



Mental Well-Being and Resiliency for Youth in Lanark, Leeds & Grenville



“Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group” (UNESCO).

INTRODUCTION:

Municipalities in Lanark, Leeds and Grenville have demonstrated a keen interest in and support for youth. The majority of townships in Leeds Grenville specifically mention youth as a focus for action in their Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP). Many municipalities provide a myriad of opportunities for youth through:

- Youth centre support
- Recreation and Sport
- Volunteer Fairs
- Public Spaces
- Youth Input

Youth are highlighted in Lanark County’s ICSP, particularly in the sections on Places & Events, Age Friendly Communities and Healthy Communities.

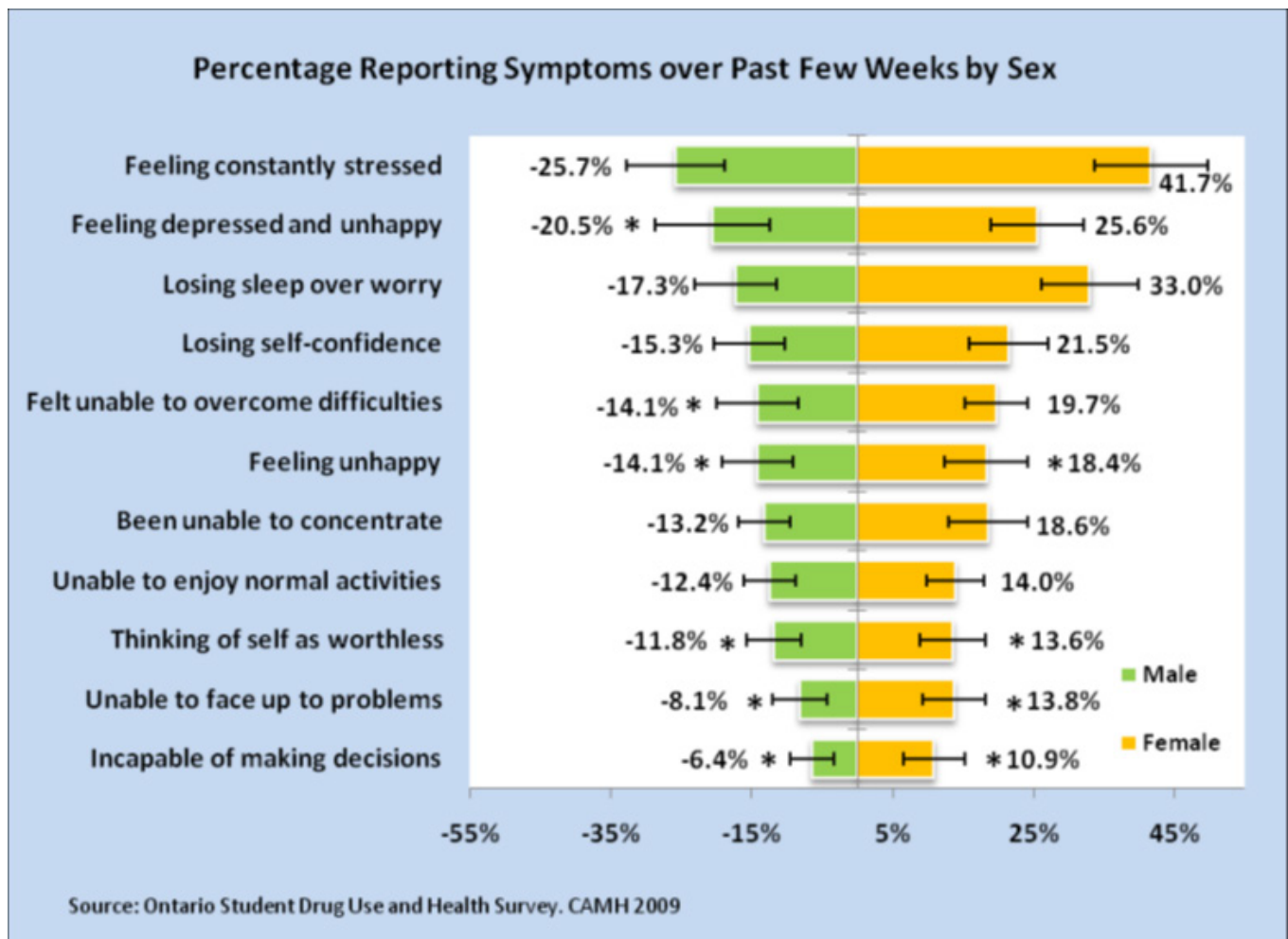


Mental Health of Youth in Lanark, Leeds & Grenville:

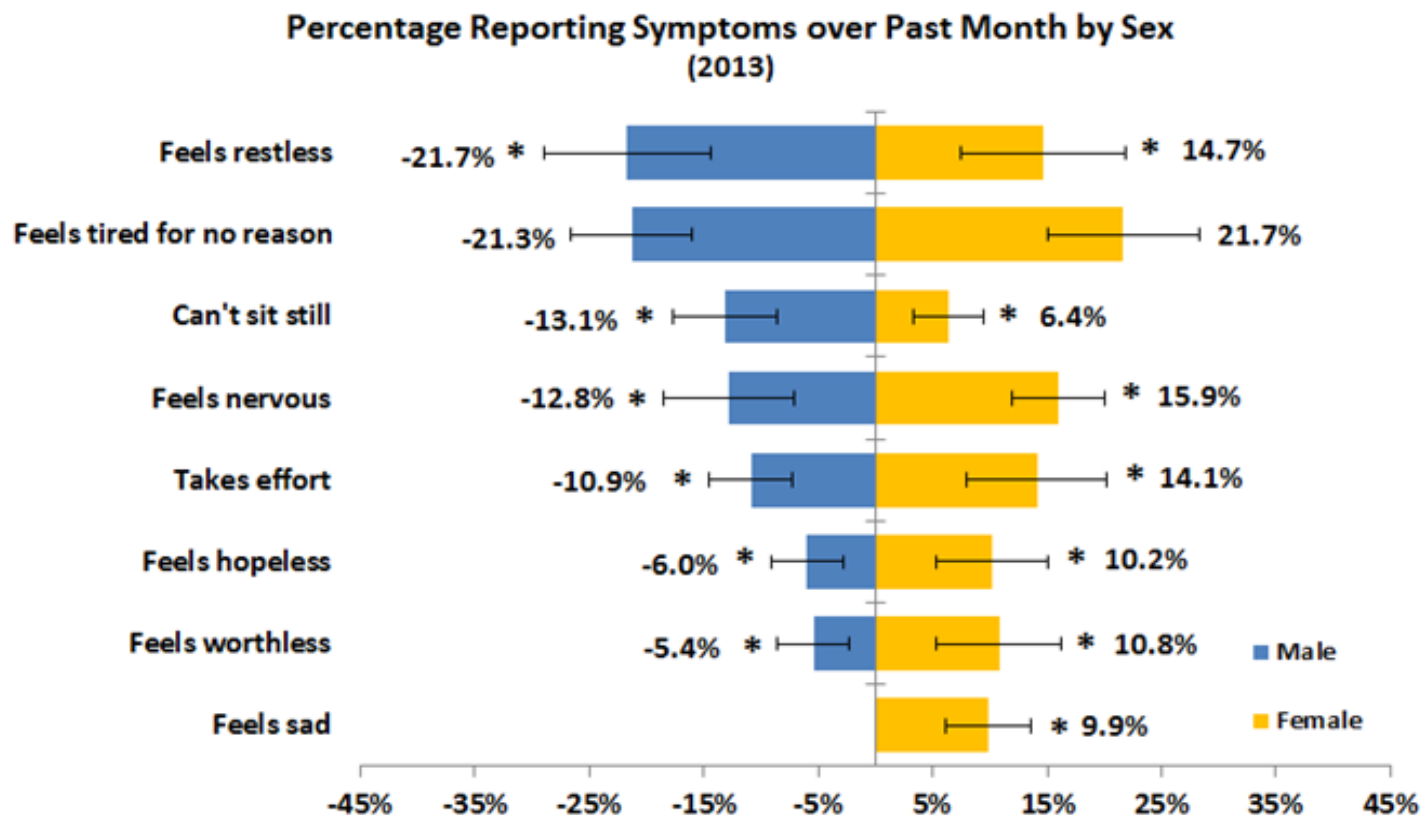
The following is a snapshot look at the mental health of Grade 7 to 12 students in Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey report from 2009:

