

# #RisingYouth Research Highlights on Lessons Learned from Participants

## Emerging Themes Throughout COVID-19

APRIL 2021

“ I believe the biggest success of this project was a few things actually; a sense of belonging was displayed by the hard work, the planning of individual aspirations for the exterior, and coming together to work together.”

— #RisingYouth Alumni

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# Introduction

TakingITGlobal's #RisingYouth Community Service Grants program, launched in 2017, has approved 4,700 micro-grants led by young Canadians (15-30) amounting to \$4,923,500 in funding distributed to date. These projects have resulted in 325,000+ volunteer hours and over 30,000 volunteer placements across the various fiscal years to date, made possible through funding by the Government of Canada as part of Canada Service Corps. Over **80% of projects are led by youth who identify from underrepresented communities**, with approximately 30% of application referrals coming from over 100 community partner organizations who have offered support with promoting the grants and mentoring youth during their project journey.

Each year, continued improvements have been made to support the participant experience including the launch of various tools and resources to support applicants, grantees, and alumni.

Our program has maintained a Net Promoter Score of 90, reflecting high levels of satisfaction in the program delivery experience which has aimed

to provide responsive service to applicants. Our average turnaround time for review and approval was 17 days, and improved to just 11 days in 2020, exceeding our promise of a response within 30 days. Given the context of a global pandemic, we are amazed at what has been achieved together with our team and partners involved.

We asked all of our 2020 grantees to reflect on these questions: What was your biggest success in your project? What lessons did you learn?

Analyzing over 2,200 responses, a key theme in both success and learning was related to self-growth. Words such as “realize”, “possible”, “learn”, “impact”, “feel”, and “proud” were most often mentioned in the overall responses. Grantees expressed not only learning about skills vital to managing their projects, but also a change in outlook in what they are capable of, and what is possible for themselves and their communities. These responses were fit into the theme of “Overcoming Challenges” and “Self-Growth” respectively.

**12,277** team members  
collaborating with grantees on  
implementing their projects in 2020

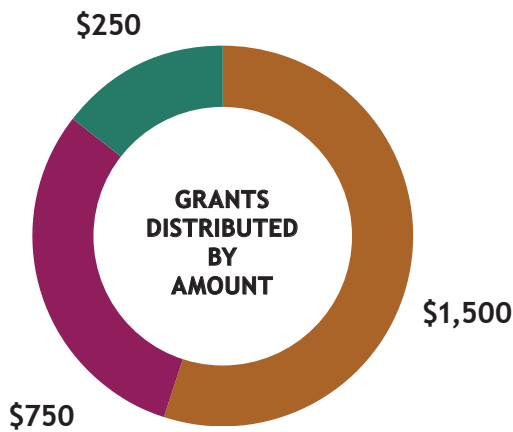
**201,695** hours volunteered  
through #RisingYouth projects in 2020

# INTRODUCTION

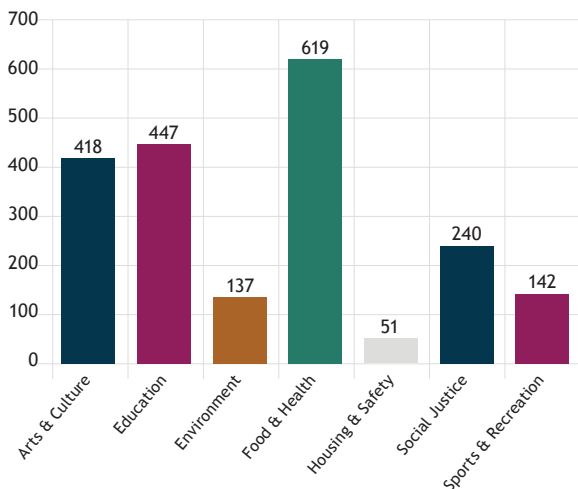
Our grantees who identified as a visible minority also included many action-oriented words, such as “achieve”, in expressing the inspiration for doing more because of the experiences in their project.

Another key theme that arose is related to the shared-community. Words such as “together”, “connect”, “impact”, “share”, and “create” were most often mentioned in the responses

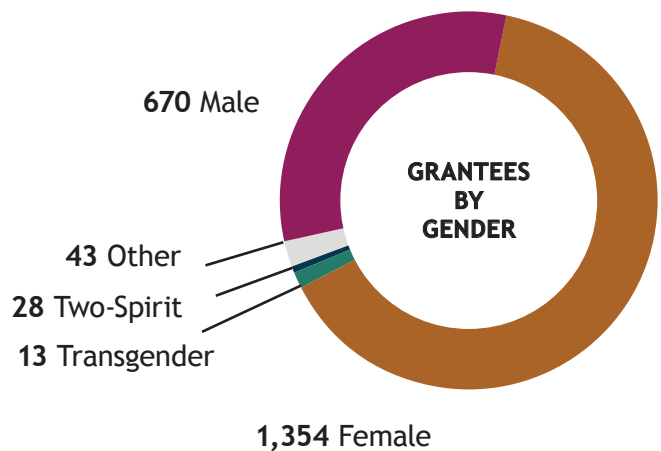
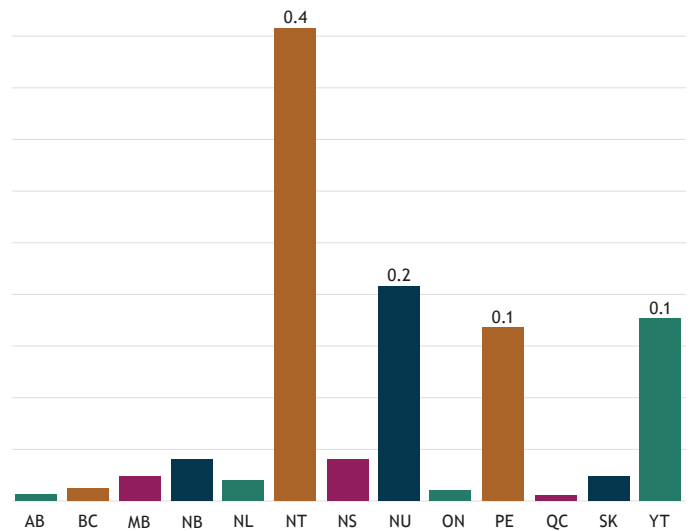
overall. Grantees expressed a greater sense of belonging with their communities, through the connections they made and the experiences in the project. Our Indigenous grantees also often mentioned “teachings”, which most often related to the teachings that they received from elders in their communities, and the teachings that they were able to pass on.



GRANTS BY PROJECT CATEGORY



GRANTEES AS % OF POPULATION BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY



# Lessons Learned - Key Themes

## METHODOLOGY

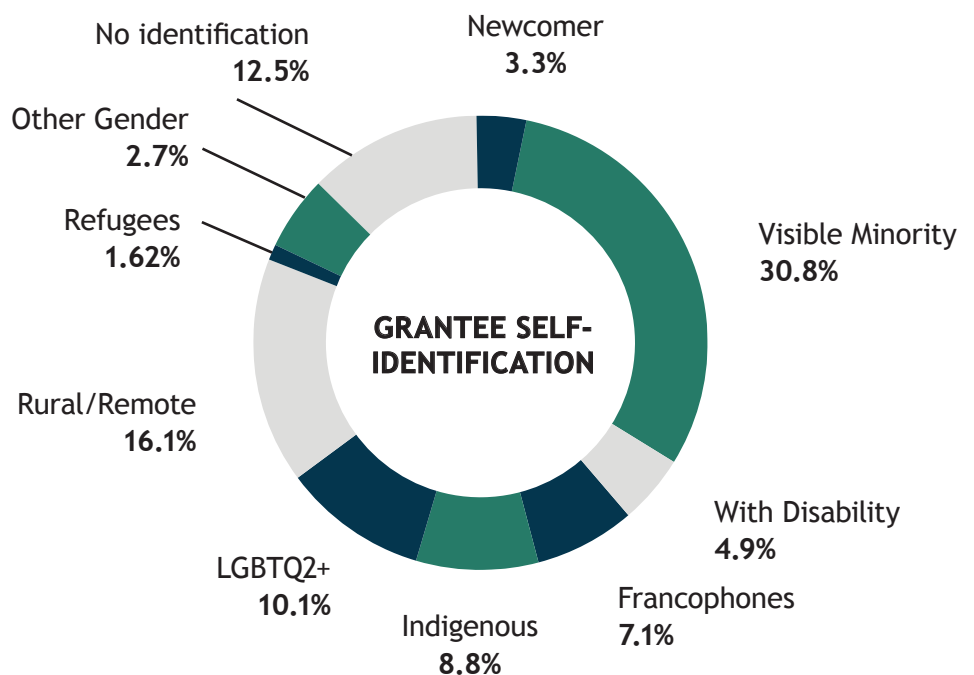
Grantees were examined as a whole and then they were broken down based on different demographic subgroups. Specifically grantees were broken down into those identifying as visible minority, Indigenous, LGBTQ2+, and francophone. It was intended that other subgroups be examined, however, there were either not enough responses within the groups to do an in-depth analysis.

