I had always been interested in technology and computers. Later on, I got in touch with the coordinator of the business program. A staff that was recently hired was now in charge of the business skills development program named L. She helped me through the steps of writing my application and business plan for the grant. I was constantly working on my business plan and conducting my market research. She was a tremendous help towards this process.

I then put my application through the nearest business centre (Woodstock) and the manager had me come in for an interview and screening process. She then reviewed my application and business plan and gave her recommendations. After the revisions, she sent her recommendation to the province. After a couple weeks later, I received my e-mail of acceptance.

This was a huge self-confidence booster for me. Before this point, I was a very shy and quiet individual. I was struggling with not having regular part time employment. It was so exciting, I actually got to own my company and make my own money. My life had been changed forever! It has been a fulfilling, rewarding and extraordinary experience.

Some skills, such as skills related to technology were noted to be significant because technology will be such a large part of their future that it's important that they become
comfortable using technology now. For some, Fusion provides an opportunity to access equipment, such as cameras and computers and software, such as Photoshop, that they do not have access to elsewhere. One program offered by Fusion is RebuildIT, which teaches youth how computers operate, how to take them apart and put them back together and how to build their own units:

I’ve learned a lot of stuff through the programs, like the RebuildIT program. I’ve learned almost everything I know about computers in there. So that’s been a very positive change...It gets me more in the know-how and gets me more set up for a job in the future (emphasis in original transcript).

Finally, participating in Fusion programs often gives youth opportunities to develop public speaking and presentation skills. Many youth replied that they participated in programs such as Fusion TV and the new radio booth which they found very useful because it helped to develop new skills as well as build confidence:

We partner with Heart FM in Woodstock and it gives us a good opportunity to broadcast live here and see how it feels...It’s pretty cool.

While Fusion programs are identified as important by all of the youth who participated in the study, it was also significant that some youth also responded that they didn’t participate in any of the programs. Reasons for this included lack of interest and the perceived absence of any skills to build on. It is interesting that that while they acknowledge the importance and usefulness of these programs, some youth do not feel the need to participate.

Many of these youth emphasized Fusion’s importance as a place to hang out, a place to feel safe and be with friends rather than a place to develop new skills. However it is interesting
that many of these youth who claimed not to participate in activities also indicated that they “hung out” in program spaces such as the art room and computer lab.

**CHANGING FEELINGS OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION**

This section explores findings from my fifth and sixth research questions:

- What do youth contribute to Fusion?
- What makes Fusion a youth-friendly environment?

**Youth contributions to the Fusion Youth Centre**

This proved to be a difficult question for many youth to answer. While some answers highlighted concrete things like the stuff they bring with them, I was more interested in the personal attributes that they share with others while using the Centre.

However opinions were mixed about whether or not youth had the influence to change things or contribute to the Centre either within Fusion itself or at the Municipal level. The majority of respondents did feel that they made positive contributions however there were individuals who felt that they were not listened to and that therefore their potential was limited:

> The Town Council doesn’t really listen to us...Neither does [staff] here really. It’s kind of like: “Can I talk to you?” “Yeah okay tomorrow.” You come back tomorrow the same time it’s like: “Hey...can I talk to you?” “No you can’t I’m busy”...So no one really listens to us here [Fusion] or at Town Council.

First, youth noted that they can bring a sense of inclusion to Fusion by welcoming new members and being friendly:
I guess everyone is so used to it that when someone new comes along they’re just nice to them automatically. Which makes them feel more accepted…And so, just a chain reaction. It’s like a family environment.

Some youth replied that they bring existing social structures to Fusion but that often these structures look different within the youth centre. For example, cliques were described as a source of pressure for youth outside of the centre; however many youth acknowledged the presence of different groups or cliques within Fusion as well. Most responded that these groups looked slightly different, or were made up of different people than cliques at school. Some even went so far as to say that Fusion creates its own clique that by coming to Fusion youth can gain entry into this group:

You come to Fusion, you’re part of the Fusion clique.

It was somewhat unclear if this Fusion clique has influence outside of the centre or it exists only within Fusion. It was also noted that getting along with others is often something they learn to contribute to Fusion:

I think it’s because Fusion has taught us that it’s easier for us all to just get along than to fight and have a bunch of drama: “Oh I don’t like her, I don’t like him”. It’s just easier for us all to get along and it makes Ingersoll a better place.

I found it interesting that this youth recognized that getting along at Fusion also contributes to a better community in Ingersoll.

Many youth related their contributions to Fusion directly to changing feelings of inclusion and exclusion. For example, the ability to contribute something to the centre made some youth feel that they were a larger part of the centre and that they were more accepted and included:
Well I feel like I belong here because I do a lot of work...around here. So like a lot of people know my name, they know who I am, they know: “Oh, this is broken, let’s see if [...] can fix it”. So, I feel like it's a place where I belong and where people know me for who I really am.

These contributions to Fusion also seemed to produce feelings of youth ownership of the centre which was very interesting to observe. This sense of ownership also led to a greater respect for the Centre, its staff and the resources it provided:

I feel like I [belong], mostly because I do a lot of work in RebuildIT for the Centre...A lot of other youth just feel like this is a second home almost. So they feel like a lot of the stuff in part belongs to them too, so they're more respectful of it than other things.

Youth also reported that they contribute to Fusion’s relationship with the community in Ingersoll by participating in community activities such as the Community Clean Up, the Harvest Run and the Santa Claus Parade. These activities are important because, as noted by many youth, Fusion does not always have the best reputation in the community because it concentrates youth in one place:

My parents are definitely among those who think that [Fusion] is a terrible idea. They think it’s just another place for us to go, pass drugs around...get drunk, whatever. But really, the people that are saying that haven't actually come and given it a fair chance. They just automatically assume that youth in a building is a bad idea.

But youth can help to change perceptions about Fusion by how the behave both when they're at Fusion and out in the community:

A lot of people have come through [Fusion] and seen youth not doing bad things and actually doing something, like, not bad. So I guess when they see that they think: “They’re really not that bad after all”.

90
In the community, some youth reported using the lessons learned at Fusion about how others should be treated and applying them in other situations:

We’re all taught at Fusion to be respectful to everybody and treat everybody equally. And outside if we see, if you go to Fusion and you see someone who doesn’t go to Fusion picking on anybody, you’re like: “Whoa, that’s not right, don’t do that”...It teaches you not to be a bystander.

An interesting note with regards to youth behaviour and changing perceptions of Fusion and the youth who use it is that many youth seemed to struggle when linking their actions with possible impacts. It was sometimes difficult for them to see the link between their actions and the contributions they make both to Fusion and the wider community.

**Inclusive Environments**

Fusion creates an inclusive environment in many ways. First as discussed above, many youth emphasized that Fusion was a place to go in a town where they felt that they had few alternatives. They also stressed that at Fusion they had the freedom to choose what activities they wanted to participate in, how long they wanted to participate and how often. Some youth also noted that Fusion is youth-friendly because it is an interesting place to visit. One youth noted that while going swimming or to the bowling alley became boring because they feel these activities are repetitive, Fusion is interesting because it’s always a different experience:

[Fusion] is kind of the one place that isn’t always the same. Cause different staff work different days and like, they have the computer and art room and the music studio and all that.

Other youth talked about how Fusion was a place where they could hang out with their friends where they were free from some of the rules imposed at home:
I got bored at home. And I wasn’t allowed like having many friends. Like here you can have like unlimited friends coming over and at home like you can have like limited friends.

Fusion was also described as youth-friendly because many youth felt that they are not judged or stereotyped as much, or at all, within Fusion like they are outside:

We don’t get stereotyped here as much…But anywhere else we usually do.

The ability to create a safe and positive space for youth was another attribute of youth-friendly that was discussed in the interviews. The small community that uses Fusion was one attribute of a positive environment reported by youth:

You just recognize everyone and feel like it’s a good environment.

A safe environment was another interesting discussion point. When talking about what makes Fusion safe, some youth brought up the safety measures taken inside the building including have a staff member in each room and the security cameras installed all over the building. This supervision made youth feel that people were watching out for them and that there would be help if there was a problem.

The Centre’s safety rules were also seen as positive by most of the youth because they were seen as preventative. Since the rules were in place, there was less of a chance that they would be pressured to do drugs or other illegal activities while at Fusion.

It provides a space for youth to hang out and reduces the threat of them becoming involved with the law and making poor choices.

Some also felt that the rules discouraged youth who did want to use drugs from coming to the Centre:
In my opinion that’s just really stupid: “Yeah, let’s go to a place that’s supervised by staff members in a building that is against that, to do [drugs]”. No, I’d just go and talk to someone at my school and find out oh, this guy, okay, meet him after school, buy it, whatever.

And if they, or someone else, had been doing drugs, many youth recognized that it was safer for them to come to Fusion where there were responsible people to look after them rather than leaving them outside with impaired judgement:

And even if kids like go and get high and come [to Fusion], at least there’s people watching them so they’re not getting caught. They’re still in a safe environment. Whereas if they just go and do that...there’s no one watching them.