- 20.2% reported that they sought the help of a medical professional for either emotional or mental health reasons in the 12-months prior to the survey
- 10% of secondary school students reported low self esteem
- 41.7% of females and 25.7% of males are feeling constantly stressed
- 25.6% of females and 20.5% of males are feeling depressed and unhappy
- 33% of females and 17.3% of males are losing sleep over worry
- 51.8% of males and 28.8% of females engaged in at least one delinquent behavior in the preceding year, with vandalism being the most often reported followed by fighting at school and petty theft
- 35.3% of students reported being bullied

Graph below shows results for Lanark, Leeds and Grenville OSDHS 2009



Graph below shows results for Lanark, Leeds and Grenville OSDHS 2013



Source: Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey. CAMH 2013

Mental Health & Well-Being:

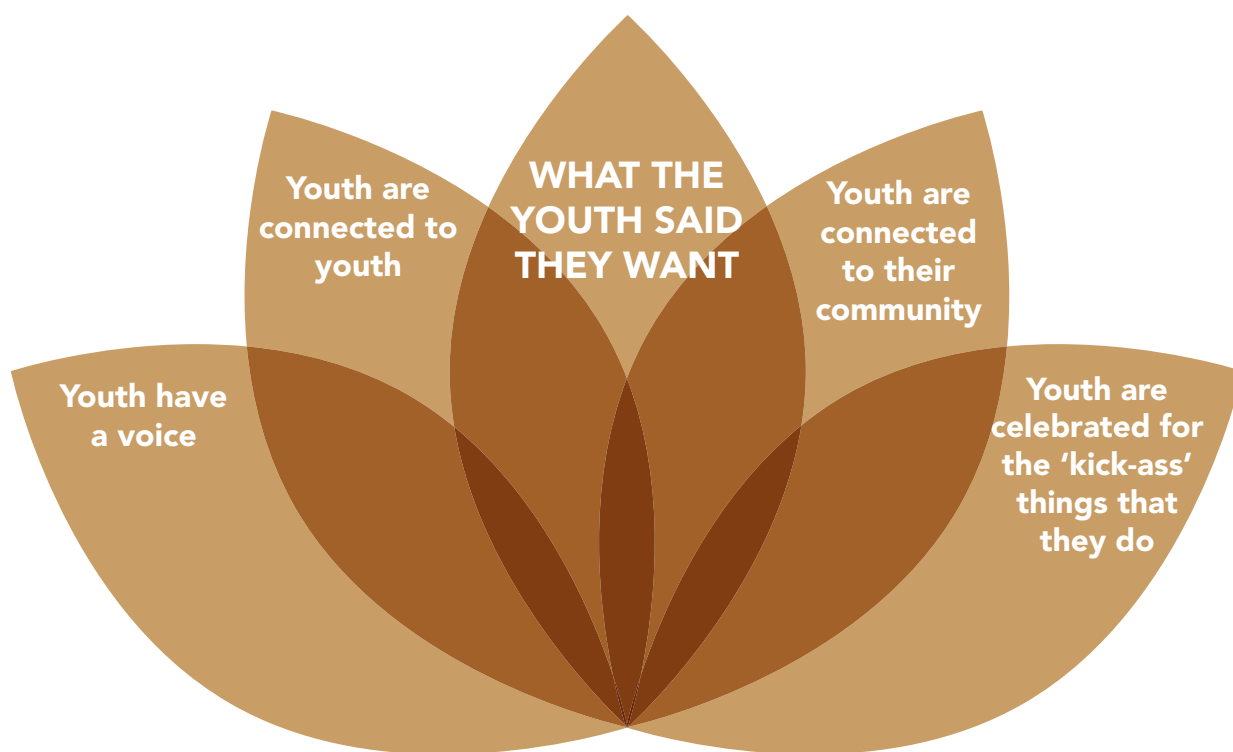
The World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) has defined mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (p. 1).

Promoting mental health and well-being encourages the development of resilience, and resilience leads to better mental health. Mental well-being and resiliency are particularly important for our youth so that they:

- become productive, contributing members of our communities,
- are more likely to stay within or return to our communities, and
- become actively involved in promoting communities that provide a sense of connection, belonging and support.

