

**YAH**

**YOUTH ACTION for HEALTH**

# YOUTH CENTER COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

2019 \ 2020



# YOUTH ACTION FOR HEALTH VISION

An inviting center created by youth for youth that gives them a place where they belong and can connect with peers and the local community. Here, teens will have a safe space to express themselves without the pressure of negative influences and learn skills that will set them up for a successful future.

-Written by Youth Action for Health







## WHAT IS A YOUTH CENTER?

Third places provide non-commercial settings for youth to spend their afternoons and weekends in a positive environment that is specifically designed to support their interests and needs. A youth center can be a third place - a venue for needed social, cultural, educational, recreational, and creative opportunities for youth.

## WHY IS A YOUTH CENTER IMPORTANT?

### Improve social and emotional wellbeing for youth.

A youth center will provide a space where youth can connect with peers, trusted adults, and community opportunities within Fort Collins.

### Improve access to community services available to youth.

Fort Collins offers many services for youth, but it may be difficult for youth to know what is available and how to access these services.

### Reduce youth substance use.

An appealing, culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate environment helps normalize and reinforce a healthy, substance-free adolescence.



## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Youth are future and current assets to their communities, contributing to the local workforce, economy, and culture.

**Fort Collins is a community with a rapidly growing youth (and overall) population.**

Fort Collins families and schools do not have the capacity to meet all needs of youth. Furthermore, with four traditional high schools, an alternative high school, and many charter and private schools, school-based experiences and opportunities - including after school programming and auxiliary services - vary. Family experience and resources also vary dramatically in Fort Collins, affecting the opportunities and challenges for local youth.

**Fort Collins has a strong network of local nonprofit and government programs that provide resources available to youth and offer diverse and needed programming services.**

Bringing these assets under a single roof to provide a spectrum of opportunity for local youth could improve access, collaboration, and delivery of these resources. This will not only benefit youth, but has potential to increase utilization and impact of new and existing community-based opportunities.

# YOUTH ACTION FOR HEALTH & YOUTH CENTER PARTNERSHIP



**The work to build support for a youth center is a collaborative, community initiative led by youth.**

**Youth Action for Health (YAH) is a group of youth in Fort Collins who work on community health issues affecting local youth.**

YAH identified the need for a youth center and led outreach, peer assessment, and visioning efforts for this project.

**There are also many community organizations who have been involved in this initiative.**

With the support of Communities that Care state funds, the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment (LCDHE) engaged youth through YAH's efforts and convened additional community stakeholders to provide input, guidance, and leadership for how to make a Fort Collins youth center. This community of stakeholders is called Youth Center Partnership (YCP).

**Organizations who have contributed ideas to this initiative include:**

- Poudre River Public Library System
- Alliance for Suicide Prevention
- The Boy's and Girl's Club of Larimer County
- City of Fort Collins Parks and Recreation
- City of Fort Collins Office of Sustainability
- 5 to Thrive
- The Foundry Mentoring
- Fort Collins Interfaith Council
- The Health District of Northern Larimer County
- Larimer County Economic Workforce Development
- Larimer County Department of Health & Environment
- Imagine Zero
- The Matthews House
- Poudre School District Wellness
- United Way of Larimer County
- Youth Action for Health



## NEXT STEPS

### Align Existing Spaces

**YAH, YCP, and program staff are currently trying to identify and build more collaboration on supporting existing spaces and programming.**

The vision of greater alignment among leadership of youth-driven spaces and programming is to strengthen collaboration between partners and to build templates for future programs and services that could be brought together within a youth center, supported by various community organizations.

### Reorganize Leadership

**The Communities that Care funding that has been used by LCDHE to build initial momentum for this work ended in June, 2021.**

With the end of this funding, staff capacity available at LCDHE to champion and convene partners around this initiative has changed. At this time and moving forward, this initiative will continue through Partnership for Healthy Youth (PHY), a coalition of local stakeholders working to improve the wellbeing of youth and young adults in Larimer County.

## Diversify the Movement

**Considerable effort has been put into identifying, involving, and partnering with diverse organizations and youth.**

To build an inclusive process, more work needs to be done to represent all youth in Fort Collins, particularly minority, under-resourced youth, and those who may benefit most from a youth center. We will continue to partner with minority youth and their adult partners to ensure their voice, their needs, and their desires are reflected in this initiative.