Responses to two questions - what was your greatest success in your project? And what was a lesson learnt through the project, and how would you have done differently? - were analyzed separately. The quotes presented in this report were responses to these two questions.

In analyzing the grantee responses, the first step was to find out what common themes existed between all of the responses within a specific demographic group. Thus, within the demographic groupings mentioned above, the top 10 to 20 words that were mentioned most frequently in the grantee responses were identified.

Next, all the quotes that contained these frequently used words were manually reviewed to understand the context to which the words were used for context. This allowed words to be grouped into specific themes. For example, the frequently used word “communication” was placed into the group labelled as “Challenges”, whereas “connect” was placed in the group labelled as “Shared Community”. The quotes were reviewed by the analyst for content, and select quotes were presented to TakingITGlobal staff for selection to include in this report.

The following provides an overview of how grantees have self-identified:



# Theme 1: The Shared Community

A common theme resulting from grantee reflections was related to the community in which a grantee completed their project. This theme consisted of quotes that talked about the individual and their relations with their community. Common words our grantees used within this theme included, “engage”, “support”, “impact”, “connect”, “share”, and “create”.

“ I learnt that reaching out to your connections is a super effective way to gain attention and receive support.”

As a whole, most grantees talked about the hope and inspiration they felt from the communities they were serving in. For example,

“ We learnt more than I can hope to put into words, there are so many caring people in the world and it’s a blessing to be able to work to make something meaningful for your community. [...] So much is possible with help, reach out and you will be surprised with what you find.”

For 2020:

**2,108** grants approved

**\$2,311,500** granted

## THEME 1: THE SHARED COMMUNITY

Grantees also talked about how their project enabled them to see the potential for change within their communities. For example,

**“The lessons I learnt was to never doubt your community. Never doubt the power of togetherness, of sharing our stories and our pain, and never doubt the power of giving someone hope and a bit of comfort any way that you know how.”**

Our Indigenous grantees were more likely to speak of their shared community in respect to Indigenous tradition and culture. Common words in their responses include, “culture”, “teach”, “elder”, “proud”, and “tradition”. These grantees often expressed gratitude for feeling more connected to their own heritage as well as the land on which we all share.

Grantees who identified as visible minorities were more likely to speak about the shared community in the context of feeling secure in their communities. Common words amongst these grantees included “safe”, “space”, “family”, “health”, and “home”. These grantees were likely to express the connectedness and comfort they felt for their community after their project.



**“The quality of the project does not depend on the number of people present, but rather on the impact of the project on those who participate in it.”**

## Theme 2: Overcoming Challenges

**“The biggest success was the fact we made a difference in people’s lives and that we made them smile during these hard times.”**

Another common theme was on the topic of challenges, and how the grantee overcame these challenges. This theme consisted of quotes which talked about specific skills and mindsets that challenged them during their project. Common keywords that appeared in this theme included “communication”, “manage”, “organization”, “new”, “budget”, “advertise”, and “promote”.

**“A lesson learnt through this project is to never underestimate youth’s abilities to put together something amazing! I don’t think I would do anything differently with this project, but I now am more sure that with the right support youth can really accomplish all kinds of creative initiatives.”**

Overall, many grantees described the challenges they had to face, as being challenges directly relating to skills they needed for their project. For example,

**“At times, we all struggle and there is nothing wrong with receiving help. One of the most valuable lesson in life is that when times are hard, do not give up. Seek help and anything is possible. If I was to start this project today the only thing I would do differently is to [ask for help] more often.”**



## THEME 2: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Our grantees identifying as Indigenous were more likely to talk about overcoming challenges related to engaging a community for the purpose of passing on cultural and community knowledge. For example,

**“ I would make sure that the traditional teachings were broken up into sessions so more youth would be engaged.”**

Participants also often expressed having to face and overcome challenges which forced them to think beyond their project. For instance, the grantee in the following quote recognized societal or systemic reasons that would make their community feel unsafe when participating in a project. This grantee as a result, needed to examine and address these broader challenges in order to ensure that their project could impact their participants.

**“ I...found out [that] feeling safe is key towards making any impact.”**



## Theme 3: Self-Growth



“ [The project] has filled our broken-hearted community with new hope, new friendships, new vision, and new passion for relationships.”

Another common theme resulting from grantee reflections was self-growth. Within this theme, participants often talked about changes in regards to how they view their own capabilities, changes in their beliefs, and in their outlook for the future. Common words expressed by grantees under this theme include “proud”, “future”, “hope”, and “believe”.

“ One small act can lead to big change. If I were to redo everything today, knowing what I know now, I would have shared the experience of starting this project with someone younger than I am so that this dream would not fade and that they could one day pass it on and inspire others once again.”

## THEME 3: SELF-GROWTH

Through their work, participants often talked about being empowered and feeling that their skills can contribute to make a difference in a community. For example,

**“This could be a turning point for us to strive to do bigger and even better things in the world because we know where our strengths are, we know [what we] are capable of and we know it’s possible now.”**

Our Indigenous participants were more likely to talk about changes as a result of their project that altered the way that saw themselves with respect to their community and culture. For example,

**“Finally, I gained valuable cultural knowledge and realized the importance of culture, the connection we as people have with the land, and how essential the caribou are to the community of Old Crow.”**

Participants also often talked about a change in their outlook, where what they achieved changed their perspective on the potential of their community. For example,

**“I believe the biggest success, personally, was achieving a dream that I didn’t think would ever be possible.”**

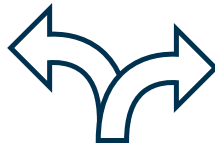
# Skills Developed

In reviewing responses submitted by project leaders as part of their Final Reports, the following skills were identified as being developed through the process of implementing their projects.



## LEADERSHIP

(Strengthening sense of social responsibility, gaining trust in self and others towards vision)



## DECISION MAKING

(Determining priorities and selecting between competing options)



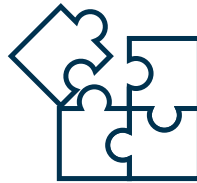
## COMMUNICATIONS

(Listening to others, asking for help, giving verbal/visual/written instructions)



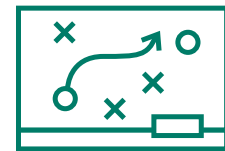
## TEAMWORK

(Defining roles based on strengths and working together with others to overcoming obstacles)



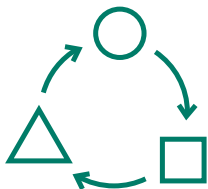
## PROBLEM SOLVING

(Breaking down big problems into smaller components)



## PLANNING

(Project design, time management, setting goals, and meeting deadlines)



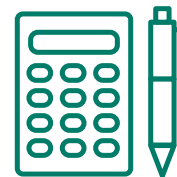
## ADAPTATION

(Ability to respond in flexible ways to changing circumstances)



## FACILITATION

(Fostering a sense of belonging, creating safe(r) spaces)



## BUDGETING

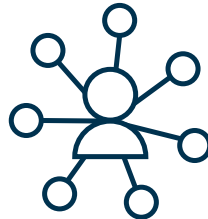
(Purchasing items, organizing receipts, and utilizing resources to meet goals)

## SKILLS DEVELOPED



### RAISING AWARENESS

(Finding ways to emphasize importance of particular issues)



### OUTREACH

(Developing promotional material to invite others to participate in project activities)



### NETWORKING

(Meeting new people, establishing positive relationships with youth and adult mentors)



### RESEARCH

(Further exploration of issues, organizations, theories, application of research to practice)



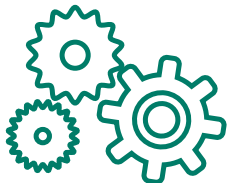
### REPORTING

(Data gathering, reflecting on lessons learned and outcomes)



### IDEA GENERATION

(Related to project application process and developing more ideas after completion)



### TECHNICAL SKILLS

(Use of new software and/or hardware in order to complete project activities)



### PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

(Preparing and submitting requests to local organizations)



### SOCIAL INNOVATION

(Creating platforms and unique opportunities to address complex social issues)

## SECTION 2

# Project Themes - Pandemic Response

The following themes have emerged based on projects proposed and implemented over the past year. Some examples of project approaches have been highlighted to provide a glimpse into the unique and creative ways youth are involving and supporting communities through these initiatives.