Many youth also felt that the rules governing who was allowed into Fusion made the space safer and more positive. Currently youth between the ages of twelve and eighteen are allowed to use Fusion. It was interesting to see how many youth were quite possessive of the Centre, seeing it as a space for youth and not adults. Many responded that they felt it would be inappropriate for older individuals to use the Youth Centre because they are not youth.

I wouldn’t like having like 30 year old coming and chilling with teenagers.

They also reported that sometimes older people can be a negative influence on younger age groups:

That way you don’t get I guess people in their 20s coming in and I guess bullying other people cause they’re bigger, they’re older, what not. And they’d have more access to things like alcohol which people our age can’t have.

Fusion staff members were also cited as part of why Fusion is a youth-friendly environment. However staff were discussed at such length that I have included a section for them below entitled Connections.
CONNECTIONS

This section explores the last three research questions of this project:

- What connections does Fusion facilitate between youth and the community?
- What connections do youth form at Fusion?
- Why are these connections important?

Community connections

Impacts on youths' lives outside of the centre were hard to ascertain. As discussed above, many participants had trouble linking their activities with impacts to Fusion and in the wider community. However there were several common themes that emerged in the discussions on this topic.

Volunteering was a dominant theme that emerged in this category. Fusion offers youth many opportunities for volunteering, both inside the Centre and in community events that Fusion participates in. Many youth said that coming to Fusion encouraged them to get involved and to volunteer with other community organizations and events:

Anything I see I volunteer for now. Since I started coming to Fusion I’m like: “Oh, I can do that, I can volunteer”.

Some said that Fusion encouraged them so see how they can get involved and how they can benefit themselves and their communities:

I also like the opportunity to try out many different programs and also being able to get involved with volunteering opportunities to serve my community.
However many youth did not seem interested in volunteering or changing their communities. When asked how they got involved they simply replied that they were not interested in those types of activities. Other youth responded that they were interested but that they did not feel as though they had the power to change anything:

If my community wants to change, my community will change...I can’t do it by myself obviously.

When asked to describe why they felt that there was nothing they could do, one replied:

I’m not popular so I can’t change the minds of people who don’t like me because I’m underneath of them in the social chain.

However some youth thought that Fusion acted as a link between themselves and the community, empowering youth to ask for change by giving them contact people to talk to who could raise their concerns to appropriate people in the Municipality:

It’s more knowing people around [Fusion], like the staff. If there’s a problem...the staff have a meeting once a week or something and they’ll talk about what’s wrong. And if they have enough youth go to them about a problem they’re having they’ll go to the Town or whatever and the Town will do something about it.

There were mixed feelings about whether or not Fusion made the community friendlier towards youth. Some respondents argued that the community doesn’t really like youth who come to Fusion:

I’ve heard that some people don’t want their kids coming here [Fusion] cause they’ve heard it’s a place for drugs.

And some youth argued that Fusion has in fact improved relationships between youth and the community:
I know a lot of people around that work around the town like love this place [Fusion], they support it fully because they've noticed that youth aren't as like, ganging up and what not as they used to be.

However they responded most youth recognized that there is still a gap between youth and the community that needs to be addressed:

But [Fusion's] actually a really good place and I guess the youth and like the community has kind of a big gap, because of...well yeah, just a gap I guess.

**Connections at Fusion**

Youth reported forming many relationships at Fusion. Some youth emphasized meeting new people and making new friends, others saw Fusion as a place to hang out with their existing friends group. Some youth replied that Fusion was a place to hang out with people they wouldn't normally hang out with at school or elsewhere and almost all of the participants emphasized the importance of the relationships they formed with staff.

Some youth talked about being new to Ingersoll or not going to school in Ingersoll. For them, Fusion was an opportunity to meet new people and to form connections:

I didn’t really have many friends in town so I figured I'd start coming here [Fusion] and making friends.

The following story recounts a youth experience moving to Ingersoll and having to get used to living in a small town. The youth chose to record the story with a facilitator rather than write it which accounts for the interview-like format:
Fusion was also a place where youth from different grades and schools could come together and hang out:

There are so many different schools. Like there’s schools in Woodstock, and schools in London that some kids go to. And there’s IDC [high school in
Ingersoll]. And we’re all different grades, but like, through our variety of ages we can all just come together here [Fusion] and be friends and hang out.

A few youth talked about how they felt they could hang out with different groups of people at Fusion because they weren’t as afraid of being judged:

But I don’t hang out with them at school. Because they’re…grade 9s and it’s not cool to hang out with grade 9s.

This story was written by a youth who talks about a time he made a really good friend at Fusion:

**Figure 8: Most Significant Change Story 3**

How I met one of my good friends at Fusion

*This is about the time I met my good friend [...]. Back in 2009, My favourite staff member A was on his last day, and everybody spent the entire day goofing off, doing nothing but causing mischief. All that day I spent hanging out with A and so was another youth I wasn’t very fond of at the time. Over the day we were all hanging out, and slowly [...] (the youth I wasn’t fond of) and I started to get to know each other better, and we eventually became friends. At the end of that day we teamed up and delivered a delicious whipped cream pie to his face. It’s important because that day I made a good friend who would continue to be friends until this day.*

Staff were a popular topic of conversation with all respondents in this project. Eleven of the twelve youth who participated in interviews singled out staff as a key aspect of what makes Fusion a successful project and as an important connection that they had formed:
My relationship with staff is pretty strong. I am able to come to most of them and talk about what is on my mind, what has been getting me down or angry. Staff are very considerate and caring. They go out of their way to ask you how your day is or to cheer you up.

Many youth described the staff at Fusion as an important support system that they could turn to if they needed help:

Personally I’m close to a lot of, almost all the staff. And I feel like I can trust them with anything. And if I ever need anything...Fusion’s the first place I turn.

More youth described how they find staff easy to talk and relate to. They often described what sounded more like peer relationships with staff rather than a relationship with someone in an authority position:

You can like talk to [them] and just have a conversation. Just casually without having to like watch what you’re saying or anything like that...It's like they’re still kids.

Relating to staff was very important to many youth. The next story highlights how being able to relate to staff makes Fusion a better place:
Most Significant Change Event at Fusion

The most significant event that happened to me at Fusion Youth Centre was when me and S (Fusion staff member) best friends. This is significant because he is one of my favourite staff member who works here. He is a very nice man and I feel as I can trust him and tell him anything that I need too when I need too. I also find him a really good role model. I have a lot of respect in him because he treats all the kids pretty well and he also is kinda of a kid himself. I think he is a kid him self because he acts silly and immature and he can relate to most of us pretty well. S makes fusion a good place to be and come. I consider him as another big brother. Meeting S is important because he makes life better here and during the guys group sleep over he makes it something to remember and fun. Fusion is just like a big family were everyone can trust us and respect each other.

They also noted that having this type of relationship with adults was a refreshing change from their other experiences:

They talk to you like you're a person, not just some punk ass kid. It’s like, nice.

Another topic that emerged related to connections formed at Fusion is that of losing those connections. As youth age out (turn 19) or staff leave for new opportunities, many feel like they are losing important connections. When asked about staff turnover, most youth responded that how they felt depended on what kind of connection they had to that staff member. If they didn’t feel like they had a relationship with them they didn’t feel the loss as
much. However if they felt that they had a close personal connection with a departing staff member, the loss was felt very keenly:

   It sucks...Since I've been here I remember two that have both left. And it sucks because you form a relationship with them and then they're just kind of gone.

Losing staff can also discourage youth from participating in certain programs at Fusion if they felt that they had a specific connection with that staff member. While youth generally acknowledged that moving on was good for staff members, many tended to focus on the negative impacts they experienced because of the loss. In some cases, losing a staff member can result in a youth deciding that they no longer have a reason to come to Fusion:

   It's good for [them] but it sucks for us...When [they] left, a lot of people who were in the music room left too. And don't really come as much anymore.

Losing staff resonated strongly with many of the youth. The following two stories were written by different youth but describe the same event:
Friends Gone in the Blink of an Eye

The first summer I came here I got into playing drums. The people who worked in the music studio were A and K. A taught me beats on the drums and K taught me beats on the mac. During the summer fusion didn’t open until 2:30 so I would come to fusion at about 9 or 10am to meet K and/or A and they would teach me until about 12 or 2pm. Sometimes we would go to [local coffee shop] for food afterwards. But then suddenly one day someone told me that they quit and were moving to Toronto because they got hired to record music for a lady. I was so upset because of how close I was to them. We were best friends and now they were gone. When fusion got a new drum kit A gave me the old one but it still needed stands and cymbals and stuff and A told me that when I got the stuff I needed he would [help] to tune them and set them up for me. Not that long ago K came to fusion to visit before he went to Alberta which is where he is from. He was going there to get ahead in life. When I saw him at fusion I was so shocked, I went up to him and he gave me a big hug. I missed him so much and I was really glad to see him. Although I never see A or K anymore I still talk to them on facebook all the time.
Youth also discussed their feelings about their peers leaving or themselves having to leave when they turned 19. Some anticipated being disappointed that they would no longer have access to resources or people at the Centre. However having plans for the future such as finding a job or pursuing post-secondary education often mitigated these feelings:

I’ll be a little disappointed that I won’t be able to come here anymore, but like by them I plan on being in university…so it won’t be too huge.