## Explore Expansion and Funding Pathways

**COVID-19 has changed community and global conditions.**

The need for a community place of belonging, connection, and support for youth has only risen. Through the assessment done by YAH, YCP, and program staff at LCDHE, it was clear that there was desire and demand from youth and support from youth-serving organizations. The major barrier has been identifying and securing financial resources to sustainably support the operation of a youth center. One of the most critical next steps will be to explore funding models and governance frameworks that support the values, scale, and collaborative structure of this vision.



# RECREATION

COURT    OUTDOOR SPACE

SPACE

REC/GAME ROOM

your ideas!

# ENVIRONMENT

LOUNGE AREA

COFFEE SHOP

STUDY SPACE

EVENT SPACE

MUSIC ROOM

ART ROOM

WORK SHOP

NEAR TRANSIT OPTION

KITCHEN

OTHER IDEAS!!



# YOUTH VISION & ASSESSMENT

The vision for a youth center starts and ends with our youth members.

Members of YAH participated in a series of guided brainstorming sessions to generate initial ideas and identify common themes in the following areas:

- Services
- Programs
- Physical space
- Role of youth leadership in a youth center
- Youth Events

YAH then hosted and attended community events to get input from other youth on their vision.


White boards were used where participants indicated the elements they would use at a youth center.

After brainstorming and refining various ideas, the following themes emerged as critical elements of a youth center for Fort Collins.

- Recreational facilities (gymnasium, natural area, yoga or dance studio, etc.)
- Services (mental health counseling, peer support groups, sexual health services, etc.)
- Educational support (test prep, study rooms, tutoring, resume building, etc.)
- Skill development (music/recording room, art studio, cooking classes, budgeting, etc.)
- Leadership opportunities
- A youth-friendly space to hangout (coffee shop, lounge, rec room, etc.)

### HIGHEST RANKED ELEMENTS FROM THE VISION BOARDS

CRITICAL ELEMENT	VOTED #1	VOTED #2
Recreational facilities	Gym	Outdoor space
Services	Mental health services	Facilitated peer support groups
Educational support	ACT/SAT prep	Tutoring support
Skill development	Essential life skills	Visual and performing arts
Leadership	Youth employees	Youth Advisory Board
Youth-friendly Environment	Coffee Shop	Study rooms



**Key informants largely focused on the benefit of programmatic and service delivery elements of a youth center such as mental health services, tutoring and job placement programs, opportunities to learn and apply essential life skills, and programs that support the visual and performing arts. The primary concern identified by key informants was funding and organizational structure and concerns about “ownership”.**

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

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Key informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with local organizations or programs that serve youth to better understand the landscape of youth services, programming, and space needs.

These interviews also helped to identify partners who wanted to participate in or become champions for this movement.

Over 60 organizations, programs, service providers, and businesses were identified by program staff, youth, and other stakeholders as having a valuable perspective on this topic.

All KII were done with program staff and consisted of the following questions:

- Is a youth center needed in Fort Collins?
- What could a youth center offer to this community?
- How do you see yourself/your organization becoming involved?
- Who else in the community should we be talking to about this?



# RESEARCH OF MODEL YOUTH CENTERS

In addition to assessing local conditions, our team also researched successful youth centers across the country.