## FOOD SECURITY

Many projects preparing food hampers and/or boxes with both perishable and non-perishable items distributing to charities and families in need and suffering from food scarcity during the pandemic.

- **“Fantastic Food Event”** Lindsay partnered with a local Youth Centre to create a Donut and Pasta Kit night for youth and their families. Over 100 people were impacted.
- **“COVID-19 Drive-Thru Outdoor Market”** a team of youth created an innovative walk-thru market where people could choose their own produce in a safe and open environment, food was also delivered to Beresford Curling Rink, Bathurst High School, local homeless shelter, NABCL, and Bathurst Volunteer Centre. The project aimed to break the stigma of ‘need’ and asking for help.

“This project targeted people who were in need of food in a way that broke the stigma of ‘need’ and asking for help. By offering food to everyone, it wasn’t seen as a negative situation.”

## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE



- **“Community Garden”** developing a berry garden in a marginalized area of the community.
- **“COVID-19 Garden Kits”** Packaging different materials and tools to help families of Northumberland County to start growing their own food. 186 families benefited with help to start to develop a backyard or kitchen window garden. Packages were given to community organizations to help families based on need.

“ Learning how to grow our own food helps us to become more self-sufficient and, in turn, less reliant on the current food-supply chain that can be impacted by various factors, including weather and in this case, a pandemic.”

- **“Food Insecurity Event”** involving 300 high school and university students as part of a #SupportLocal Series to raise awareness on how COVID-19 is impacting business owners.

## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE

### ACCESS TO ARTS-BASED ACTIVITIES



- **“Virtual Paint Night”** providing attendees with supplies and snacks (dropped to their doorsteps prior to the event), allowing for a guided painting class to encourage a sense of connection and lessen the feeling of withdrawal during COVID-19.
- **“Flower Pots for Seniors”** over 30 volunteers worked together to assemble and paint flower boxes and bird feeders for seniors at three different long-term care facilities.
- Initiatives to support children with access to art supplies.
- **“Youth Lunch Program”** 247 items to support activities for school-age children purchased to help approximately 100 families in Iqaluit to keep kids busy at home during COVID-19.

“ We used the grant to purchase activities and games for children in our community. Most of us have been stuck at home, some with little activities to keep them occupied and engaged. This should help them stay healthy, active and happy! ”

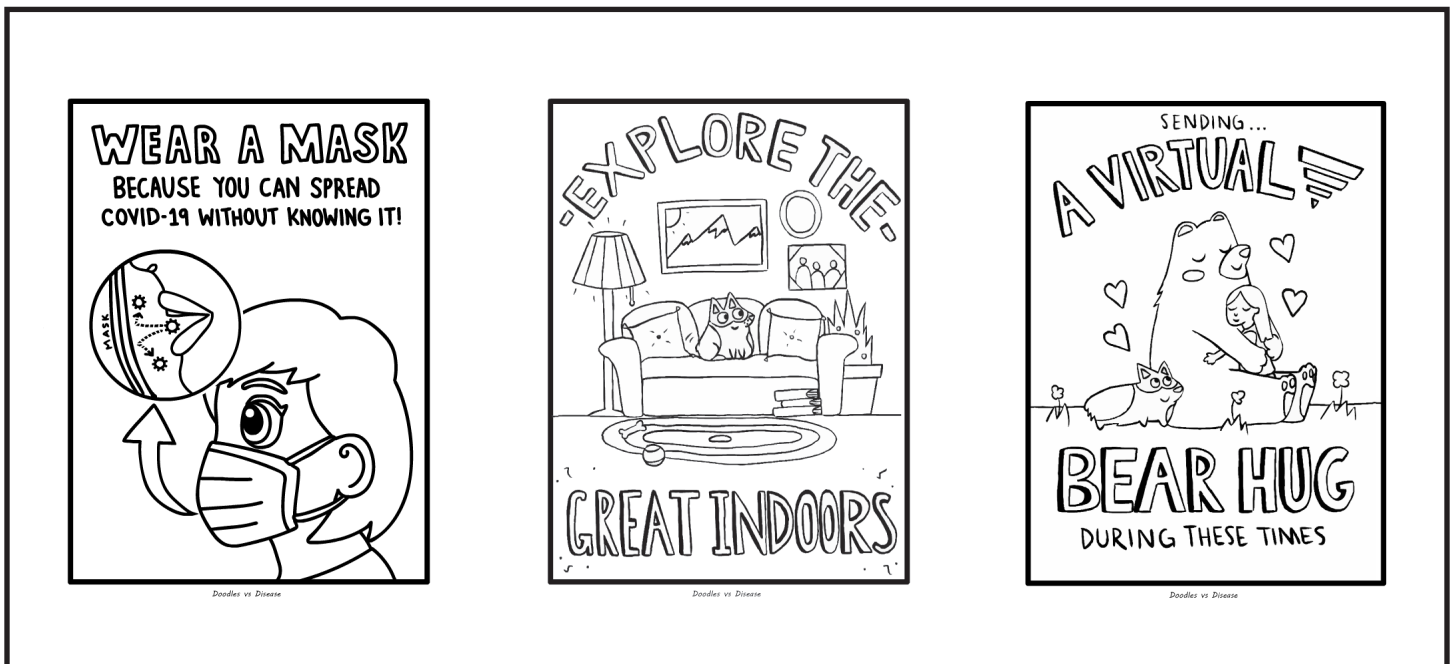


## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE

- Community mural projects in youth drop-in space.

“Once our drop-in re-opens at the end of the month, it will be seen by the many women and gender diverse communities that stay at our drop-in for our meal service and as residents.”

- “Doodles vs. Disease” colouring pages to inform children age 3-8 about COVID-19 were created and available for free download online in English and French. 140 printed colouring books were donated.





### ACCESS TO FITNESS & RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT

- Low income families were provided with recreational equipment packages including a soccer ball, skipping rope, and other supplies to support early childhood development while at home during COVID-19.

“With their new recreational equipment kids were able to develop new skills and keep them active and entertained while they are off school and do not have access to the same resources (art room, gym, etc.) that they would during the normal year.”

- “Online Exercise Platform” young adults with disabilities were supported to keep active and healthy during COVID-19 with regular online programming including yoga, Zumba, bodyweight circuits, and meditation.

“These activities helped young adults increase their activity levels during the pandemic. They also improved mental health through the promotion of inclusion and social connections.”

## MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

- **“Empowering Youth Mental Health”** an online conference where 150 people were engaged receiving tools and resources to combat mental health challenges.

“ We achieved an overwhelming response within the community to the point where Breakfast Toronto reached out to interview us post the event, to help empower Canadians to take a much more important note on Mental Health in Canada.”



## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE



- Creating and distributing handmade cards to vulnerable members in local communities.

“Creating and donating cards to community members was fun and rewarding. I really enjoyed this experience.”

- “Breathing and Relaxation Classes” Online breathing and stretching classes to ease anxieties and stresses that have increased as a result of COVID-19 reaching 55 attendees targeting the Black community.

“We made people feel more relaxed, offering an escape from the hustle and bustle to just breathe and get in tune with their mind, body, and soul. Our attendees told us they can’t wait for more classes!”