Some felt that losing the connections they formed when they turned 19 was too arbitrary, particularly since some 19 year olds are still in high school and therefore rely on those networks for friendship and support:
Like you form really close friendships with them and then they’re just kind of gone because they turn 19 and it’s like boom! Bye...And a lot of people in Ingersoll are still in high school when they’re 19 so they don’t have many other friends and then everybody’s here and they don’t have anywhere to hang out with their friends.

Some youth anticipated really missing Fusion because of the connections and experiences that they will be leaving behind:

I’m going to hate it. I’m going to miss Fusion a lot. And all the experiences that I’ve had here.

Perhaps not surprisingly, how youth felt about leaving depended on how old they were. Youth who were 14 or 15 did not appear to be as worried because it’s not an immediate danger to them. One expressed the hope that maybe the rule about the age limit would change before they turned 19.

Opinions among the older youth were split. Some expressed a preference for changing increasing the age limit now or creating a new centre reserved for older youth, for example 15 to 21:

It’s because I’m ageing out that I want to do this, but I’d shift it up to minimum age 15 and then like bump it up however many years you took off under 15.

Other youth nearing 19 felt that Fusion was so popular amongst the younger age groups that they no longer feel like they belong as much as they once did. Some expressed the feeling that they were ready to move on:

I feel sort of too old to be there and to me, it feels like I am out of place because of my age. I think I am ready to move on with my life.
Significance of Connections

These relationships and connections are important because they help build youths’ networks and capacity. Some youth described their relationships as an alternative to their relationship with their parents. Sometimes they faced issues that they were more comfortable discussing with a staff member before talking about them at home:

I like the fact that I can go to staff besides going to my parents.

For others, staff were an essential part of their development. They formed emotional connections to staff and needed them to process some of the trials that they experienced as teenagers:

Whenever I have anything wrong the first thing I do is come to Fusion. I’m like: “I need to talk”.

This youth’s story describes how friends and staff at Fusion helped them deal with a particularly difficult time in their life:
Dealing with Depression

Since I first started coming to fusion 2 years ago I have went threw a lot dealing with losing friends not knowing where I fit in my mom attempting suicide and heart break, about 5 months ago I went threw a rough patch and started on a down words spiral and started to cut and have many suicidal thoughts dew to problems in my life. When my mom ended up in the hospital for attempted suicide I felt like it was my fault and it all became to much, everything that had ever went wrong for me came flooding back, that’s when my Depression came to an unbearable extent and I was slowly watching my life drip away literally, if you didn’t really know me you wouldn’t have been able to tell that I was as messed up as I was I seemed happy and bubbly to all those who didn’t know me but to my Friend could tell after finding cuts and scars on my arms [...] suggested that I talked to a staff at fusion to get help, so I talked to an old staff member named K and told her I wanted to tell my parents how I was feeling but didn’t know how, K then called my parents and they got me help, I’m very thankful for [...] and K for without them I may not be here today, fusion has truly changed and saved my life. I know that the staff at fusion will always be there to help me and thanks to them I am a happier way more confident person that knows that when something goes wrong it’s not always my fault.

Other youth simply appreciated that in the staff they had found adults that they could talk to openly without fear of judgement:

You realize that just because they’re adults they’re not going to judge what’s going on in your life. They’re going to try and understand and help you through it and it really teaches you to open up to people and talk to them about your problems instead of leaving them all bottled up.
Connections with staff were also seen as important because they increased youth influence. By using staff as a link between youth and those in power some youth found that they had more influence to push for more change:

They’d have more power to change things [and] they’d want to change more.

Some youth discussed how they benefited from the connections more generally. The connections they form at Fusion helped give them a place where they felt welcomed and accepted and where they can be themselves:

At Fusion I guess you do get to [meet] everyone...But you can, like I said, connect to certain people but it’s not just that, like you kind of feel more accepted here than out in like the big bad world I guess.

Youth also found validation in the connections they formed at Fusion because they could be friends with different age groups that were not always accessible to them in places like school:

If you’re at Fusion, if you’re hanging out with like grades 11s and 12s, and I’m [younger], they don’t act like I’m some little kid. They act, I guess it’s because I’m mature, but they act like I’m just another person.

Fusion was also described as a place where people could make new connection and hang out with new groups of people who could potentially be helpful in the future. For example, one respondent described a scenario in which youth in elementary school could meet high school youth at Fusion, thereby building connections that would help them make the transition from elementary to high school:

Because then grade like 7s and 8s get to know kids from high school so when they go into high school they know people.

And it was also a place where youth can meet new people who shared their interests:
I hang out with other people that are actual musicians here...And it’s a lot more interesting, like people I would never have talked to and then I find out we share like an interest.

Connections were a theme that resonated with every single youth that participated in this study. Both workshops produced information about connections with staff, peers and the community and all twelve interview respondents had stories to share about how connections had changed their lives.

**SUMMARY**

In this section I provided an overview of the findings from this project. Youth in Ingersoll face many of the same challenges such as boredom and a lack of youth-friendly spaces and activities. While the youth who participated in the study have different backgrounds, different interests and attend schools in Ingersoll and Woodstock there is a feeling of being judged or targeted for their age that is common to all of them. Because they often feel like they do not fit in in their community, they have embraced the Fusion Youth Centre as a place of their own, where they can truly be themselves.

These feelings of ownership are interesting to explore and reflect the value that youth place on the space. Youth also reported benefiting from participating in Fusion programs through skills development and personal development in areas such as confidence and self-esteem. All of these are components of positive youth development and capacity building.

Connections were another theme identified as important by youth. Through Fusion they form connections with their peers, with staff and with the community. These connections offer support networks as well as a sense of safety and belonging that many of them seem to seek out.
After completing my first draft of the findings I returned to Fusion and conducted a validation focus group with four youth who had participated in the workshops and interviews. I provided an overview of the findings as they are laid out and asked youth their opinions on what I had found and how these findings were presented. Youth were generally interested in the findings and had no major concerns about what is presented in this chapter. Their main concern was that the findings should not portray Fusion in a negative light. They were concerned about Fusion’s reputation and quite adamant that Fusion should not be portrayed as a place where youth obtain or do drugs.

I feel that the findings in this chapter accurately reflect what was said during the research process and that nothing significantly implicates Fusion in Ingersoll’s drug culture. If anything, youth described Fusion as a safe place where they were sheltered from negative influences outside. Therefore no changes were made to this chapter after the validation focus group.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This project focused mainly on youths’ experiences in Ingersoll Ontario and the role and impact of the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in their lives. This chapter, divided into five sections, explores in further depth some of the findings from the study, focusing specifically on common experiences and tensions.

The first section looks at those findings that could be considered universal themes for youth and afterschool programs, regardless of community. The second section explores the shift from prevention to positive development in approaches to afterschool programs. The third section describes the tensions that emerged in the findings, specifically between youth trying to define themselves and resisting society’s attempts to define them. The third section highlights another area of tension: the concept of youth-friendly that developed throughout the course of the study and explores what is youth-friendly and who has the power to define it in a Town like Ingersoll.

The fourth section contains my lessons learned from the study and provides space for my closing remarks. And finally, the fifth section highlights possible areas for future research as identified by myself and the youth participants of the study.

UNIVERSAL THEMES

While discussing their experiences as youth in Ingersoll, several of the youth identified issues such as: boredom, feeling judged or stereotyped, drama, social hierarchies and barriers to participation such as cost and mobility. While these themes are important, they are generally recognized as common to most youth, regardless of where they grow up.
If we accept that youth is a social construct, it makes sense that there should be common experiences that determine this life phase. After all, youth is essentially the time when young people “forge meaning and make sense of social conditions” (White & Wyn, 2008). For it to be a category recognized around the world, these meanings and social conditions must have something in common.

We can also take this to mean that these experiences (boredom, judgement, drama, cliques and barriers to participation) are a normal part of growing up (Pais, 2000). Youth experience them to different degrees, depending on their social class, the resources they have available to them and the societies that they live in, but they are in fact normal experiences (White & Wyn, 2008).

All of these issues: boredom, judgement, drama, cliques and barriers to participation revolve around central issues of inclusion and exclusion. If an individual feels that they have nothing to do in their community, if they feel judged, pressured by social hierarchies or unable to participate because they cannot afford it or get to a certain location, they are effectively experiencing exclusion.