To be resilient and have good mental health, youth need to feel included and respected in their community and have opportunities for meaningful engagement.

In 2013 Every Kid in Our Communities sponsored a Youth Engagement Forum, led by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, where local youth were asked what they would like to see in place in their communities. Their responses fell into 4 categories:



The Healthy Communities Vision:

The Healthy Community Partnership encourages organizations and municipalities to endorse and support the 'Healthy Communities Vision', which follows.

All community members have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a healthy life, regardless of income, education, or ability.

Healthy community environments promote well-being and quality of life and contribute to integrated community sustainability (cultural vitality, economic health, environmental responsibility and social equity).

Based on consultations with the community, a specific vision statement for mental well-being and resiliency has been developed:

All community members are engaged and connected and have access to resources, and are able to cope with life's challenges within a safe, supportive community.

It is about going beyond focusing on risk factors, mental illness, and treatment (a deficit-based approach) to focusing on strategies, within a municipality's capabilities, that build protective factors (an asset-based approach) for youth. This in turn, contributes to positive mental health and well-being.

"...parents, communities and decision makers should move beyond a deficit-focused model of youth development (ensuring that youth are problem-free) and toward a coordinated and asset-focused approach that seeks to prepare youth to thrive as family and community members, leaders and contributors to the province and our future" (Government of Ontario, 2012).

An Asset-Based Approach-Developmental Assets®:

The Search Institute has identified 40 Developmental Assets® that foster healthy development and resiliency in children and youth. Assets can have a powerful, positive effect. The more assets youth have, the more likely they are to have positive attitudes and engage in thriving behaviors. The developmental assets framework takes a **strengths based approach** by focusing on what is present (assets/strengths), not what is absent (risks/problems). For more information, see Appendix.



The following three pages outline possible asset building strategies, based on youth input and research, that municipalities can engage in, either in partnership with the community or on their own, to support and encourage local youth.

Your Municipality Can Give Youth a Voice:

- Partner/sponsor a Youth Ideas conference.
- Include youth on community boards and councils and give them opportunities to take leadership roles and make real contributions.
- Have a youth advisory link to municipal planning.
- Run a youth focus group when developing policy.
- Use Twitter to get youth input on community issues and programs.
- Have youth give input on where and how they want community services provided.
- Ask youth where they do and do not feel safe. Ask them what could be done to make them feel safer.
- Assess current programs, especially those that are not attracting youth.



Photo credit: Metroland Media

Your Municipality Can Celebrate Youth Success:

- Publicize and celebrate the ways youth contribute to the community.
- Host an annual community awards ceremony with sponsorships by local businesses to provide prizes.
- Recognize youth through local media (focus on the positive things youth are doing).
- Post success stories of youth, by youth, on municipal websites. These may not always be read by youth, but would help adults be more aware of youth success stories.
- Sponsor an awards night for youth in the community who serve as good role models. Adults and kids could nominate deserving youth by secret ballot.
- Regularly recognize children and youth that excel in various areas: service, creativity, courage, performance, leadership, academics, sports, etc..
- Challenge local media to spotlight the positive accomplishments of many youth, as opposed to the negative actions of a few.
- Display youth artwork and projects at local community centres and other places where community members are likely to see them.
- Affirm and honour the healthy choices that youth make. Examples: Invite youth to create posters against drug and alcohol use and/or violence, then sign them and display them in the community.
- Provide opportunities for youth to model positive, responsible behavior for each other. Examples: Promote youth volunteer activities; encourage youth participation on community and municipal committees.
- Provide funding grants for innovative/creative ideas and initiatives.
- Hire youth when appropriate.



Your Municipality Can Provide or Support Opportunities for Youth to Connect with Youth:

- Provide youth with safe, supervised times and places where they can hang out with their friends.
- Provide places for informal activities (passive recreation) e.g., skate parks.
- Sponsor diverse activities to reach all youth, especially those who are underserved by existing organizations.
- Sponsor youth bands, orchestras, drama clubs, dance troupes, and singing groups. Provide places to practice.
- Partner with local congregations and youth organizations



in sponsoring community-wide youth events.

- Publicize youth programs in many different ways - through the media, posters, community bulletin boards, websites, etc..
- Provide a community website for youth, where they can post information and messages.