### DIGITAL INCLUSION

- **“Devices for Youth”** Projects to support distribution of mobile devices and/or Tablets to students in need of assistance with being able to complete online school work during COVID-19.
- **“Hospital Devices”** - iPad tablets delivered to Langley Memorial Hospital for seniors and immunocompromised to ensure patients remain connected throughout their stay.

“An iPad can assist with communication, wellness and education for hospital patients. And although family members were unable to visit in person, this helped patients feel less alone in times of need.”

- **“Cellphone and Digital Literacy Training”**

“The results from the project were great! Some recipients were able to reach old family members. One client regained contact with his sick daughter in Alberta and another could finally access government services and book necessary appointments.”

## VIRTUAL GATHERINGS & GAMES

- **“Games for Families”** recommendations provided on supports for families in need with the cancellation of many recreation activities. 34 families received games to increase quality time together.

“The families who received the games were very surprised, happy and thankful. Some of these families would not have been able to afford to purchase a game otherwise. This really appreciated the quality of life of mothers, fathers, and their children.”

- **Virtual Games:** members of Community Health, Environment and Wellness (CHEW) took part in a Virtual Escape Room and join bi-weekly virtual activities outside of school work for online support.

“We created an online platform that discussed issues that affect youth, and communicated with thousands of youth across Canada the many different supports available.”



## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE



- **Virtual Walking Tour** - organized virtual tours, zoom calls and podcasts to support connection to neighbourhoods and cities when physical gatherings were not allowed due to COVID-19.
- **“Class of 2020 Valedictorian Speech”** Since thousands of Canadian graduates in 2020 were unable to attend their ceremonies, a video was created to celebrate students across all geographies. Over 14,000 people were engaged from 17 countries through this video.

“ I am so thankful that this video that reached graduates worldwide, ensuring that they were awarded and celebrated for their achievements.”

- **Online Youth Gatherings** - ranging from motivational speaker series, self-management, and healthy habits.

“ Our team that could connect with youth during the ongoing pandemic, provide resources and motivational speakers, and fun games on various platforms.”

## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE

- Finance Workshop - to teach young women the basics around savings, wealth, and credit.

“ I was able to give these women an escape from their day-to-day lives by creating this space for them to connect and learn something new.”

- Virtual Watch Party - movie night bringing people together after an extremely challenging period apart.
- “Ramadan Trivia Nights” an informative and rewarding evening of spiritual fun using Kahoot and Zoom to integrate live trivia to celebrate the holiday of *Eid al Fitr*.

“ With COVID-19 causing social distancing and the temporary closing of religious buildings, we set out to host these trivias to help the greater community attain a sense of spirituality under these tough conditions.”



### COVID-19 CARE PACKAGES

Many projects focused on preparing packages for different populations including educational activity kits for children, supports for single mothers, appreciation for frontline workers, and hygiene kits for people who lost their homes and jobs.

- **“COVIDPacks”** - a team of 54 volunteers developed and delivered youth-friendly as well as education-focused activities for families in Saskatchewan experiencing quarantine.



**“COVIDPacks not only offer youth an alternative outlet to learning but an informative way for families to bond during a challenging and uncertain time. Our project aims will address accessibility barriers around educational resources during COVID-19.”**

- **“Care Packages”** 20 volunteers distributed over 350 packages including essential items like socks, toilet paper, and dental kits across Winnipeg including the West Central Women’s Centre.

## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE

“ I pitched the idea to my friends who were completely on board and received tremendous help from the community through raising donations. Not to mention, I held an open call to put together packages the days before we handed them out! Many people were involved in this wonderful day.”

- **“Care Packages for Mothers”** in preparation for Mother’s Day, 33 young and single moms in Langley, BC each received a surprise package (including educational activities for children) to brighten their day along with their kids.
- **“Care Packages for Frontline Workers”** together with support from seven local businesses, Sunshine Boxes were created for 31 frontline workers nominated by community members with items to support well-being and express appreciation (i.e. candles, lip balm, health bar, chocolate).



## PROJECT THEMES - PANDEMIC RESPONSE

- **“Hygiene Kits”** - (50 hygiene kits filled with 8 products including face masks, hand sanitizers, toothbrushes, toothpaste, baby wipes, tissue, shampoo, and soap) delivered to Calgary’s Women’s Shelter and vulnerable Calgarians.

“During this pandemic, it is important to band together for our community. Many people have lost their homes and jobs, the last thing they should worry about is lack of hygiene.”

- **“Mental Health Care Kits”** - 50 volunteers assembled and distributed mental health kits.

“The recipients of the packages really appreciated all of the hard-work that went into making it. We took into account their item and colour preferences when creating them. We got comments that it was a lovely surprise and made their quarantine.”

- **“Ending Period Poverty”** - over 19,000 feminine hygiene products for women were donated to three local food banks.

## SECTION 3

# Collective Project Outcomes

In the final project reports submitted by grantees upon the completion of their projects, participants were asked to reflect on their greatest success in completing their project. After careful review of the responses, the following 6 themes were identified:



- **Youth as Experts:** When youth are trusted with resources to implement their project ideas, the self-awareness and broader recognition of their expertise allows for a context and enabling environment for generativity.
- **Catalyst for Change:** The process of working together with volunteers to address an issue became a catalyst for future follow-up activities and additional resources mobilized to support efforts.
- **Social Inclusion:** Projects that allowed for the strengthening of social bonds in communities during challenging times and social isolation due to COVID-19.
- **Learning and Leadership:** New knowledge, skills and perspectives were gained through learning opportunities and resources that were produced, launched and facilitated as part of project activities.
- **Access and Equity:** Responsive to needs of diverse communities in need of essential supplies, issues of representation were addressed and platforms were created for new voices to be heard.
- **Increased Awareness:** Greater reach and awareness through social media and mainstream media of issues and youth-led creative approaches to problem-solving.

# Youth as Experts

By providing funding directly to youth who are signatories of the grant agreements, it positions youth as experts both in micro and macro context as they are entrusted with transforming their knowledge and experiences into actions to address issues and complex challenges.

“My biggest success achieved during my project would be more so self oriented. I feel like I really gained a sense of self and truly came to know my personal value. I feel like this project made me realize how much of a change I could make in the community and in the world just as one person. 1 million starts with 1 and I think I could be that one person to create a rippling effect that would inspired people to do their best and help others if they are capable and if not in any financial means at least with their time.”

“To create a platform where youth can talk and learn.”

“Our greatest success was being able to make a tangible difference through the youth that we were able to either support one-on-one or indirectly. While we did support over hundreds of youth online, we believe that creating a safe, tightknit, and supportive network where youth are able to free express themselves was our biggest goal.”

“Helping youth find a sense of pride.”

## YOUTH AS EXPERTS

“ I would say our biggest success with this project was the actual implementation and execution of the project. We would not have been able to do this project without #RisingYouth, our community and our amazing, driven executives. Every little milestone was a success which added to the entire successful project. I would say that every success throughout our journey was a big success as it positively impacted our community and those around us.”

“ We were also invited to speak at community events, which was validating and people gave positive feedback.”

“ There were many successes; working with youth to address a need in our community to support marginalized families with food support and wellness support during what has been a difficult year was a success in itself.”

“ I proved to myself that there are plenty of opportunities to help despite the current challenges and I have been so inspired by the other young people across the country who are creating projects of their own!”

“ A sense of ownership, because of the hard work all the youth and staff put into because it was their own and their own to share with the community on how proud they were.”



## YOUTH AS EXPERTS

“Our greatest success is the robot. It’s a combination of artificial intelligence and legal advice. This is a source of pride because, for the first time in history, labor law laws will be within reach and personalized to users. In addition, we are also in the process of integrating video capsules in animation format which will simplify and popularize the most recurring articles of law used in the context of the most violated laws.”



“Nunavummiut from the heart, I make this investment within the territory through a professional and personal commitment, in favor of the acceptance of differences, of all kinds, whether linguistic, cultural, political, social or gender.”

“My greatest success is certainly to have had a diverse and egalitarian program. I knew how to find and put forward new female and male talents from diverse backgrounds.”

“The requests from schools and hospitals to meet as soon as covid is under control. I am asked to continue my project in the long term.”

# Catalyst for Change



Building further interest and momentum towards follow-up activities, mobilizing resources, and spin off projects.