In these scenarios, societal structures have broken down, denying individuals the support they need to feel welcomed and to participate fully in their communities (Shucksmith & Chapman, 1998). This section will highlight two specific universal themes: lack of options in the community and barriers to participation.
Lack of options in the community

Many youth feel that their communities do not have enough activities or facilities that reflect their particular interests or that these communities disapprove of the activities youth want to engage in (Panelli, et al., 2002; White & Wyn, 2008). One reason for this, as identified by youth in the study is that most youth do not feel like they have access to political and other power structures. Several youth in the study were critical of the municipal government in Ingersoll and answered that they felt people did not listen to them in the community.

Those who have access to decision-making structures are in a better position to create a community that reflects their interests. Lacking access to these structures means that youth are in a weak position to push for change in their community:

If you try to speak your mind in any small town, you’re probably not going to be heard.

Barriers to Participation

Cost is a significant barrier for youth in many communities. For example, youth may feel that they are unwelcome in public spaces such as stores, restaurants and shopping malls because they do not have the disposable income to justify their presence (White & Wyn, 2008; Panelli et al, 2002). They may also be perceived as too noisy or boisterous and therefore asked to leave because they are disturbing other customers (White & Wyn, 2008).

The Fusion Youth Centre addresses this barrier by charging a low, one-time payment for membership. Youth pay five dollars when they sign up and then have unlimited use of the
facility. Several participants indicated that this was a major reason that Fusion was more accessible than other recreational facilities in the Town:

I’ve been to the bowling alley and then their prices went up...[at] Fusion you pay once and then you’re done.

Mobility is another challenge for youth, especially in small communities that lack public transit. Many youth are not old enough to have a driver’s license or do not have the money for a car or gas. This lack of mobility can effectively put some activities and resources out of their reach (Shucksmith, 2004; Pavis, 2001).

This was an interesting issue in the study because youth have conflicting opinions on mobility. Some argued that one of the benefits of living in a small town was that they could walk everywhere, effectively making everything in town accessible. Others however said that because they didn’t have cars and there was no public transit some facilities, such as the community centre which is on the outskirts of town, were out of reach.

Another interesting angle to this issue is the accessibility of nearby towns such as London Ontario. Many of the youth talked about going to London for social purposes such as shopping, or for academic purposes such as going to college or university. However to reach London they needed to find someone to drive them, or have access to a vehicle.

FROM PREVENTION TO POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Prevention is a driving force behind the establishment of afterschool programs in many places because adolescence was seen as a period of high risk for both young people and their communities (Nicholson et al., 2004; Small & Memmo, 2004; Halpern, 1999).
Communities were afraid that if youth were unsupervised they would be more likely to engage in negative behaviours like drugs or vandalism.

It was interesting that the youth who also participated in the study also picked up and placed a high value on the idea of prevention. They talked about how Fusion gives them an alternative place to go, a place where they feel safe, where they don’t feel as pressured to engage in negative activities as they do outside of the centre:

If you don’t have a place like this, then it’s kind of a free for all, you know, you know: go smoke you drugs, go drink your alcohol...Here, it's kind of like, you know, you come here, you’re not bored, and you’re not tempted to go out and smoke your drugs or anything...You’ll get other kids who are like: “Well I’m here now, I don’t want to risk getting kicked out, cause all my friends are here anyway.

For some youth it seems as though they subscribed to adults’ beliefs of prevention. That by coming to Fusion they are less at risk and that there is a corresponding reduction in crime rates in the community:

I think more towns need something like this to like, I guess, deter criminal activity. Cause I think, I’m almost certain I’ve noticed the youth crime rate go down since the place opened.

Other youth felt that instead of just keeping them away from bad influences, Fusion gave them an outlet for their energy. This allowed them to channel it in more productive ways, rather than in ways that the community disapproved of:

Like some places that don’t have a youth centre there’s a lot of graffiti and everything. We used to have graffiti but it’s not as much anymore...cause like S lets us do graffiti in the skate park...or the gym...and like on the desks and stuff in the art room. We’re allowed to draw on that and stuff...So then kids just get it out there instead of going and doing it where they can get in trouble.
This space for creative expression is a key aspect of some after-school programs and can not only prevent negative behaviors but also promote emotional health, help to relieve stress and allow youth to explore their individuality (Nicholson, et al., 2004). These alternative outlets also reflect positive youth development values, as they buffer negative influences and promote positive or resilient behaviors (Damon, 2004; Lerner, et al., 2005a; Catalano, et al., 2005).

This shift also emphasizes the shift in values behind after-school programs, from simple prevention to a broader, more holistic approach that views youth as resources with potential rather than as a liability (Lerner, et al., 2005a; Damon, 2004). This shift is important because it broadens the scope of programs like Fusion allowing them to focus on youth learning and offer more programs and resources to youth, building skills and assets and helping youth become more competent and confident individuals (Benson, 2007; Nicholson, et al., 2004).

“BUT THAT’S NOT ME” STATEMENTS

Youth is a time of identity crisis as young people try to define who they are in a world that seems driven to tell them who they should be. Again, this identity crisis is generally accepted as a normal part of growing up (Erikson, 1968) but it highlights a tension between youth defining themselves and resisting society’s definition of who they are:

It’s like: “You’re a teenager, you do graffiti, you do drugs”. You know it’s kind of like: “No, I don’t do that kind of stuff”.

One issue that resonated with participants was how they felt judged or unwelcome in the community. Several reported being followed in stores, asked to leave restaurants and being
judged for hanging out with friends in public spaces. They also acknowledged that youth in Ingersoll do have a poor reputation, particularly for vandalism and drug abuse.

What I found very interesting was how so many of the youth felt the need to distinguish themselves from this stereotype and to emphasize that they are different, that they do not engage in these negative behaviours and that therefore they do not deserve the judgement that is heaped on them. I collected all of these statements and called them: “But that’s not me” statements:

I’m different than what most people are. A lot of people here in town are like pot smokers and all that sort of stuff. Where I’m the complete opposite. I’m totally against it.

It is often believed that youth are passive recipients of exclusionary systems like the labeling described above (Leyshon, 2008). However this does a disservice to youth, denying them agency and limiting their influence. It must be recognized that youth are active participants of social systems; that they play a dynamic role in defining themselves and their circumstances (Leyshon, 2008; Erikson, 1968). While it is true that some youth who hang out in public spaces do engage in negative activities such as drugs and vandalism, however hanging out in public spaces is also a way for youth to claim space in the community, marking it (often literally, for example with graffiti) as theirs and excluding others (White & Wyn, 2008).

Youth in this study readily acknowledged the stereotype and label given to them by society and felt the need to defend themselves, actively re-defining themselves as the opposite (Leyshon, 2008; White & Wyn, 2008). Their readiness to defend themselves was also a sign of how they expect to be perceived by others, particularly adults. I never raised the subject
of drugs in either the workshops or the interviews. I only asked what it was like to be a teenager in Ingersoll, what were some of the good things and hard things. But almost every youth responded that drugs were a challenge and over half of respondents felt the need to defend themselves by clearly stating that they do not use drugs.

These statements also highlight how labeled the youth feel in their community, how they feel that these labels are unfair and how they need to defend themselves. Their readiness to stand up for themselves and define themselves and establish themselves as different from the label also reflects how comfortable they feel in the Youth Centre.

Afterschool programs are often spaces where youth feel safe and welcome (White & Wyn, 2008; Panelli et al., 2002). They are also spaces where youth interact with sympathetic individuals such as peers and staff, building confidence and helping them to define their identities (Halpern et al., 2000; Jarrett, et al., 2005). Fusion provides this safe environment where youth establish positive relationships with peers and staff, are able to explore new and different opportunities through the program and simply be themselves. These attributes go a long way to giving youth the confidence to stand up to existing exclusionary systems such as stereotypes and labels and to develop their own social structures and identities.

How young people define themselves relative to their communities can have significant impacts on behaviour (Jones, 1999). These “But that’s not me” statements reflect an acknowledgement and a rejection of the dominant identify imposed on youth in Ingersoll. Youth recognize that they are labeled in a certain way, and most understand to varying extents why these labels exist, but they reject the application of the label to themselves.
individually. They are able to differentiate themselves from their age group and assert some independence or individuality.

In this way, these statements are also symbols of youth trying to take control of part of their identity creation and to be strategic negotiators in defining what it is to be a youth in Ingersoll (Pais, et al., 2000). By changing how they are understood in the community, youth also affect how much power and influence they hold, they change existing power dynamics in the community and they improve their position relative to other community members (Durham, 2004).

**YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS**

The concept of a youth friendly environment was a very interesting one to explore with youth. This topic exceeds the scope of my research that aimed to understand the impacts of afterschool programs. However the community environment impacts the youth motivations for participating in afterschool programs and how they benefit from their participation.

Youth-friendly was a theme that emerged from the research, rather than one that I set out to explore. As discussed above, several of the youth reported feeling stereotyped or unwelcome in the community. They felt that they were judged based on their age that this was unfair, seeing as, in general, they did not identify with the groups that was engaged in drug activity or other illegal activities.