Your Municipality Can Provide or Support Opportunities for Youth to Connect with Community Members:

- Create opportunities for youth and adults to work and play together.
- Support mentoring programs that match youth with caring adults.
- Support establishment of community gardens. Define the youth role.
- Provide neighborhood playgrounds and parks.
- Provide/support a community library.
- Create neighbourhood service projects that bring adults and youth together.
- Work to create strong neighborhood bonds. Sponsor activities that encourage neighbors to get to know each other better.
- Promote appreciation for diversity by sponsoring music concerts, ethnic dance performances, multicultural festivals, and other events.
- Make programs accessible. Offer transportation to and from programs.
- Sponsor diverse activities to reach all youth, especially those who are underserved by existing organizations.
- Think intergenerationally. Start and support programs that connect old and young, adults and youth, teenagers and children.
- Provide an asset map for youth related activities and resources on a municipal website.
- Provide free internet access for families, including access to a youth/family site.
- Provide special doorways into employment for youth.
- Sponsor/participate in career days so youth can spend time with adults in professions that interest them.
- Publicize volunteer programs and opportunities for youth.
- Pair youth with adult volunteers for community service projects.
- Host a volunteer fair at a secondary school.
- Create and publicize service opportunities for youth and families.
- Create community calendars that include all different kinds of youth activities: in schools, congregations, community organizations, etc. Distribute them widely (community newspaper, cable access, or a community website) so that families can plan and set priorities together.
- Provide training for coaches and other adult leaders on how to communicate well with youth.



Other:

Municipalities Celebrate Community Asset Builders:

- Recognize people who make a difference for youth in your community.
- Celebrate positive role models in your community through media coverage.
- Honour all adults who exhibit the qualities you seek to nurture in youth, not just celebrities or powerful people.
- Recognize youth employers.

Also:

- Publicize family crisis hotlines.
- Make safety a high priority in parks and other public places.
- Make sure that coaches and other adult leaders (of teams, clubs, youth organizations, after school programs, etc.) are informed of school boundaries. Ask for their support.

Appendix

Process for Development of Municipal Asset List to Support the Mental Well Being and Resiliency of Local Youth

1. The '[Community Picture](#)' for Lanark, Leeds & Grenville identified unacceptable levels of stress, depression/unhappiness, worry and poor self esteem of local youth.
2. County and municipal Integrated Sustainability Community Plans indicate an interest in supporting youth.
3. Leeds Grenville and Lanark health and social service providers came together to identify and support potential initiatives which would lead to the mental well-being and resiliency of local youth.
4. Every Kid in Our Communities of Leeds and Grenville hosted a Youth Engagement exercise conducted by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement.
5. Local youth chose four areas they identified as priorities for support.
6. The Search Institute's research on Developmental Assets shows that the more assets a child/youth has, the more resilient they are and the more thriving behaviours they engage in.
7. Recommendations for actions municipalities can take to support youth were identified based on the results of the youth engagement and Search Institute's Developmental Assets.
8. The recommendations were reviewed and modified based on feedback from municipal staff and youth.
9. Adult allies and youth were recruited to seek input from youth relevant to each individual municipality.
10. Municipal Council presentations will be delivered to share findings

Developmental Assets® to Develop Resiliency

The Search Institute has identified 40 Developmental Assets® that foster healthy development and resiliency in children and youth. These 40 assets (protective factors) are positive experiences, opportunities, relationships, skills and personal qualities that young people need to help them become healthy, caring, and responsible adults. The developmental assets framework takes a strengths based approach by focusing on what is present (assets/strengths), not what's absent (risks/problems).



Assets can have a powerful, positive effect. **The more assets young people have, the more likely they are to have positive attitudes and engage in thriving behaviors.** They succeed in school, exhibit leadership, maintain good health, value diversity, overcome adversity, help others, delay gratification, and resist participating in risky behaviours (e.g. alcohol use, binge drinking, smoking, drug use, sexual intercourse, criminal behaviour, aggressive and bullying behaviours,

and other excessive risk taking). Thirty-one assets is a benchmark for experiencing their positive effects most strongly.

These municipal strategies for youth well-being were chosen based on developmental asset literature on how communities can build assets in youth. In addition, local youth had the opportunity to review these indicators and provide feedback. The strategies chosen have been approved by youth, who felt that either they or youth they know would participate.