“Biggest success was seeing the spin off projects that are now happening with people who met in the projects. It’s cool to see the seed that was planted grow off in new exciting ways! And seeing people team up in such wonderful ways when perhaps they wouldn’t have connected otherwise. I think we created a spark.”

“We got a lot of very positive feedback from community members that they would like to donate again or to volunteer on second chance. I believe this event will grow each year.”

“We hope that we inspire more people to give back to their community and provide comfort for someone else in need.”

“It was an opportunity for people who had been in desire of a volunteer opportunity to volunteer and give back to the community.”

“Our biggest achievement was our team’s resolve to serve the community without making pandemic an excuse and infuse hope and confidence in the city that we will cope together!”



“The biggest success I feel is the happiness I was able to give a few people in the Community and the happiness and the satisfaction it brought to me.”

“Engaging community members; everyone is very excited for this project and looking forward to attending education sessions, volunteering at future events and harvesting the food forest in a few years!”

“It was creating an impact by sharing information and knowledge with a small group of capable youth who can then use the experience to get empowered to further the impact and spread it over the larger population.”

“This has inspired me to do more projects.”

“Getting the conversation started really will help the youth focus on how they can make their self care journey more sustainable in the long term.”

“A big takeaway was how people felt inspired to keep writing or put on their own events/ attend more events after this one finished! I was definitely inspired to keep putting on my own workshops!”

“I learned that one person can make a difference in a community. It's like dropping a pebble in the water. The ripple effect can be tremendous.”

“The greatest success is being able to introduce these books to a secondary school! I have worked and searched hard to find books with topics of bisexuality, same-sex parenthood, gender identity, trans people, and sexual orientation. These French books are hard to find. I had to order them and it took them a long time to arrive with the pandemic but I succeeded! In addition, I bought the books from a local bookstore to encourage the economy here.”

“We were able to convince the school to substitute some cafeteria meals for healthier meals like crispy chicken wraps and Chicken Broccoli Fettuccine Alfredo. Maybe this will show the school that meals don't have to be super complicated to be healthy and I hope they see how the students like it!”

“It's a personal success. A great success. I have surpassed myself, I have gone beyond my limits and I have exceeded them. I was very depressed during the pandemic and I was seeing symptoms of depression. I dared to talk about it and everything became clearer and more beautiful. Getting up in the morning with a heart full of passion. Listening to testimonials from people who took it as an inspiration for a business inspired me and allowed me to keep doing the project and have fun doing it. There were harder days, but I remembered my journey. I contacted entrepreneurs, got a scholarship, worked intensely in the morning contacting people, made a little change and felt so good. I was counted on, I built a schedule for myself and there isn't a better hobby than this project for me. Me who hates paperwork, I managed it for 3 months haha, now it's ok! I feel stronger than ever because even though I was fragile due to the pandemic my passion has simply allowed me to fly over this difficult period and make it one of the most incredible of my entire life.”

“I shared a letter to say that teaching is not a career choice like any other. Teaching is not filling a vase, it is lighting a fire.”

# Social Inclusion

Fostering a sense of belonging, acts of kindness bring optimism, smiles, hope, fun and joy during hardship and difficulty.



“Creating a comfortable space for people to discuss their lives and celebrating intersectional identities.”

“My overall biggest success would be just being able to make people happy in such a sad and stressful time.”

“The biggest success of the project would most likely be the social interaction that we were able to provide during the three paint nights that were held. Everyone was very appreciative of being able to safely take part in something.”

“It was a great feeling to have the whole community together to help us get the garden prepared for planting. It was a great feeling to have accomplished the feeling of community togetherness.”

“Engaging youth to gather virtually and have a conversation about a topic that occurs in their daily life but seems strange to them and create a safer space for not just themselves but also to their peers and family.”

“Strengthened bonds within the community.”

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

“Watching the kind acts and people being recognized for their kindness.”

“The biggest success would have to be with lightening the overall mood with everyone’s lives. People originally had felt as if the world was all coming down, but we all came together as a community and enjoyed the moment.”

“Community is engaged and appreciative of positive messages.”

“To get people together - we don’t usually do that here in my hometown, we don’t have those kinds of programs. We got people together, which was great, and everyone had a lot of fun.”

“The greatest success was the collaboration of a diverse group and the compassion expressed in their differences.”

“Supporting our community through the pandemic has been the biggest success of our project.”

“I think today’s event just felt so joyful; I think that is the biggest success. I saw people laughing, dancing, getting messy, harvesting, picking flowers, and learning about bees.”

“To see some of the students who are very disengaged in school to flourish during this after school time. Students who didn’t have friends gain some long lasting friendships.”

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

“The biggest success is that this project not only taught me how to garden (it was my first garden!), It also gave fruitful harvests (at least 10 baskets of vegetables per week), but the biggest success for me has been in bonding with the community and breaking people’s social isolation. In fact, the garden is located on a very busy street and the people who walked by the garden would stop to chat with us, congratulate us on the garden and get to know us. By the end of the fall, we knew the names of several people in the neighborhood. For me, it is this sense of community that has been the greatest success of the project, especially in times of a pandemic where one can feel isolated and alone.”

“I was happy to see how young people wrote messages to touch the hearts of older people. I knew how to convey to them the importance that these messages could have for these people.”

**“It was to see how proud the young people were of their work. Proud to see their harvest from the garden. To see the bonds of friendship develop between young people who would probably not have known each other otherwise, if they would not have had this opportunity to work on a collective project.”**

“As soon as the government of Quebec gave the authorization to trick or treat on Halloween night, we began to install the decorations and put security measures in place. The inhabitants of the district noticed them and many of them asked us questions about the project and the respect of the sanitary instructions. This created excitement and encouraged families in our area to safely collect and distribute Halloween treats, even during a pandemic. I am convinced that having decorated earlier encouraged other homes to do the same, and thus helped to continue the tradition of door-to-door Halloween in our neighborhood, despite COVID-19.”

# Learning and Leadership

Launching new resources including books, podcasts, websites, apps, webinars to develop knowledge, and skills.

“One part of the biggest success I felt that I have achieved through leading and executing my project is improving myself and my skills as a leader. This developed my communication skills by helping me listen to others, clarity, open-mindedness, respect, and many more.”

“The biggest success was combining the separate interviews into chapters to create a complete book. Successfully getting it published online and in a hard copy was a huge success as well.”

“One of our biggest successes was when we were reached out to by two organizations who wanted to partner with us to be a part of one of our Webinars. We felt honoured that other organizations and youth saw the value of what we were doing and wanted to help out in our missions as well.”

“The biggest success I will achieve through my project is teaching children a lifelong skill. Often music is overlooked as a critical part of educational development, and is not given the same importance as other areas in school.”

“I believe the biggest success achieved through our project was the variety and breadth of topics that we tried to cover in our 4 part webinar series. Our webinar series was meant to support youth in the dimension of wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, wellness can take on many forms ranging from mental wellness, to physical wellness, to social wellness.”

## LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

“The biggest success was probably our creating of our website - it was something that we’ve not done before and was new but it was truly very exciting and also a big accomplishment that we were able to create that.”



“The biggest success of this project I think was actually carrying it out. I didn’t realize how ambitious it was when I started it, and I wish that I had more support and skills to make it more of a success.”

“My biggest success achieved throughout this project was receiving positive feedback from people who received the photography books and also having more people requesting the books due to their interest.”

“Seeing youth participate and learn about how dialogue on addictions is possible made me feel proud to be involved with this project.”

“The biggest success achieved through the project was the knowledge that the youths are finding the items in the kits useful to uphold their mental wellbeing. For example, they are reviewing the flashcards for breathing exercises and specific tips on reducing COVID-19 anxiety, using the materials such as the modelling clay and the scented ball to curb symptoms and utilizing the maze set and journal to offset feelings of boredom that can often induce anxiety spirals.”

“My greatest success is not having given up on my mission, which is to unite two generations who seemed to be forgotten and greatly isolated during the health crisis and even today. Finding an organization that believes in our project was not an easy task, but I got it! My team continued to believe in me and in our project, which allowed us to continue despite the printing difficulties, for example. In addition, on a relational level, this project allowed me to make a difference in the lives of others, even from a distance! One moment that I will always remember is this: during my calls with my elder, she told me that talking to me about her childhood and her past allowed her to come to terms with the latter. In short, I am very proud of this project and of the people who worked alongside me. The creation and publication of this book will impact generations to come. I hope that this book can serve as a testimony and message of inclusion in the future.”