One of the reasons that the Town of Ingersoll supported opening Fusion in 2006 was to make the Town more youth friendly (Town of Ingersoll Strategic Plan, 2009). However
when I spoke to youth about this there were mixed opinions about whether or not Ingersoll was more youth friendly as a result of Fusion and some debate (mostly on my part) around the definition of youth-friendly and who has the power to define it.

When framing this part of the discussion it is important to note that for many of the youth participants it was hard to measure changes in Ingersoll because they were very young when Fusion opened. Therefore it was difficult for them to compare the Town before and after Fusion.

During the interviews, several different themes related to youth-friendly environments emerged. Interestingly, when I asked the questions directly (Has Fusion made Ingersoll more youth-friendly?) several youth responded along the lines of: Yes, because you see fewer youth on the streets now:

I would say that you see less kids running the roads now. They used to all hang out at the park or the gazebo downtown. Now you don’t see anybody. They’re either at home or at Fusion.

I found that to be a controversial and debatable answer with many possible interpretations. If through that answer they mean they are no longer seen in public because they have a place to go then it could be compatible with the concept of youth-friendly. However if it simply means that youth are hidden and that makes the community happier, I would argue that that is not a good definition of youth-friendly.

I would argue that youth-friendly ought to reflect an inclusive society that promotes increased youth power and participation in the community. Checkoway (2011) argues that this is important because (p340):
When young people participate, it draws on their expertise, enables them to exercise their rights as citizens, and contributes to a more democratic society. It also promotes their personal development, and provides them with substantive knowledge and practical skills.

The answer possibly reflects current power dynamics within the community (Checkoway, 2011). If adults are saying that they dislike seeing youth hanging out in public, it could be that youth have internalized this discourse and are now reproducing it. When it comes to systems of inclusion and exclusion, youth are not simply recipients of systems created by adults, they also play a role in changing and perpetuating them (Leyshon, 2008). In the above section, the “But that's not me” statements reflected youth rejecting the dominant exclusionary discourses. However their answers to questions regarding youth-friendly communities are possibly an example of youth buying into and reproducing an exclusionary system.

It could also be an extension of the “But that’s not me” statements in that the youth are reinforcing the idea that they are different from those youth who use drugs and are adopting adults’ disapproving attitudes, thereby reinforcing those “inside” their circle and those “outside” (Adler & Adler, 1995).

**SUMMARY**

This section provided an overview of some key discussion points that emerged from the data. Many of the findings, while relevant and interesting were not necessarily specific to Ingersoll or even rural or small communities. Feelings of being judged or stereotyped in the community, the perception that communities do not also prioritize meeting the needs of youth and barriers to participation such as cost and mobility are common to youth in many
different places. However these findings do reflect experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the community and highlight the fact that youth in Ingersoll have much in common with youth in other areas. The shift from a prevention approach to a positive development approach was also captured in the findings and expanded on in the discussion and reflects current trends in afterschool programming.

The “But that’s not me” statements were a particularly interesting piece of data to work with. I was surprised at first at how defensive some of the youth were, at how they wanted to be clear about who they were and how they wanted to distinguish themselves from others in the community. And finally, the issue of youth-friendly environments and communities was one that emerged from discussion throughout the course of the study. While it impacts the youth-experience in Ingersoll as well as systems of inclusion and exclusion in the community it is beyond the scope of my study and perhaps deserves its own study in the future.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to understand the impacts of afterschool programs on feelings of inclusion and exclusion from the youth perspective. Afterschool programs like the Fusion Youth Centre have multiple roles in small communities, offering programs, services, physical space and connections to peers and adults. It gave a voice to the youth who use the Centre, asking them how it affects their lives.

There is a substantial amount of research on youth and afterschool programs from several different disciplines, exploring types, approaches, results and impacts. However the voices of youth are an under-researched area in this field although they are arguable one of the
most important perspectives to understand. Those working with youth and those positions of power in small communities need to understand the motivations and needs of youth. Only by engaging with youth can communities become more inclusive, encouraging youth participation and benefiting from their insights and contributions.

The findings from the study include: the youth experience in Ingersoll; motivations for participating in afterschool programs; the importance and impacts of Fusion programs; youth contributions to Fusion; inclusive environments; and connections. The youth described their experiences in Ingersoll as lacking appropriate activities, being bored and often feeling judged or stereotyped in the community. Youth described feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome in the community, they perceived that many community members disliked seeing them hanging out in public areas.

Because of this, they were motivated to come to Fusion, viewing it as a space where they could be themselves, see friends and participate in learning activities. Fusion was described as a safe space where youth were free from the judgement and pressures they experienced in the community. It was also a supportive environment where youth could access networks of peers and staff and find help for issues troubling them outside of the Centre. Several youth described Fusion’s environment as a family environment, somewhere they felt accepted. Youth also reported that Fusion was an accessible facility, both financially and physically. The membership fee was low enough that no youth felt excluded, and paying once gave youth unlimited access to the Centre, giving it an advantage over other facilities such as the bowling alley or community centre where youth have to pay each time
they go. Fusion’s central location in Ingersoll also made it an attractive option because most youth could easily walk there.

The breadth of Fusion activities was praised by most participants, even those who admitted to not participating in them. They appreciated the opportunity to learn new skills and competencies both for fun and for utility. Many of the programs were seen as contributing to youths’ future plans, giving them useful skills for future careers. Youth also found that they gained confidence and character through their participation in Fusion programs and appreciated being respected and given responsibility.

Youth also recognized their own contributions to Fusion, seeing their role in creating a positive environment for the Fusion community. They discussed how they learned to get along and passed this lesson on to others, actively contributing to creating a positive environment where youth feel welcome. They also admitted to bringing in existing social structures such as cliques to Fusion. Some of these structures were changed, for example the evolution of a “Fusion clique” while others exist outside of Fusion as well. Youth also contribute to Fusion’s reputation in the community, participating in community events with Fusion and changing perceptions and attitudes towards the Centre.

Fusion’s environment was a popular subject of discussion as youth discussed how their participation changed their feelings of inclusion and exclusion. In a small community where youth feel they lack options and resources, Fusion was a space that offered freedom and choice, something greatly appreciated by most youth. Youth also described Fusion as a positive environment that discouraged them from engaging in negative behaviours such as drug use, an activity they perceived as widespread in the community. While they described
drugs as pervasive in the community and in the school systems, they argued that Fusion provided a buffer from these pressures, offering alternative activities that allowed them to productive rather than wasting their time.

Finally, connections made up a significant part of the findings throughout the course of the study. Youth described connecting with friends, staff and the community. Fusion was a place where youth could connect and spend time with their friends. It was also a location where youth could access peer support to help them work out problems. In general, youth were greatly appreciative of staff, recognizing their role in maintaining the quality of the Youth Centre and its programs. Staff members were seen as a source of support, of knowledge and influence. Youth discussed going to staff when they had problems in other areas of their life. They also felt that they learned important skills and competencies through working with staff members, and through this work, gained respect and responsibility which they learned to apply outside of the Youth Centre. Youth also saw staff as a source of influence, recognizing that if they wanted to change something in the community, it was effective to raise this issue with staff and ask staff to raise it to management and then to Town Council.

These findings indicate that the Fusion Youth Centre does have a positive impact on feelings of inclusion and exclusion in the community. Youth who come to Fusion find a place where they belong and feel more included. However, as highlighted in the discussion section, while Fusion may change individual feelings of inclusion and exclusion it does not necessarily change systems of inclusion and exclusion. There is some evidence that progress is being made in this area, for example youth feeling that they can use staff as a
resource and a linkage when they want something changed, however they continue to feel excluded at the community level, as evidenced by statements about the lack of options in Town and how they feel judged or stereotyped. The “But that’s not me” statements also reflect how youth can be active creators of systems of exclusion despite the fact that their individual feelings may have changed.

The goal of this study was to understand the impacts of afterschool programs on feelings of inclusion and exclusion. As a result of its focus on the youth perspective and experience, this study is limited to the perspective of individuals and does not address issues of inclusion and exclusion at the societal level. However findings from the study have highlighted that these issues go beyond the individual’s experience and also exist on a broader scale. This has significant implications for future research because it highlights the fact that when researching issues of inclusion and exclusion, focusing on individuals’ feelings is insufficient. Future research needs to also explore these issues at the community level, identify areas of where social systems have failed, allowing groups and individuals to be excluded from mainstream society (Shucksmith, 2004). Future research must also take into account that youth can be active creators of these systems, not simply passive recipients or victims (Leyshon, 2008).

That the youth in this study placed a high value on the Fusion Youth Centre was obvious at every stage. As described in the workshops and interviews the Centre plays a central role in the lives of the youth who use it, positively changing feelings of exclusion to feelings of inclusion. While Fusion’s impacts on feelings of inclusion and exclusion outside of the Centre require further research, I think that it can be safely said that Fusion provides a
place of inclusion in a place where, and at a time when, youth feel high levels of exclusion and uncertainty and this greatly improves youths’ experiences growing up in Ingersoll.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the extensive research already completed on the role of impacts of afterschool programs, there is still room and opportunity for further research. The first five topics described below are areas of potential research that I identified during the course of this project and while reflecting on the final product of this study. I also felt that it was important to ask youth what topics they thought were important for future research, as these could shed further light on what issues are important to youth and highlight new issues that may not have occurred to adult researchers. The following two topics are those suggested by the youth participants during the validation focus group.