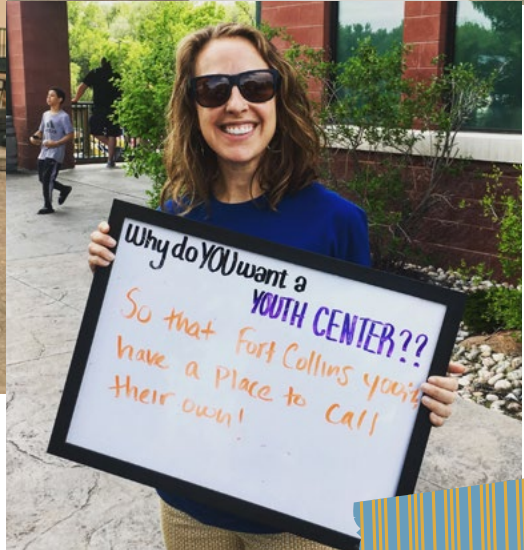
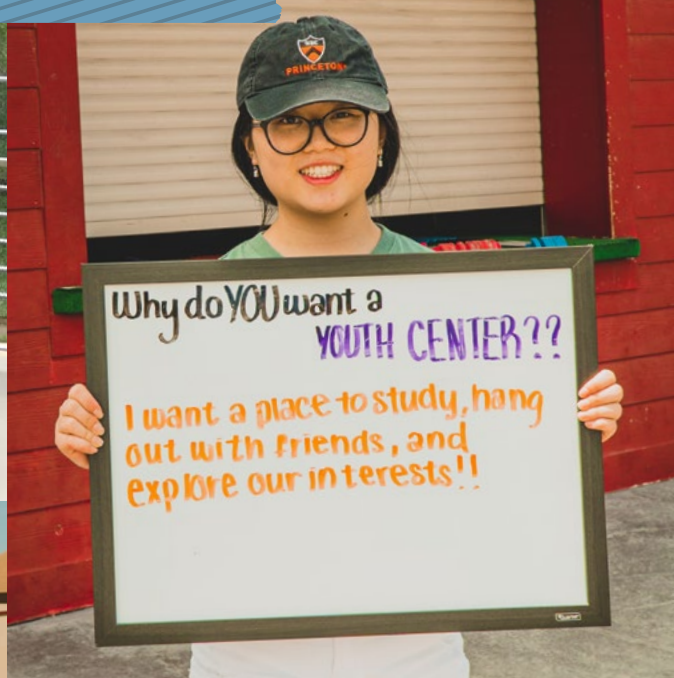
Our assessment focused on teen offerings, history, organizational structure, funding, and youth leadership. Staff conducted phone interviews, site visits, or website/social media reviews of these model youth centers.

## HIGHEST RANKED YOUTH CENTER AUDIT

NAME OF YOUTH CENTER	WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA REVIEW	INTERVIEW	SITE VISIT
The Neutral Zone, Ann Arbor, MI	✓	✓	✓
The Launch Pad, Prescott, AZ	✓	✓	
Teens Inc, Nederland, CO	✓	✓	
Youth Access Center (YAC), Montrose, CO	✓	✓	
The Bay, Lincoln NE	✓		
The RYSE Youth Center, Richmond, CA	✓		

### Takeaways from model youth center include:

- All successful youth centers had significant and meaningful ways youth voices were included in decisions about programming, funding, and even staffing.
- Many of the centers researched started with one or two programs with small/shared facilities.
- All centers evaluated had focus, even if they offered a wide range of activities. No center claimed to offer everything.
- Training staff to work with youth is relatively simple, but training staff to have real expertise in a particular skill area (music producing or therapist) is not. There is significant value in having highly skilled staff to coordinate programming.



## SURVEY RESULTS

YAH members and program staff developed a survey for youth and adults to gather more information about the demand, needs, and public support for a youth center.

The survey asked youth and adults about who would use the youth center and their opinions on if their needs were being met.



# WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD...

The survey collected 640 responses with 48 reporting they were parents, 26 reporting they were adults with no children, and the remaining 566 responses were completed by youth between 11-18 years old.

English and Spanish surveys were collected.

OVER **91%**

reported that they would or may use a youth center if they had access to one in Fort Collins.

Which of the following would you be likely to use at a youth center?

YOUTH RESPONSES	
CRITICAL ELEMENT	% OF YOUTH WHO WOULD USE
Youth-friendly Environment	<b>86%</b>
Recreational facilities	<b>80%</b>
Skill development	<b>69%</b>
Educational support	<b>67%</b>
Leadership	<b>60%</b>
Mental emotional support services	<b>54%</b>

Which of the following items do you think would make for a successful youth center in Fort Collins?

ADULT RESPONSES	
CRITICAL ELEMENT	% OF YOUTH WHO WOULD USE
Youth-friendly Environment	<b>87%</b>
Mental emotional support services	<b>85%</b>
Skill development	<b>85%</b>
Recreational facilities	<b>81%</b>
Educational support	<b>80%</b>
Leadership	<b>80%</b>

Youth and adult respondents agreed that Midtown Fort Collins (near the mall) is where a youth center should be located. The other locations that had significant support were Old Town and the Harmony Corridor.