“**My greatest success has been to get people to come together socially even from a distance and to raise awareness of the importance of supporting each other in this time of pandemic.**”

“My greatest success in my project was the involvement of the students and the people present for the Kahoot, all of them questioning, arguing, sharing with each other on the subject of human rights. This proves that we have been able to provide interesting facts and relevant and essential information for all citizens.”

“**I think we’ve managed to bring together a lot of genuinely interested people who have learned things that will change their perspective on the world. In addition, these people made new meetings that will possibly open doors for them in the future, either to collaborate or simply to learn more about the topics covered during the event! Finally, I think we have all in all succeeded in organizing and offering a great virtual activity for a first attempt with Zoom.**”



# Access and Equity

Addressing issues of representation, creating platforms for voices to be heard, addressing stigma, providing essential supplies and care packages.

“We were able to make small steps towards reducing health inequities.”

“The biggest success achieved through this project was that we were able to help populations that are experiencing inequities and disadvantages when it comes to the resources available to help them. A survey after our workshop suggested that we impacted 63 seniors who indicated they felt more empowered to change their lifestyles and live healthy after the event.”

“That despite COVID, we were able to organize and connect with vulnerable persons, assessed their needs in a collaborative way and ensured we respected their requests in order to create care packages that would help the community.”

“We gave space to Black queer people to share their experiences.”

“Our biggest success was the fact that we were able to provide for multiple women on our island that cannot afford or be able to get these necessities themselves.”

“Through our project we were able to begin building networks between Indigenous and migrant communities, and understand the gaps that need to be filled to create pathways for allyship between these communities.”

## ACCESS AND EQUITY

“The biggest success of this project was reaching mental health professionals and future mental health professionals to teach them about the very real impact of systemic racism and white supremacy on mental health symptoms, access to treatment, and the treatment itself.”

“My biggest success was finally getting to make something to help some of the community that is something needed more of during the time of a pandemic. That makes a difference in family life and my community like teacher’s, elders, families that don’t make enough and community workers with big families.”

“Knowing that we may help families/girls in need have access to the proper hygiene tools was the biggest success.”

“The biggest success of the project was being able to serve our community, especially a community that is often so overlooked and has been somewhat underserved throughout the pandemic.”

“Seeing the looks on people’s faces when they realized it was free.”



## ACCESS AND EQUITY

“The biggest success is that this project not only taught me how to garden (it was my first garden!), Also gave fruitful harvests (at least 10 baskets of vegetables per week), but the biggest success for me has been in bonding with the community and breaking people’s social isolation. In fact, the garden is located on a very busy street and the people who walked by the garden would stop to chat with us, congratulate us on the garden and get to know us. By the end of the fall, we knew the names of several people in the neighborhood. For me, it is this sense of community that has been the greatest success of the project, especially in times of a pandemic where one can feel isolated and alone.”

“My biggest success is the appreciation of the homeless population for the kits. Before I started my project, I was under the impression that the individuals who received the kits would not be very happy since they are not very exciting items, but all 90 individuals who received a kit were very happy to receive it. The response from homeless people was very positive and to help a large population that is not getting enough help was a great experience!”

“Honestly, when we give the hot meals to the homeless we could see the hope in their eyes, just being able to give them a hot meal is one of our greatest successes. Covid affects health a lot, and the well being of the homeless who may not eat during the day so we were very happy to contribute to their health. They were very grateful and happy.”

## Increased Awareness

Reaching participants involved as well as wider audiences through social media, television & radio highlighting issues & impact.

**“Our biggest success was probably getting recognized that we made a difference by our schools weekly student shout out. We also had teachers and students thank us for everything. Our biggest success was our kindness day, it was a little crazy but by the end of the day it felt so good to do good for others.”**

**“We were interviewed by over 5 media sources, allowing us to broaden our reach!”**

**“Providing a platform for people in my community to share their experiences with mental health and the stigma associated with mental health issues.”**

**“So much positive feedback. Erasing the stigma of mental health issues and forging ahead in difficulty. People came away with contact numbers and resources. They know they’re not alone.”**

**“The feedback from former classmates was so inspiring. The community thanked me for talking about this topic and bringing the issue to light. The local middle school students were informed and their parents were thankful this was addressed.”**

## INCREASED AWARENESS

“ I hope that I was able to draw attention towards climate change issues in the Arctic through an incredible book! ”

“ Our biggest success of this project was finding members in our community who love gardening. It was great connecting with others who are passionate about food security and sovereignty. ”

“ Creating 200 care packages with not only helpful and useful contents but including infographics that could potentially aid in the prevention of transmission (7 ways to prevent COVID-19 transmission outlined by WHO) as well as nearby COVID-19 testing stations. ”



“ The biggest success for the project was how we bridged multiple fields for a shared goal. We were able to highlight and promote our local fashion industry, recognising the importance of supporting artists and industries close to home. We sent a strong message for the importance of ocean conservation to our audience in a new, fresh format. ”

“ My website and I were featured in a few media interviews. ”

## INCREASED AWARENESS

“The partnership with community radio would have allowed us in the long term to reach a larger audience while enriching community radio listeners.”

“I was really surprised at the number of young people who participated in the workshop because we planned to have between 20-30 young people and we ended up having 44. I believe that we were also able to reach several young people from the French immersion program and this is a group of young people that is usually more difficult to reach. I think my biggest success was the involvement and commitment of the panelists during the evening because they were really great and made the evening very relevant and informative for everyone present.”

“This project led to the creation of a Facebook page with free videos, which made it possible to introduce the world of babywearing to other parents in my region and which created a space for discussion.”

“Allowing people to meet. The virtual and social networks have their benefits, it is not comparable to the energy and momentum that an event of this type gives; as much on the side of the artists who can discuss their work (not only respond to brief comments on Instagram) as of the people who came and who were able to meet other people from the field. Basically, allow/promote the creation of a community of emerging artists.”

## SECTION 4

# Partner Appreciation

Each year, our #RisingYouth team has formed partnerships with community organizations who have helped to support youth in accessing the grant through outreach efforts. Over the past year, over 100 organizations from every Province and Territory across Canada worked with us as Awareness and Impact partners. In addition to formal partnerships, we had extended networks of community organizations reaching out and encouraging youth to apply. This resulted in over 32.5% of applicants who said that they heard about the opportunity through an organization. We are grateful to our partners who have supported youth in this process of both applying for the grants as well as offering mentorship and support through to completion!

During the first wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic, front line youth drop-in centres had to close their physical doors to youth in accordance with public health guidelines and we would like to commend the incredibly adaptive approaches that groups have taken throughout these trying times to remain open and available to youth. In the fall of 2020, our Partnerships and Outreach Team organized consultations with 13 organizations to gain insight on the following:

- A deeper understanding of the challenges organizational partners are experiencing during COVID-19.
- Perspective on the challenges youth accessing their programs/services are facing during COVID-19.
- Insights on how #RisingYouth can support organizational partners to generate more referrals.
- How #RisingYouth grants to be leveraged to address emerging barriers/needs identified by youth.

There were a number of barriers identified by partner organizations that spanned across regions:



### Staff Capacity

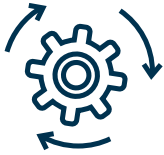
- Organizations were overwhelmed and struggling to keep employees from burning out.
- Front line workers were at increased risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Emerging needs/gaps require ongoing re-prioritization of programs/service delivery.



### Program Modifications

- Transitioning program to online/virtual engagement.
- Digital literacy, procuring the right equipment for organization and accessibility to youth.
- All partners indicated they had transitioned entirely or predominantly to online programming.

# PARTNER APPRECIATION



## Operational Modifications

- Funding has had to be reallocated to address emerging needs including PPE.
- Funding has had to be reallocated to adapt to online/virtual engagement.
- Training staff in online/virtual engagement.
- Training staff in PPE and safety measures for in-house programming.
- Decreased participation due to local/regional restrictions on gatherings.