Future Research Proposed by the Researcher

First, this study explores the impacts of afterschool programs on feelings of inclusion and exclusion from the youth perspective only. While I interacted regularly with staff and management at the Youth Centre, they did not participate in the research process. However these other perspectives are equally important and relevant to this area of research; future researchers should explore this or similar topics from the point of view of staff and management at afterschool programs, as well as from the point of view of community members and local government institutions. This research will help to provide a more complete picture of the role and impacts of afterschool programs in small communities and allow other stakeholders to have their say.
Second, the issue of youth-friendly requires significant further research to understand the full scope and scale of this issue in small communities. I related the theme to issues of inclusion, exclusion and existing power dynamics in the community. However youth-friendly is a much larger issue, including not only the definition of youth-friendly but also the power dynamics involved in writing this definition. Based on youth responses in this study, it is unclear whether youth are writing their own definition of youth-friendly or repeating a definition created by adults in the community. Given the time limitations and original scope of the project I was not able to fully pursue this topic. Youth-friendly is also a concept that exceeds the scope of a study on afterschool programs. These afterschool programs may be a component of youth-friendly but further research needs to be one in the wider community to fully understand the term and its importance.

Third, it would be useful to do research with youth in Ingersoll who do not participate in Fusion programs. They could be reached through the local public school system or other youth organizations and asked what their perceptions are of Fusion and why they choose not to go to the Centre. This research would be very valuable in helping Fusion reach out to youth who do not current come and expand its membership base. It would also help to improve our understanding of how Fusion is perceived in the community and how and if those perceptions can be changed.

Fourth, it would be very interesting to conduct a research project in which Fusion youth are active participants and researchers. In this scenario youth would help to define the research problem and questions. They could also be the ones to conduct research amongst
their peers. This type of project would bring to the forefront the issues that youth identify as important and allow them to control the research process.

Fifth, ageing out was an area of concern for many youth who participated in the study, particularly those who were nearing eighteen. Some expressed an interest in a space intended for older youth that was separate from Fusion’s main programs. Fusion has already identified this as a problem and created the Youth Entrepreneur Program for youth interested in starting their own business. This program is available to youth over the age of eighteen but is not necessarily of interest to all youth who participate in Fusion. Because of the value placed on Fusion by youth and the benefits they accrue from their participation it is worth exploring this issue further to look for alternative solutions to the issue of ageing out. This would also ensure that youth who turn eighteen are not automatically cut off from the support system they have built but experience a gentler transition into adulthood.

Finally, the role and impacts of staff is great enough to be its own research topic. Future research should not only explore the opinions and experiences of staff but also look specifically at the role of staff in afterschool programs. For example, what does an afterschool program look for in potential staff? And what type of commitment should staff make to an afterschool program? Many youth in this study talked about how they felt when staff left the Centre, moving on to new opportunities. From the perspective of the Youth Centre this might be a desired action, to have regular staff turnover, thereby ensuring a young and energetic team full of fresh ideas. From the perspective of staff, an afterschool program like Fusion may be viewed as a stepping stone in a broader career plan. However from the youth perspective, this turnover can be disruptive and disturbing. The advantages
and disadvantages of staff turnover ought to be researched in greater detail, delivering recommendations on optimal staff composition and turnover.

**Future research recommended by youth**

The importance of the staff perspective was considered to very important by some youth. They recommended conducting a study similar to this one but from the staff perspective and then comparing the two. This would highlight staff ideas and opinions and help us understand if staff and youth understand issues in similar ways or if a disconnect exists between the two parties.

Drugs were another serious issue that concerned youth. Many worried that Fusion suffers from a negative, and undeserved reputation for drugs and wish that research could be done to clarify the issue and hopefully demonstrate that this is not the case.
FINAL THOUGHTS

Searching for youth voices about the impacts of afterschool programs was both a challenging and rewarding project. At times it felt as though youth were not interested in sharing their thoughts or thought that their ideas had no value. At other times they had so much to say and their stories were so interesting that finishing a conversation was difficult.

The stories they shared throughout the course of this project highlight the important role that afterschool programs play, not only in smaller communities like Ingersoll but also in larger communities in Ontario and throughout Canada. While these stories describe some of the challenges youth face while growing up, they also provide examples of possible solutions and lessons learned from a program that places a high value on its youth and has committed to helping them overcome some of these challenges.

There is much that other towns and cities could learn using the Fusion Youth Centre as an example. Fusion demonstrates what can happen when a team of people, with support from the wider community, is dedicated to youth learning and development. It also shows what can happen when youth programming is comprehensive and holistic offering not only programs for learning but sympathetic staff and a safe space for youth to be as well. These are all key components to successful youth programs that help youth grow into healthy and productive adults who contribute to their communities and hopefully pass on what they learned to future generations.

There are still challenges to overcome with regards to youth programming and development. Adolescence is, and perhaps should be, a difficult time in which young people learn about their own strengths and weaknesses and how to building on or overcome
these. However they must also know that they do not have to go through this transition from youth to adulthood alone. They are part of a larger community, whether they feel included or not, and it is partly the responsibility of that community to reach out to youth and ensure that they do not feel excluded.

I've learned from experience that communities are stronger when they stand together, and I think that Fusion is a great start in this direction for the Town of Ingersoll.
REFERENCES


Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre. (n.d.(a)). Background Information.

Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre, (n.d.(b)). United Way of Oxford Agency Questionnaire 2011/12.


# APPENDIX ONE: FUSION PROGRAM CALENDAR

## Fusion Youth Centre Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Centre Drop-in Hours</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>1:00-11:00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Technology Centre Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music Lessons (Ages 12-14)</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00-4:45pm</td>
<td>2:30-4:00pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Lessons (Ages 15-18)</td>
<td>8:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>4:45-5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Jam - Any ages</td>
<td>7:30-8:30pm</td>
<td>8:00-9:30pm</td>
<td>8:00-9:30pm</td>
<td>3:45-5:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Jam - Ages 14-18</td>
<td>2:30-4:00pm</td>
<td>2:30-4:00pm</td>
<td>2:30-4:00pm</td>
<td>5:00-6:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording Studio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7:00-9:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Game Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00-6:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebuild IT</td>
<td>6:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>6:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>6:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>6:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>1:00-4:00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Editing</td>
<td>6:30-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Broadcasting</td>
<td>7:00-9:00pm</td>
<td>7:00-9:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Leadership Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IVAC (*runs bi-weekly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7:00-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guys Group</td>
<td>6:45-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls Group &amp; Go Chicks</td>
<td></td>
<td>6:30-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Brothers &amp; Sisters Group</td>
<td>6:30-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Arts & Culture Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photography/Graphic Design</td>
<td>7:00-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>6:30-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Breaks</td>
<td>2:30-4:00pm</td>
<td>8:00-9:15pm</td>
<td>2:30-5:00pm</td>
<td>7:00-9:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Factory</td>
<td>7:00-8:30pm</td>
<td>*bi-Weekly</td>
<td>7:00-8:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Blue - Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00-6:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Sketchers</td>
<td>8:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>8:30-9:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Sports, Fitness, Recreation & Leisure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skate Park (weather permitting)</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-11pm</td>
<td>1:00-11:00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td></td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-11pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badminton</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00-5:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop in Sports</td>
<td>1:30-4:30pm</td>
<td>3:45-5:00pm</td>
<td>3:45-5:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer (ages 12 &amp; under)</td>
<td>7:00-9:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>7:00-9:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Night</td>
<td>8:00-9:15pm</td>
<td>8:00-9:15pm</td>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>7:00-9:45pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lounge-Drop In</td>
<td>2:30-9:15pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-11:00pm</td>
<td>1:00-11:00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pool Tournaments</td>
<td></td>
<td>2:30-9:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Games</td>
<td></td>
<td>8:00-9:45pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Night</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00-6:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Blue - Gym</td>
<td></td>
<td>8:00-9:15pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Life Skills & Cooking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dinner is Served</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy's Diner</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack Shack</td>
<td>4:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
<td>5:30-6:30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Music Lessons
Fusion Staff teach music lessons on a number of instruments, including guitar, bass, drums, and more.

Art Breaks, Factory, and Sketchers
Learn art and design skills, such as perspective, still-life, drawing, painting, sculpting, modeling, scrapbooking and more.

Graphic Design and Photography
Learn graphic design using Adobe Creative Suite, including Photoshop and Illustrator. From camera basics to advanced photography, learn how to maximize your photography skills.

Video Editing
Learn the basics of editing, advanced effects, motion graphics, filmmaking, and more. Youth can also participate in the production of our own television show, Fusion TV!

ReBuildIT
Learn the basics of how a computer works, as well as computer repair skills, and participate in E-Waste recycling.