Every Kid in Our Communities of Leeds and Grenville

Every Kid in our Communities is a coalition of over thirty agencies, organizations and government working together to ensure that all children, youth and families in Leeds-Grenville are safe, healthy and valued. Every Kid focuses on building on the strengths of children, youth and families through promotion of the Developmental Assets.

The coalition has worked on a number of initiatives to support youth, including:

- Regular meetings of agencies providing services to youth to discuss how to better align resources to fill gaps and avoid overlap in services
- Support for inclusion in and access to recreation
- Developing strategies to engage youth in their communities
- Forming a Youth Engagement Squad (YES) to provide advice to the coalition and support youth in their communities

In 2013 Every Kid sponsored a planning meeting lead by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and involving local youth and service providers. Participants identified four goals related to supporting youth in our communities. These include:

- Celebrate youth
- Give youth a voice
- Provide opportunities for youth to connect with youth
- Provide opportunities (formal) for youth to connect with the community

The municipal strategies provide communities with concrete actions to meet these goals.



Connecting School and Community

Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario:

"The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario is committed to supporting Youth Engagement and Youth-Led activities in all of our schools and communities. By promoting these initiatives, it is our hope that student resiliency will be increased thus decreasing the rate of mental health concerns noted in our students. For the past three years, our students have completed a Resiliency Survey developed in collaboration with Resiliency Initiatives in Calgary, Alberta. It has been found nationally, and in our board, that students feel resilient and connected to their communities in the younger years, and this resiliency and connection declines throughout adolescence. It is our school board's goal to close this gap and foster students' strengths, thus increasing and inspiring their resiliency. By partnering and supporting the Healthy Communities Partnership's vision of creating a more Youth-Friendly and Youth-Engaged culture within Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, we are empowered to facilitate this objective. By strengthening and truly listening to the voice of our youth, both in a school setting and within the larger community, incredible and sustainable change can occur."

Upper Canada District School Board:

"The Upper Canada District School Board's mission is to prepare all students for a successful life. Wellness is a pillar of the Board's Strategic Plan. A successful life is nurtured when students are included in and feel connected to their communities, have a voice in community development, and have access to activities and opportunities that increase and maintain positive mental health and well-being. The Board is committed to cultivating assets in children and youth, and recognizes that this is critical for healthy development. The Board's Mental Health Strategy includes powerful "We All Belong" and "See my Voice" student campaigns, a focus on building mental health literacy, strategies for intervening early and often when well-being is at risk, and partnering with community agencies and organizations that share a commitment to engaging with and supporting youth in their development. The Healthy Communities Partnership presents a comprehensive tool for taking a strengths based approach to building vibrant, strong, and healthy communities."

Sources:

Benson, Peter L, Judy Galbraith, and Pamela Espeland. What Kids Need to Succeed. Minneapolis MN: Search Institute and Free Spirit Publishing Inc, 1998.

Fisher, Deborah. Assets in Action: A Handbook for Making Communities Better Places to Grow Up. Minneapolis MN: Search Institute, 2003.

<http://www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-assets>

<http://everykid.on.ca/assets-workgroup/local-data/>

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/AddictionsSubstanceAbuse/hi-asa-simp-conn-stronger-kids.pdf>

<http://www.healthyllg.org/mwbr.html>

<http://www.porticonetwork.ca/web/camh-hprc/resources/best-practice-guidelines-for-mental-health-promotion-programs>

[http://www.healthunit.org/reportpub/reports/Mental Health and Wellbeing Among LGL Students.pdf](http://www.healthunit.org/reportpub/reports/Mental_Health_and_Wellbeing_Among_LGL_Students.pdf)

Resources:

Resources to assist municipalities and others interested in this initiative are available here:

<http://www.healthyllg.org/mwbr.html>

Topics include:

- Youth engagement
- Sample process for youth council members
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Event planning

Contributors:

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- Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
- Children's Mental Health of Leeds & Grenville
- Every Kid in Our Communities of Leeds and Grenville
- Healthy Communities Partnership: Lanark, Leeds & Grenville
- Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit
- Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth
- Safe Communities of Leeds and Grenville
- The Township of Rideau Lakes
- The Town of Smiths Falls
- TRICAS - TriCounty Addiction Services
- United Way Leeds and Grenville
- Upper Canada District School Board