## Temporary Closures / Shutdowns

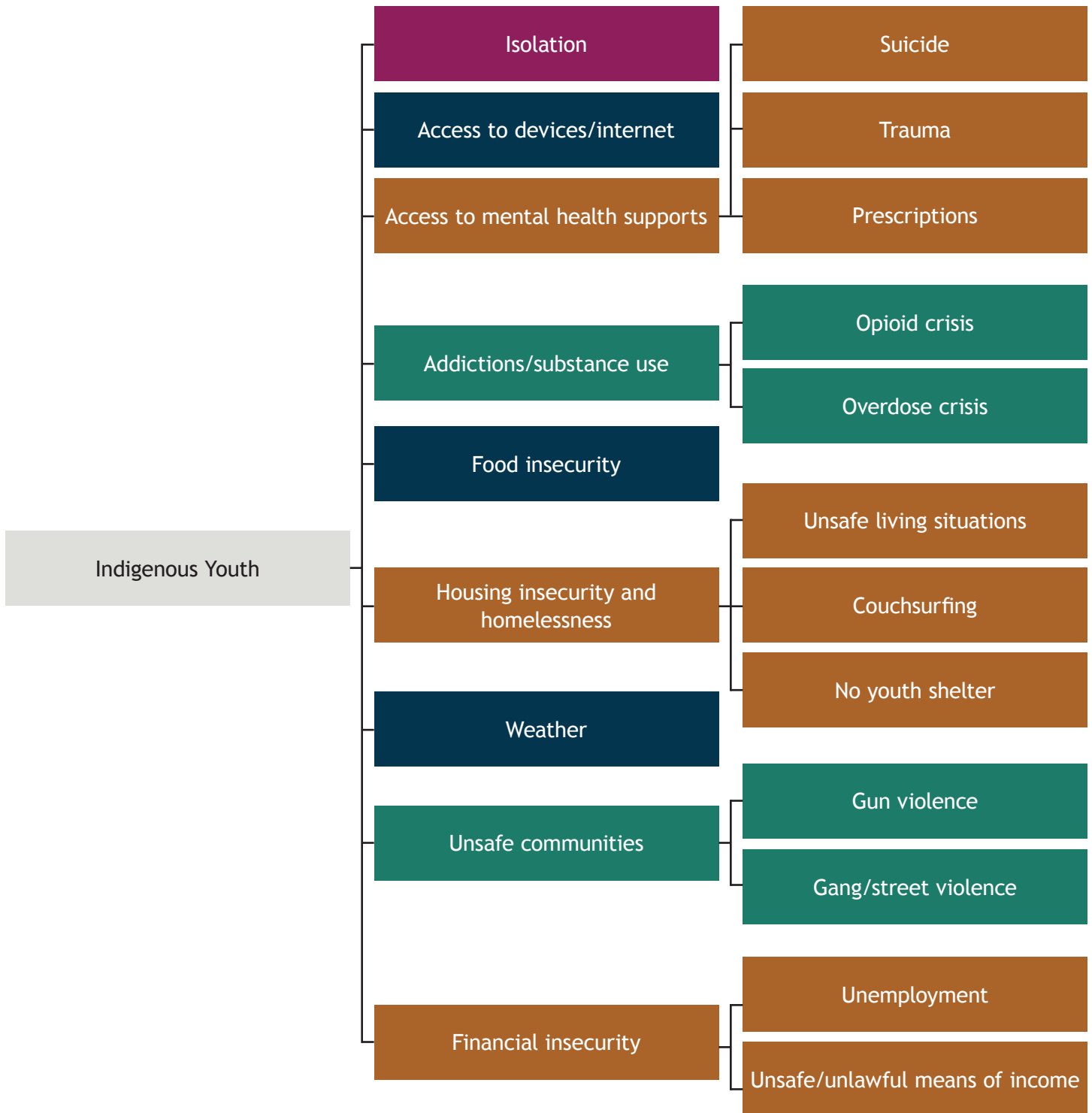
- All organizations who completed the follow up form indicated they were required to either modify their hours of operation or temporarily shutdown.
  - 25% of the partners indicated they were operating at 25% capacity or less.
  - 37.5% of the partners indicated they were operating at 50-75% capacity.
  - 37.5% of the partners indicated they were operating at 75% capacity or more.
- 37.5% of partners indicated that they shutdown for a period of 3-4 months during the year.

Below are diagrams of the identified barriers impacting our priority demographic communities, especially in the context of COVID-19, the following themes were raised during the 14 conversations that took place with regional organizational partners.