Go Chicks! & Girls Group
Young women are encouraged to participate in physical activity such as sports, fitness, and recreational activities, with an emphasis on emotional and mental wellness.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters
Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday, Big Brothers and Sisters volunteers bring their little brothers and sisters to Fusion to participate in various activities hosted by Fusion staff.

Open Jam Session
Come jam in the studio with your friends. Cooperation and appreciation of different musical styles is encouraged.

Dinner is Served
Nutritious meals are cooked fresh and served to youth members for only $3 nightly! Get it while it’s HOT!

Tracy’s Diner
Come cook a delicious dinner with staff Tracy. Learn skills from the best, and enjoy eating your own creations in the diner!

Snack Shack
Get together for fun, food, and friendship. Cookies, popcorn, and potato chips from scratch are a few of the homemade treats.

With Blue - Art & Gym
Learn some art and sport skills from Constable Jim Brady from the Oxford County OPP as he brings on his talent.

Recording Studio
From microphone and instrument set up, to the recording console, youth have the opportunity to record and mix their own music in our state-of-the-art recording studio.

Fusion Fitness
For all fitness levels, we offer a variety of activities such as circuit training, kick boxing, wellness and more. This program is supervised by personal trainers and group fitness instructors.

12 Under Soccer
Are you too young to become a Fusion Member? Here is your chance to get involved. Either play in our gym or out on the sports field and get a taste of what Fusion has to offer.

Guys Group
Get together with the guys to discuss topics that are relevant to them. Staff lead the discussion.

Drop-in Sports and Sports Night
Soccer, floor hockey, basketball or dodge ball. Compete with staff and friends for bragging rights and prizes.

Pool Tournament
Youth put their snooker skills to the test and compete against each other to determine who will be the top pool shark for the week.

Hockey Night at Fusion
Get together with your friends for a fast-paced game of floor hockey. Every game ends with a sudden death shootout!

Board Games
Join with friends and put your knowledge to the test by playing various trivia, board games, and card games.

Movie Night
Get together with your friends and watch the latest new releases on the big screen TV in the lounge.

Badminton
Come learn the exciting sport of badminton in the Fusion Gym!

Digital Game Development
This exciting new program is offered through a partnership with Fanshawe College, and youth will have the opportunity to learn how to create their own video games and online applications.

Fusion Radio
Be your own DJ on Fusion’s closed-circuit radio station. Develop broadcasting skills with the helpful staff of 104.7 HeartFM.

IYAC - Ingersoll Youth Advisory Council
Youth have a say! Get together with other youth and discuss issues that matter. Make a Difference!

Memberships only five bucks!
Fusioninfo@ingersoll.ca
APPENDIX TWO: WORKSHOP FINDINGS

Visualization in Participatory Programmes

Two workshops were held in this project. In the workshops four main questions were posed to participants. Youth wrote their responses on different coloured pieces of paper, organized by question. They were then asked to organize their responses and identify the main themes that they found. The facilitators assisted with this task but the majority of the analysis was completed by participants.

Here are the findings:

1. *Why do youth come to Fusion?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships and Support (peers and staff)</th>
<th>Boredom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape (avoiding negative situations)</td>
<td>Learning and Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Space and Resources</td>
<td>Programs and Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. *What do youth bring to Fusion?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Sense of belonging (family, involvement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personalities (happiness, joy)</td>
<td>Stories/Need to Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Experiences (emotions, fights)</td>
<td>Support for one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Things (drugs, smokes)</td>
<td>Ideas/Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama (rumours)</td>
<td>Stuff (money, backpacks)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. *How do youth benefit from coming to Fusion?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Escape (avoiding negative situations: home, family, bullies)</th>
<th>Relationships with different/more people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning life lessons and skills</td>
<td>Changing attitudes (intelligence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain trust and respect (don't experience as much judgement or discrimination)</td>
<td>Safe space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fusion programs/services (computer lab, gym, food)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How does Fusion affect the lives of youth outside of the Centre?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Relationships and Friends</th>
<th>• Life changing/positively affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• New perspectives</td>
<td>• Changing values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased self-esteem</td>
<td>• Resources (scholarships)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use Fusion as reference/careers</td>
<td>• Procrastination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life skills</td>
<td>• Varying impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Able to be themselves</td>
<td>• Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better attitudes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No analysis was done beyond this point because I wanted to leave the youth analysis as it was. Findings from the workshops were used to develop the interview questions. Topics and issues that were identified by youth as especially important or relevant, as observed by the facilitators based on the quality of the discussion, were flagged and worked into the interviews.

**Most Significant Change Stories**

Sixteen significant change stories were collected in the workshops responding to the question:

“Looking back on your time at Fusion, tell me about a time that something significant happened to you or someone you know.”

Four youth chose to write that they had not experienced or observed any significant moments of change since coming to Fusion.

I did not break down the stories for analysis, choosing to leave them as whole pieces of data. The stories present an interesting picture of the impacts of the Fusion Youth Centre as felt by the youth who use the centre. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the story tellers, no personal identifiers have been included. For the same reasons, Fusion staff
who are mentioned in the stories are identified only by an initial. Themes that the stories
touched upon include:

| • Relationships with staff | • Impacts of staff leaving |
| • Skill development through Fusion programs | • Friends |
| • Depression | • Increased self-confidence |
| • Issues at home | • Having a place to go |
| • Escape | • Role models |
| • Being new to town | • Trust |
APPENDIX THREE: MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

[Story One]

Dealing with depression

Since I first started coming to fusion 2 years ago I have went threw a lot dealing with losing friends not knowing where I fit in my mom attempting suicide and heart break, about 5 months ago I went threw a rough patch and started on a down words spiral and started to cut and have many suicidal thoughts due to problems in my life. When my mom ended up in the hospital for attempted suicide I felt like it was my fault and it all became to much, everything that had ever went wrong for me came flooding back, that’s when my Depression came to an unbearable extent and I was slowly watching my life drip away literally, if you didn’t really know me you wouldn’t have been able to tell that I was as messed up as I was I seemed happy and bubbly to all those who didn’t know me but to my Friend [...] he could tell after finding cuts and scars on my arms [...] suggested that I talked to a staff at fusion to get help, so I talked to an old staff member named K and told her I wanted to tell my parents how I was feeling but didn’t know how, K then called my parents and they got me help, I’m very thankful for [...] and K for without them I may not be here today, fusion has truly changed and saved my life. I know that the staff at fusion will always be there to help me and thanks to them I am a happier way more confident person that knows that when something goes wrong it’s not always my fault.

[Story Two]

Most Significant Change Story

Back in ninth grade I dated a boy and he was into art. He was always in the art room at fusion. That’s how I met S (Fusion staff). S has become an important person in my life. He is someone I can trust and talk to, about anything. He’s there for me to hang out with and I know him on more of a personal level then on a staff to youth level.
[Story Three]

**Fusion youth center**

I have been involved in pool turnments and I have been in the the gym playing basketball getting ready for the big basketball game against the o.p.p tomorrow night. I like to play a lot of video games when I come to the fusion youth center. I like to talk to the staff here at the fusion youth center some times and I like to play pool against them too and see if I can win a slush puppy if I beat them.

[Story Four]

**Friends Gone In A Blink Of An Eye**

The first summer I came here I got into playing drums. The people who worked in the music studio were A and K. A taught me beats on the drums and K taught me beats on the mac. During the summer fusion didn’t open until 2:30 so I would come to fusion at about 9 or 10am to meet K and/or A and they would teach me until about 12 or 2pm. Sometimes we would go to [local coffee shop] for food afterwards. But then suddenly one day someone told me that they quit and were moving to Toronto because they got hired to record music for a lady. I was so upset because of how close I was to them. We were best friends and now they were gone. When fusion got a new drum kit A gave me the old one but it still needed stands and symbols and stuff and A told me that when I got the stuff I needed he would [help] to tune them and set them up for me. Not that long ago K came to fusion to visit before he went [home]. He was going there to get ahead in life. When I saw him at fusion I was so shocked, I went up to him and he gave me a big hug. I missed him so much and I was really glad to see him. Although I never see A or K anymore I still talk to them on facebook all the time.
[Story Five]

**Fusion Youth Centre**

There was a staff member named L and I could tell her anything, and she would give her honest opinion about it, well me and my girlfriend broke up, and I was heart broken, and it was important to me because she showed me to love myself, and others will follow, and just her saying that made me happy, and just set my mood and now when ever im mad or upset, I remember what she said,

[Story Six]

**Most Significant Event at Fusion**

The most significant event that happened to me at Fusion Youth Centre was when me and S (Fusion staff member) best friends. This is significant because he is one of my favourite staff member who works here. He is a very nice man and I feel as I can trust him and tell him anything that I need too when I need too. I also find him a really good role model. I have a lot of respect in him because he treats all the kids pretty well and he also is kinda of a kid himself. I think he is a kid him self because he acts silly and immature and he can relate to most of us pretty well. S makes fusion a good place to be and come. I consider him as another big brother. Meeting S is important because he makes life better here and during the guys group sleep over he makes it something to remember and fun. Fusion is just like a big family were everyone can trust us and respect each other.
Most Significant Change Story

I had always been involved with Fusion. About 2 years ago my life changed for the better. There was the business program making its debut at Fusion. The staff member at the time had brought in someone from the Small Business Enterprise Centre in Woodstock to do a presentation on a ministry program called Summer Company. This program was to get youth involved in being entrepreneurs and provided them with a grant of $3000.