# DISCUSSION

Based on the community assessment, youth, community professionals, and parents largely support a youth center in Fort Collins.

**This assessment identified recreational facilities, an environment specifically built for the needs and wants of youth and programming focused on building life skills to be the most universal needs for a youth center to offer.**

Health and support services was also ranked very highly among adults, and although 54% of youth surveyed indicated they would personally use health and support services at a youth center, many youth indicated they were supportive of having those services offered at a youth center, although did not express the need to use them personally at the time they were surveyed.

**This assessment used a wide range of methods to learn about community support of a youth center and to determine the needs a youth center could best meet for Fort Collins youth.**

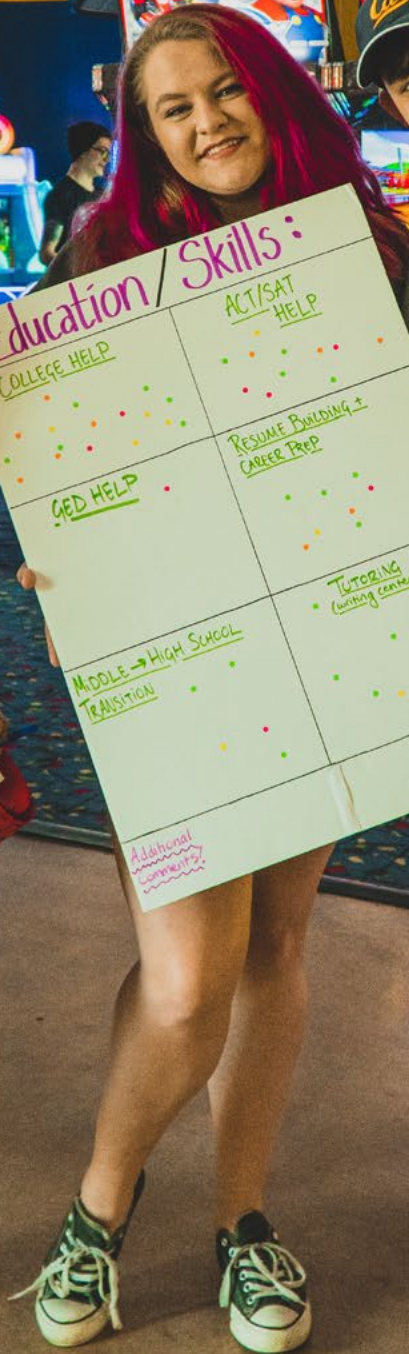
Although this process used many strategies to assess the demand for this community project, there were limitations to the assessment process. One limitation is in the representation of the sample who

participated in the assessment. The survey used a convenience sample, meaning those who are already plugged into community activities where this was shared and those already following Youth Action for Health and the Larimer County Health Department's social media channels were most likely to participate. This may help explain low participation among Spanish speaking participants.

**Perhaps the most significant barrier to this assessment was that it was conducted in 2019/2020 and ended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Because the information was collected pre COVID, there may be needs that exist now that did not come up in the assessment. Although our world and community has been undoubtedly changed by the pandemic, we know that these needs are still present for youth, if not intensified. However, priority in programming and services may look somewhat different now than they did prior to COVID-19.





**Education / Skills:**

COLLEGE HELP	ACT/SAT HELP
GED HELP	RESUME BUILDING + CAREER PREP
MIDDLE → HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION	TUTORING (writing center)
Additional comments	

**SERVICES**

Counseling, mental health navigation, and rehab	peer support
Support	sexual health (STI testing, birth control, condoms, etc.)
other ideas → <span style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px;"> </span>	





**YAH**

YOUTH ACTION for HEALTH

**We need your help!** Tell us what you think! Share your ideas: <http://bit.ly/focoyouthcenter>

**Want to get involved?** Visit [youthactionforhealth.org](http://youthactionforhealth.org)

 [youthactionforhealth](https://www.instagram.com/youthactionforhealth)