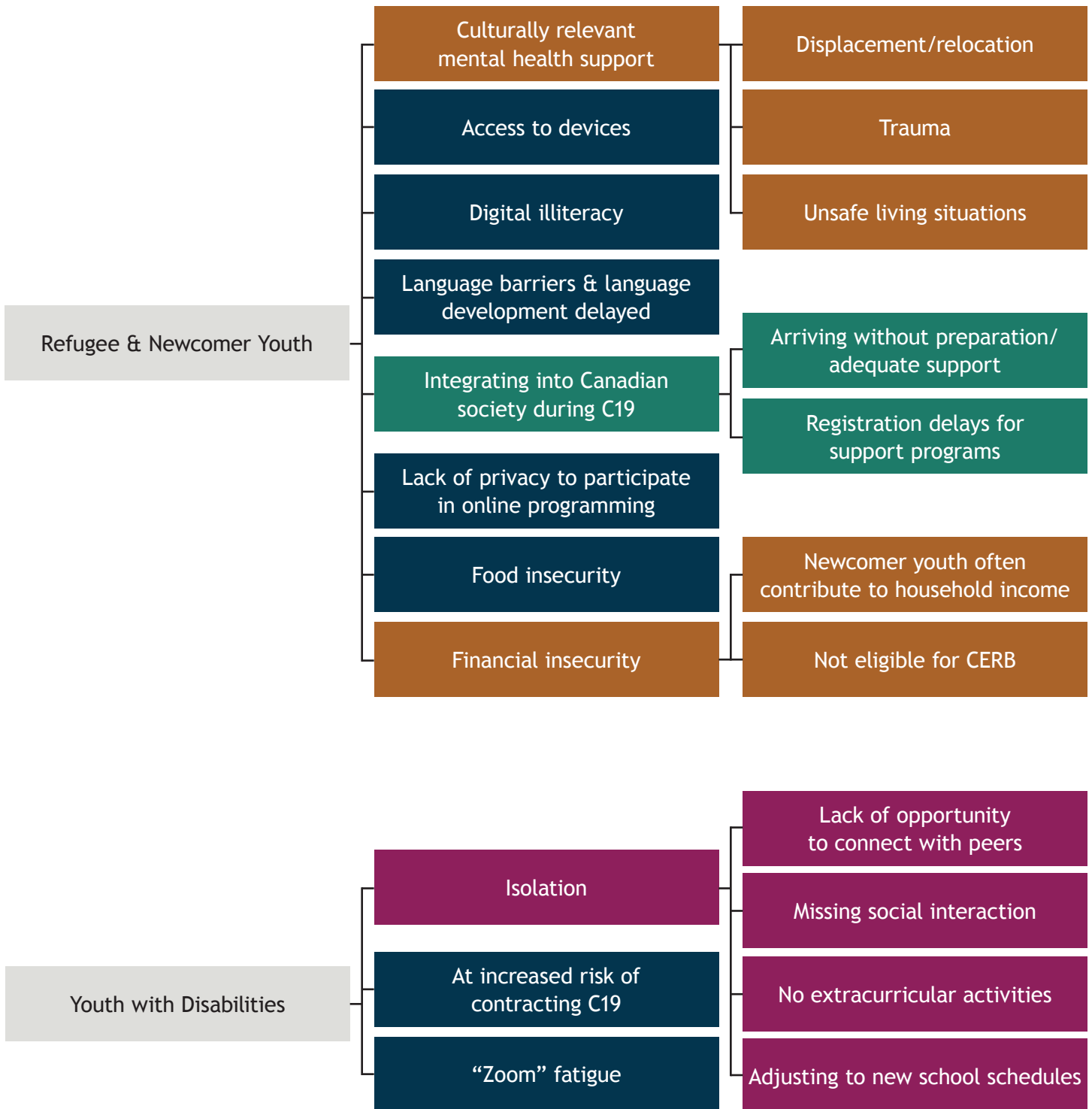




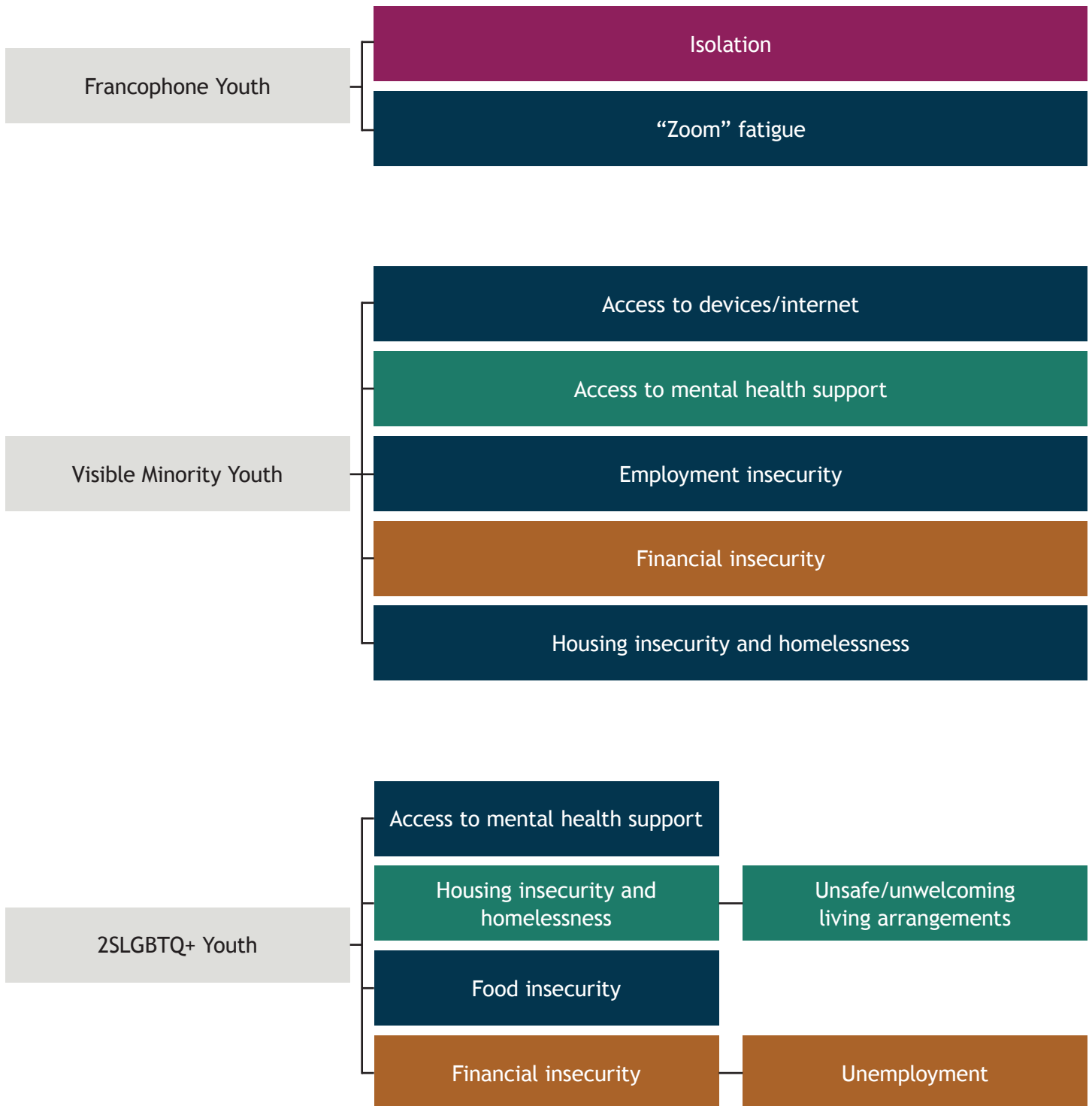
# PARTNER APPRECIATION



# PARTNER APPRECIATION



# PARTNER APPRECIATION



### PARTNER REFLECTIONS

During our Celebration Events between February and March 2021, we invited partner organizations to reflect on their experiences and highlight lessons learned. The following key themes emerged from the harvest.

#### How organizations and the youth they work with are experiencing and adapting during COVID:

Overall, youth and organizations are creative and are finding ways to problem solve in an uncertain time.

It was also acknowledged that there have been feelings of youth and staff being tired and feeling disconnected. Many also expressed feeling overwhelmed, burnt out, frustrated and concerned about the future. Youth were feeling stressed out during the pandemic, but found that volunteering and supporting others helps them help themselves cope in a difficult situation. Most importantly, participants indicated feeling a sense of belonging and have found support from their community through the participation in the projects and activities organized together. Sentiments shared in these regards were, feeling inspired, empowered, optimistic, eager, excited.

Some responses focused a lot on self-awareness, rationality, resilience and an understanding that their feelings and emotions are valid. That it is okay to experience whatever it is they're feeling. There was overall a tone of acceptance that expressing feelings is not a bad thing, and if one is not okay, it is okay to say so - this was also centred around a theme of asking for help.

#### Required supports:

Youth voiced the importance of organizations finding and supporting youth leaders across communities, and these leaders potentially being an additional point of reference or contact for them.

The buzz word during one Harvest session was on "how." How to ask for help, I wish I could learn how to manage a hectic schedule when stress is so loud; I wish I knew how to rest properly, How long will this last, How to be still and be in tune with yourself. This was also aligned with the need for connectivity with other youth due to feelings of uncertainty and the isolation resulting from the pandemic.

## PARTNER APPRECIATION

Participants also spoke about expanded understandings of relationship building with youth and focusing on understanding not just where youth were reachable, but also through whom they were reachable - that connecting with parents or guardians was sometimes the best way to reach youth or access them through their peers. In all cases, a focus on understanding where trust and comfort may already exist for youth and approaching them on terms that were cognizant of that and favourable to them was key.

### Recommendations:

Technological awareness, and cognizance of the fact that some channels may be preferred by youth but unavailable (high-speed internet, for example), where others may not be ideal but the only options available (online-only programming for some youth, in-person programming for others - no one-size-fits-all-youth options).

Online tools have increased accessibility/reaching more youth through virtual programming has been great but not all youth are reached since some have no access to wifi/are disconnected so also considering alternative ways such as phone calls to maintain connections.

Flexibility in delivering youth programs is so crucial. Creating responsive measures and deadlines around projects, funding opportunities, resources, and events to respect youth boundaries and avoid burnout.

Youth are seeking support & understanding as much as they are seeking programs & services. Adaptability was on the minds of many of the youth workers - comments about boundary and capacity were first and foremost, as youth-facing workers acknowledged a need to understand that the pandemic and lockdown have affected the emotional ability of some youth members to engage at all and that new channels and opportunities for engagement needed to be matched by an acute knowledge of their youth's capabilities and capacities, and significant flexibility to tailor that youth-by-youth. Not being rigid or inflexible with time, avenues of engagement and outcomes was key in ensuring that youth felt that support was not being withheld, made inaccessible, or not the right 'fit' for them.

Self-Care and Well-Being - Taking care of ourselves as youth-facing workers is necessary to support youth (e.g. keeping a routine, taking frequent walks, collaboration, etc.).

# Closing Thoughts

In reflecting on what it takes to facilitate large scale access to micro-grant programs supporting youth-led community service projects, it is important to continually recognize the importance of centering the experiences of youth who face multiple barriers to participation.

Reaching thousands of youth is only possible through an ecosystem approach involving local, regional and national partnerships and interconnection with both human and technical support systems.

Throughout the global pandemic, we're proud to have been able to invest in supporting the project ideas of 1,959 young changemakers, 80% from underrepresented communities.

Offering opportunities for youth to lead projects and strengthen social connectedness in a time of social isolation has been critical to strengthening our social fabric during this challenging time. We look forward to reopening the fund in April 2021 and supporting new cycles of youth-led projects while continuing to expand on supports for youth to learn and grow in their leadership experiences.

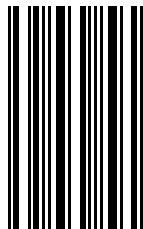
It is through our collective imagination that new possibilities can be unleashed.





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