After the presentation, I went home and had this idea swirling and bubbling in my head. My idea was to open a computer repair company. I had always been interested in technology and computers. Later on, I got in touch with the coordinator of the business program. A staff that was recently hired was now in charge of the business skills development program named L. She helped me through the steps of writing my application and business plan for the grant. I was constantly working on my business plan and conducting my market research. She was a tremendous help towards this process.

I then put my application through the nearest business centre (Woodstock) and the manager had me come in for an interview and screening process. She then reviewed my application and business plan and gave her recommendations. After the revisions, she sent her recommendation to the province. After a couple weeks later, I received my e-mail of acceptance.

This was a huge self-confidence booster for me. Before this point, I was a very shy and quiet individual. I was struggling with not having regular part time employment. It was so exciting, I actually got to own my company and make my own money. My life had been changed forever! It has been a fulfilling, rewarding and extraordinary experience.
[Story Eight]

My most significant change at Fusion Youth Centre

Fusion has helped me in many ways I did my coop here and fusion has helped me deal with my depression but recently it has helped me but preventing me from becoming an antisocial person.

It helps me vent with others that think the same way I do about the stupidity of society and a can find people like that at fusion.

[Story Nine]

Significant Event at Fusion Youth Center

When I was in grade eight my friends and I spent a lot of time singing in the “Music Room”. K was the staff member that usually only worked in there, he would record our singing and helped us write our own songs. He was a cool guy and on his breaks or after fusion closed we would go hangout at [local coffee shop]. After K left fusion to be some fancy recording dude my friends and I who used to sing all the time stopped and we all slowly stopped going into the music room. I probably have not gone in there for over a year now. K opened up a radio booth in fusion as well, which was a lot of fun at first but it never got on air because people stopped being interested in it. K my sister and I were going to do a radio show together called the Cookies and K. This is an important event to me because I really enjoyed singing but the new staff member is not as cool and fun as K.
How I met one of my good friends at Fusion.

This is about the time I met my good friend [...]. Back in 2009, My favourite staff member Aaron was on his last day, and everybody spent the entire day goofing off, doing nothing but causing mischief. All that day I spent hanging out with A and so was another youth I wasn’t very fond of at the time. Over the day we were all hanging out, and slowly [...] (the youth I wasn’t fond of) and I started to get to know each other better, and we eventually became friends. At the end of that day we teamed up and delivered a delicious whipped cream pie to his face. It’s important because that day I made a good friend who would continue to be friends until this day.
[Story Eleven]

**Most Significant Change Story**

(Recorded by Facilitator)

Introduction: I’ve been coming to Fusion for about 2 years now. I come here just to get out of the house and whenever I have nothing to do, Fusion is my main priority to go. I do work, but when I’m not working I do come here.

*Okay, wow, sounds like you have a busy life.*

*So what is your significant change story?*

MSC:

Uh, Coming from uh a big city um, to a small town where there’s nothing to do, Fusion is a great thing for this town when there’s not much to do in a small town. But, yeah, that’s a change for me, coming to a small town. I’m just used to a big city.

*And who are, what would you say are the people involved in this? I guess it affected you family?*

Yeah, yeah I would say my family.

*And you’ve met people, have you built relationships here, like with friends or staff members?*

Staff members are great impact, they’re very nice. Nothing bad to say about Fusion.

*Yeah, so the significant change is that...can you think of like a time, or sort of like a story in terms of you came here and maybe you didn’t know what to do and you came to Fusion. Is that the story?*

Uh, yeah. Basically.

*Okay. So do you remember how you felt before you discovered Fusion?*
Uh, there’s...fairly boring. There’s...went to school and went home straight after that. A friend told me about Fusion. I came here, picked up the form, and came back the next day.

*Awesome.*

And before you, before you get the form you get to be a, you get to come as a guest with a friend, and yeah. I liked it so, I got a membership.

*Awesome, well thank you. I think that’s a great story.*
APPENDIX FOUR: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions

1. Name, age, how long have you been coming to Fusion?
2. How often do you think you come to Fusion? (Per week or month)
3. Tell me about what it’s like being a youth in Ingersoll.
   a. What do you do for fun?
   b. What would you say is the hardest thing? The best thing?
   c. Do you go to the bowling alley, arena, pool? Why/Why not?
4. Why did you decide to start coming to Fusion?
   a. Why do you think some youth don’t come to Fusion? What do they do instead?
5. What do you think is the biggest thing you get out of coming to Fusion? Why?
   a. Think about relationships, the space, programs and activities available.
6. How do you feel about your relationships with staff?
   a. Do you feel like staff listen to you here at Fusion?
   b. What do you think makes a good staff member at Fusion?
7. A lot of people in the workshops referred to a “sense of belonging” when talking about Fusion. What do you think about this?
   a. Why might youth feel like they “belong” here?
   b. Do you think a sense of belonging is important in a place like Fusion?
8. Fusion is only open to youth 18 and under, how do you feel about this? How do you think you will feel when it’s time to leave Fusion?
   a. Why do you think have that rule? Does it work?
   b. Where will you go/What will you do after you turn 19?
   c. Do you think you’ll stay in Ingersoll or try to leave?
9. Why do you think afterschool programs like Fusion are important in towns like Ingersoll?
   a. Is Fusion successful? How/Why?
   b. Do you think Fusion helps make the community more youth-friendly?
   c. How can Fusion promote better relationships between youth and the community?
10. Do you see yourself, or other youth, as agents of change?
    a. An agent of change is someone that seeks to change things, to make things better in their community.
    b. Have you ever been involved in any community projects or volunteered at community events?
11. In your Most Significant Change story you talked about _______. Can you tell me more about this moment and why you feel it’s so important?
12. Do you have any recommendations for Fusion?
   a. How do you think they can make it better/easier to be a youth in Ingersoll?

13. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?
   a. Anything that you think is important about Fusion that I may have missed in the workshop or interview?
**APPENDIX FIVE: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Goal:** To better understand, from a youth perspective, the impacts of afterschool programs in the lives of rural youth and how evolving feelings of inclusion and exclusion can lead to positive youth development and increased youth capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives (of the study)</th>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Source of Data/Methods</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Describe the youth experience in Ingersoll, ON.</td>
<td>1. What is it like to be a youth in Ingersoll?</td>
<td>MSC Stories Interviews Validation Workshop</td>
<td>Boredom Lack of options Small Town “Nothing good about Ingersoll” statements Alternative activities Judgement Bad Behaviour Being Teenagers Gang mentalities Targeted Drugs Fitting In Drama Cliques Convenience Accessible Cost Friends Place to Go (hang out) Escape Connections (peers, staff) Meet new people Identity descriptions (“I” statements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why do youth come to Fusion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research Questions

1. What is it like to be a youth in Ingersoll?
2. Why do youth come to Fusion?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Understand how Fusion programs contribute to youth development.</th>
<th>3. Why are Fusion Programs Important?</th>
<th>VIPP Interviews</th>
<th>Opportunities Skills Changing attitudes Learning Responsibility Expectations Freedom (options) Fun Participation Personal Development (confidence, self-esteem) Prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. What skills and competencies to youth gain from participating in Fusion Programs?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability/Competency Skills Future Plans Knowledge Learning Resources Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>VIPP Interviews</td>
<td>Contribution Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explore how Fusion changes youths’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion (belonging, welcoming)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do youth contribute to Fusion?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Judgement (lack of)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social structures (cliques)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation (working for programs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth ownership of Fusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changing Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth-Friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth on the Streets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Place to Go</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small Town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Option</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Judgement (lack of)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe Space/Positive Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Safety (supervision)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth ownership of Fusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What is a youth-friendly community? (follow up question based on interview responses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Understand the connections formed at Fusion and why they are important to youth development.</td>
<td>8. What connections does Fusion facilitate between youth and the community?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What relationships do youth form at Fusion?</td>
<td>10. Why are these relationships important?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIPP Interviews Validation Workshop - Connections (?)</td>
<td>Community Community Change Volunteering Empowerment/Lack of Social structures Connections (staff) Reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people/Making friends Place to Go Friends Staff Different groups Inclusion Age Limits (ageing out, people leaving, loss) Appropriateness (connected to youth ownership)</td>
<td>Networks Youth Capacity Support Acceptance Youth Influence Inclusion Validation/Respect Shared Interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Codes</td>
<td>Authority Change <em>(cross-cutting theme)</em></td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Different opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
